

The scholarly legacy of Pavel Medvedev in the light of his dialogue with Bakhtin*

In memory of Professor Irwin R. Titunik (University of Michigan)

We were originally asked to write a detailed account of Pavel Medvedev's scholarly legacy. But that is too great a task for a single individual, even if that individual is Chairman of the Commission on the Literary Legacy of P. N. Medvedev, and even if he is working with the assistance of his indispensable co-author. We therefore decided to limit the scope of our contribution to Medvedev's work in the light of his dialogue with Bakhtin. True, this does not simplify, and only partly limits, our task, for, as Bakhtin argued, the individual participates in dialogue with his whole personality, so that, in one way or another, albeit cursorily, this personality must be outlined. Here the words of the writer Mikhail Zoshchenko come to mind: 'Every time I met and spoke to him, I was confirmed in my view that he was a man of exceptional kindness, intelligent, honest, and with a passionate love of literature.'¹

Articles and texts (previously unpublishable for reasons of censorship, ideology, and so on) that have appeared in recent years in the journal *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop* (*Dialogue. Carnival. Chronotope*), and in the proceedings of the international Bakhtin conferences held in Vitebsk (the third of these conferences, in 1998, was dedicated to Medvedev's memory), now make possible significant progress in the study of Medvedev's work, and thus that of the 'Bakhtin Circle' as a whole.² Many crucial facts about the creative life of the Circle, and

* First published in Russian as 'Tvorcheskoe nasledie P. N. Medvedeva v svete dialoga s M. M. Bakhtinym', *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop*, 2 (2001), 73–94. Translated by David Shepherd.

1 Copy of letter from Zoshchenko, held in the Medvedev family archive. An extract from the letter can be found in Iu. P. Medvedev, "'Nas bylo mnogo na chelne ...'", *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop*, 1 (1992), 91.

2 See Iu. P. Medvedev, "'Nas bylo mnogo na chelne ...'", 'Blok i Kuzmin v arkhive P. N. Medvedeva', *Vestnik Russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia*, 1 (1993), 167–82; (with V. M. Akimov), 'Ne maski, a liisa: Bakhtin v labirinte', *Segodnia* (4 May 1994), p. 10; 'Nikolai Kliuev i Pavel Medvedev', *Vestnik Russkogo*

Legacy of Pavel Medvedev in dialogue with Bakhtin*

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to write a detailed account of Pavel Medvedev. But that is too great a task for a single individual is Chairman of the Commission on Medvedev, and even if he is working with a reliable co-author. We therefore decided to outline Medvedev's work in the light of Bakhtin, this does not simplify, and only Bakhtin argued, the individual participate in personality, so that, in one way or another, personality must be outlined. Here the Bakhtin come to mind: 'Every time I am confirmed in my view that he was a man of great talent, intelligent, honest, and with a passionate

ously unpublishable for reasons of Bakhtin) that have appeared in recent years in the *Khronotop* (*Dialogue. Carnival. Chronotope*), at the international Bakhtin conferences held in 1998, was dedicated to the possible significant progress in the Bakhtin Circle, and thus that of the 'Bakhtin Circle' as a result of the creative life of the Circle, and

archeskoe nasledie P. N. Medvedeva v svete *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop*, 2 (2001), 73-94.

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about Medvedev's role in it, were not known before the appearance of these publications, and so did not acquire currency within the field of Bakhtin studies.

The periodisation of Medvedev's career that we have adopted (as outlined below), and which is reflected in the articles referred to above, makes this task easier to carry out.

The Petersburg period (1909-14): Medvedev's time as a student in the Law Faculty at St Petersburg University, where he also attended a number of courses in the Philological Faculty, and his first outings as a literary critic.

The Bessarabian period (1915-17): this is our provisional denotation of Medvedev's crucial series of publications on literary and philosophical topics in the Kishinev newspaper *Bessarabskaia zhizn'* (*Bessarabian Life*), written while he was on active service in the army.

The Vitebsk period (1918-22), marked by energetic contribution to the Vitebsk cultural Renaissance of the 1920s, including the writing of scholarly works on the theory and psychology of verbal art, and the beginning of active dialogue with Bakhtin and other 'Nevelites'.

The Petrograd period (1922-24): work in the company of P. P. Gaideburov and N. F. Skarskaia's Travelling Theatre; editorship of the Theatre's journal, *Zapiski Peredvizhnogo teatra* (*Notes of the Travelling Theatre*); work on the manuscripts of the Symbolist poet Aleksandr Blok (1880-1921); academic papers and articles.

The Leningrad period (1924-30-38): this period saw Medvedev elaborate his theory of sociological (dialogic) poetics (within the Bakhtin Circle, and at the Institute for the Comparative History of the

khristianskogo dvizheniia, 1-2 (1995), 152-64; 'Pis'mo v redaktsiiu zhurnala *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop*', *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop*, 4 (1995), 148-56; "My svoe otbaiali do sroka ...", *Avrora*, 10 (1995), 12-25; 'Vitebskii period zhizni P. N. Medvedeva', in *Bakhtinskie chteniia I: Materialy Mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii, Vitebsk, 3-6 iunია 1995 g.* (Vitebsk: N.A. Pan'kov, 1996), pp. 63-86; 'Nikolai Kliuev i Pavel Medvedev: K istorii dialoga', *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop*, 1 (1998), 81-100; 'Na puti k sozdaniiu sotsiologicheskoi poetiki', *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop*, 2 (1998), 5-57; 'Vstrecha, kotoraiia byla "zadana"', in *Bakhtinskie chteniia III: Materialy Mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii, Vitebsk, 23-25 iunია 1998 g.* (Vitebsk: Izdatel'stvo Vitebskogo universiteta, 1998), pp. 155-65, English translation 'An encounter that was "intended to be"', *Dialogism*, 5-6 (2002), 14-24; "Voskresenie": K istorii religiozno-filosofskogo kruzhka A. A. Meiera', *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop*, 4 (1999), 82-157; and 'Bakhtin dlia bednykh. (Dve retsenzii v vide pis'ma s primechaniiami)', *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop*, 1 (2000), 110-26 (also available at www.shef.ac.uk/uni/academic/A-C/bakh/medpismo.doc).

Literatures and Languages of the West and East (Nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut sravnitel'noi istorii literatur i iazykov Zapada i Vostoka, better known as ILIaZV), which gave him an academic base); publish his major works analysing the Formal Method in literary scholarship from the standpoint of this theory, and dealing with the history of the writing of Blok's dramas and narrative poems; produce editions of Blok's *Diary* and *Notebooks*; and complete the first version, which was refused publication, of a book on the psychology of creativity. It also saw the appearance of new, reworked editions of his books about the Formalists and the psychology of creativity, and his submission to the press of his well-known course book on the history of recent literature, a subject that he taught, along with poetics, at a number of Leningrad higher education institutions up to his arrest in March 1938.

The Petersburg period, which laid the foundations of Medvedev's university education, was also marked by a life choice that decided his professional destiny: he gave up a career in law in favour of literary research. His vocation proved to be history and theory of literature.

In 1911, while still a law student, he offered the Petersburg journal *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*) three articles at once, on Valerii Briusov, on Blok, and 'Toward a philosophy of Russian literature'.³ This submission by the nineteen-year-old critic reveals the problematic that was to determine a lifetime's academic pursuits. As we see, study of the work of specific authors (in this case, the Symbolist poets Briusov and Blok) was from Medvedev's youth onwards combined with philosophical and theoretical interpretation of the literary process. Medvedev formulated his understanding of the job of the literary critic in an article of 1916 about a leading representative of this kind of work, the creator of 'organic criticism', Apollon Grigor'ev (1822-64). Medvedev noted, in a questionnaire completed in 1924 at the request of the Contemporary Literature Office at the Institute for the History of the Arts, that he felt a certain 'correspondence of ideas' between himself and Grigor'ev.⁴ In this 'original follower of Schelling', as he called him, Medvedev saw 'the first Russian critic to

³ See the Bykov archive in the Russian National Library Manuscript Department (Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi natsional'noi biblioteki), f. 118, ed. khr. 1454.

⁴ Manuscript Department of the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House) (Otdel rukopisei Instituta russkoi literatury (Pushkinskii Dom)), f. 172, no. 550, l. 1.

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conceive of criticism as a *strict philosophical discipline with its own methods, ends, and complex and responsible objectives* (emphasis added).⁵ Understood in this way, literary criticism served as the basis, the soil, upon which Medvedev's philosophical dialogue with Bakhtin began in 1920.

The prolegomena to this dialogue are to be found in Medvedev's articles written while on active service. In conditions of military life less than conducive to academic scholarship Medvedev set down the thoughts and observations that, like his field kit, were always with him. In 1916 he wrote:

Of course, even the soul is not something given [*dannoe*] once and for all, and certainly not posited [*zadannoe*]. It is, more, perhaps, than anything else, a perpetual stream of becoming. But, just as the course of a stream is in general unchanging, so in life, in the development of the soul there is a constant, indispensable coefficient, a solid core, which determines this or that trajectory of thought, this or that aspiration of the will. Every soul is what it is because it cannot be other.⁶

The unique singularity and unrepeatability of the position in being occupied by each 'soul' generates features *that are inherent to it alone*: a 'trajectory of thought' and an 'aspiration of the will', as well as the resulting responsibility for this unique position. The common ground between the premises of their respective world-views gives the impression that Bakhtin's philosophy of the act is contained in condensed form in this fragment from Medvedev. The whole range of Bakhtin's famous categories ('non-alibi in being', 'outsideness', 'surplus of vision', 'act', 'responsibility' and others) is like a rainbow that springs from a common ('shared', in Bakhtin's term) postulate of the singularity and unrepeatability of each personality's position in being.

Had the two friends already met, it would be practically impossible to prove that this fragment was not written by Bakhtin. But there was still a little over four years before the philosopher Bakhtin would encounter the literary critic Medvedev. Examples like this allow us to speak with certainty of the *dialogic support* that Bakhtin received from his friend and philosophical kindred spirit Medvedev when, during his time in Vitebsk, he was writing *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (K

⁵ P. N. Medvedev, 'Neistovyi Apollon', *Bessarabskaia zhizn'* (17 April 1916), p. 2.

⁶ P. N. Medvedev, 'Vechnoe v Shekspire', *Bessarabskaia zhizn'* (24 April 1916), p. 2.

filosofii postupka) and 'Author and hero in aesthetic activity' ('Avtor i geroi v esteticheskoi deiatel'nosti'). In the Leningrad period this creative situation of dialogic support developed further with the writing of their articles about the Formalists (Medvedev's 'Scholarly Salieri-ism' ('Uchenyi sal'erizm') and Bakhtin's 'The problem of content, material and form in verbal artistic creation' ('Problema sodержaniia, materiala i formy v slovesnom khudozhestvennom tvorchestve')), whose positivism was on principle unacceptable to both. Medvedev, following Grigor'ev, held patently different views on the nature of creation from those of the Formalists, believing that 'all living things are born, not made'.⁷ Bakhtin was of the same opinion: '... not "making", but creation (material yields only an "article")'.⁸

No less important is the continuation of Medvedev's statement: 'The truth about this deep-seated aspect of the nature of the soul is not accessible to any psychology, be it ever so scientific. But artists have the capacity, and are able, to see through to it.'⁹ This idea, which was subsequently elaborated further in *The Formal Method*, and which so delighted the young Vladimir Turbin,¹⁰ leads to the grounding of the *parascientific* (*inonauchnoe*) knowledge of which Bakhtin, engaging in 'dialogue-agreement' with Sergei Averintsev, writes in his final work, 'Toward a methodology for the human sciences'.¹¹

The intellectual closeness between Medvedev and Bakhtin was much more deep-seated and wide-ranging than is recognised in contemporary Bakhtin studies.

On the basis of publications by Medvedev written before he knew Bakhtin (and further examples could be adduced), one arrives at conclusions of some considerable importance for academic Bakhtin

7 P. N. Medvedev, 'Neistovyi Apollon', p. 2.

8 M. M. Bakhtin, 'Toward a methodology for the human sciences', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, tr. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 169 (translation modified); Russian 'K metodologii gumanitarnykh nauk', in *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979), p. 372.

9 P. N. Medvedev, 'Vechnoe v Shekspire', p. 2.

10 See P. N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 17; Russian *Formal'nyi metod v literaturovedenii: Kriticheskoe vvedenie v sotsiologicheskuiu poetiku* (Leningrad: Priboi, 1928), p. 28. See also V. N. Turbin, *Tovarishch vremia i tovarishch iskusstvo* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961), p. 50.

11 See Bakhtin, 'Toward a methodology for the human sciences', p. 160 (translation modified); 'K metodologii gumanitarnykh nauk', pp. 361-2.

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studies and for cultural history: about the sovereignty of the con-
sciousnesses that participated in the Bakhtin Circle's creative work;
about the dialogic, shared character of the conception of verbal
creation that was produced collectively in this circle, a conception
that Bakhtin himself viewed as 'shared'; about the failure of a certain
section of the Bakhtin research community to recognise the dialogic
nature of the Circle's academic works, and also about the substitution
for such recognition of the unproductive hypothesis of 'disputed
authorship'. However, it is essential to recall Sergei Averintsev's
perspicacious suggestion that the works of the Bakhtin Circle should
be published as an appendix to Bakhtin's collected works, 'or that the
edition as a whole should be given the title *Bakhtin and His Circle*'.¹²

In Vitebsk Medvedev's entry into the milieu of those who had
earlier associated in Nevel'¹³ was easy and organic, and he soon became
an essential contributor to this circle's discussions. As the common
ground between their interests and research became apparent (ethics,
theory of creativity, philosophy of law, methodology of literary study,
Symbolism, Dostoevskii) it could not fail to bring Medvedev and
Bakhtin ever closer. This is something that Bakhtin told Viktor
Duvakin about, at first even referring to Medvedev as one of the
'Nevelites':

B: There was a circle around me that is now known as the 'Bakhtin
Circle'. A lot is being written about it of late. Those mentioned as
members are first and foremost Pumpianskii, Pavel Nikolaevich
Medvedev, and Voloshinov. Incidentally, they were all three in Nevel'
as well. Except, that is, Medvedev.

D: Is that the Medvedev who went on to write about Blok as well?
Or was it about Briusov?

B: He wrote about Blok, yes. His first book was *Blok's Creative Path*
(*Tvorcheskii put' Bloka*).

And so they were all in Vitebsk, and it was there, in effect, that the
foundations were laid of the circle that was later established in
Leningrad.¹⁴

12 S. Averintsev, 'Mikhail Bakhtin: Retrospektiva i perspektiva', *Druzhba narodov*, 3 (1988), 259.

13 See the poem 'Staroverka' dedicated to P. N. Medvedev by Boris Z[ubakin] in *Zapiski Peredvizhnogo teatra*, 43 (1922), p. 3; the poem is reprinted as 'Polevaia nevesta' in A. I. Nemirovskii and V. I. Ukolova, *Svet zvezd, ili Poslednii russkii rozenkreitser* (Moscow: Progress-Kul'tura, 1994), p. 364.

14 M. M. Bakhtin, *Besedy s V. D. Duvakinym* (Moscow: Soglasie, 2002), p. 161.

It is no accident that Bakhtin should have shifted the original foundation of his Circle from Nevel to Vitebsk, where he met Medvedev.

A detailed record in Ivan Sollertinskii's archive of lectures that he attended between September 1920 and April 1921¹⁵ offers a graphic picture of the brilliance, variety, and in many respects similarity of the work undertaken by Bakhtin, who had arrived in Vitebsk from Nevel in autumn 1920 (following his appointment as a lecturer in Western European literature at the Vitebsk Pedagogical Institute – or, as such institutes were then known, People's Educational Institute (Institut Narodnogo Obrazovaniia, INO)), by Medvedev, a lecturer at the same Institute, and by Pumpianskii, who taught at the People's Conservatoire. The erudite young Sollertinskii, whose archival notes show that he attended lectures by all three, did not miss a single one of Medvedev's series of lectures on literature, although the topics did occasionally overlap: Bakhtin's 'Symbolism in modern Russian literature' (at the Pochtél' club) and the fifth lecture, also on Symbolism, in Medvedev's course at the Institute. This clear parallelism would recur later too: as Bakhtin recalled in his conversations with Duvakin, there was an evening on Blok at which both he and Medvedev spoke;¹⁶ they both (and Voloshinov as well) took part in the work of the Literary Studio;¹⁷ and at the same time as Bakhtin was writing his book on Dostoevskii, Medvedev was running a seminar course, also on Dostoevskii, at the Pedagogical Institute.¹⁸ Their independent but shared interest in 'problems in moral philosophy' is also indicated by the topic of Medvedev's paper 'Turgenev as man and writer', read in

15 See L. Mikheeva, *I. I. Sollertinskii: Zhizn' i nasledie* (Leningrad: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1988), pp. 28–9.

16 Bakhtin, *Besedy*, pp. 190–1.

17 The subjects taught at the Literary Studio were 'Aesthetics. Theory of artistic creativity. Western and Russian literature, theory and history of the arts and Russian journalism studies. The professors and lecturers at the studio are P. N. Medvedev, M. M. Bakhtin, A. G. Romm, A. O. Tsshokher, V. N. Voloshinov and M. N. Pustynin' (Anon., 'Khronika', *Iskusstvo* (Vitebsk), 4–6 (1921), 48).

18 Cf. the biographical statement drawn up by Medvedev during his time at the Herzen Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad: '1920/21 and 1921/22 academic years: lecturer at the Vitebsk People's Education Institute (course on poetics, twentieth-century literature, and seminar course on Dostoevskii), and member of Dean's Office in the Social History Department' (P. N. Medvedev, 'Zhizneopisanie', Archive of the A. I. Herzen Russian State Pedagogical University (Arkhiv Rossiiskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta im. A. I. Gertsena), f. 4331, l./d. 1076, l. 3). See also P. N. Medvedev, 'O literaturnom nasledii Dostoevskogo', *Iskusstvo* (Vitebsk), 4–6 (1921), 49.

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in should have shifted the original focus from Vitebsk, where he met Medvedev, to Sollertinskii's archive of lectures that he gave in 1920 and April 1921¹⁵ offers a graphic picture, and in many respects similarity of Bakhtin, who had arrived in Vitebsk following his appointment as a lecturer in Pedagogy at the Vitebsk Pedagogical Institute – or, more fully known, People's Educational Institute named after G. I. Pribludnitskaia (INO)), by Medvedev, a lecturer at the Department of Russian Literature and Folklore (Linguistics), by Turgenevskii, who taught at the People's University of the Young Sollertinskii, whose archival notes by all three, did not miss a single one of the lectures on literature, although the topics differed. The first lecture was on Symbolism, and the fifth lecture, also on Symbolism, was given at the People's Educational Institute. This clear parallelism would be reflected in his conversations with Duvakin, and it is significant that both he and Medvedev (as well as Bakhtin) took part in the work of the People's Educational Institute at the same time as Bakhtin was writing his *The Creative Act*. Medvedev was running a seminar course, also at the People's Educational Institute.¹⁸ Their independent but convergent moral philosophy' is also indicated by Bakhtin's reading of 'Turgenev as man and writer', read in

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November 1918.¹⁹ Medvedev set great store by the methodological appropriateness of this juxtaposition, which he viewed as essential both on the philosophical level, and on that of practical life. This problem was the object of constant attention in his lectures on theory of artistic creativity ('Artist and human being') and in his manuscripts. There was an ethical and aesthetic basis to the grouping of professional writers, *Sodruzhestvo* (Community), that was subsequently established in Petrograd, and that in his conversations with Duvakin Bakhtin referred to as 'Medvedev's literary circle'.²⁰

The Vitebsk period of Medvedev's life and work proved extraordinarily productive. His firm belief in the perennial enlightenment mission of the member of the intelligentsia who bore responsibility for the continuity of culture, as well as the opportunity to apply his talents as a theorist and practitioner of art (lecturer, critic, literary and social activist, even theatrical director) developed in him a colossal energy, he felt a sense of great intellectual élan. The Vitebsk newspapers and journals of the time are full of references to Medvedev. In his personal biography this was a time of *Sturm und Drang*. At the head of the school education subsection, and later the subsection for the arts, Medvedev, together with Dobuzhinskii, Chagall, Mal'ko and other enthusiasts brought harmony to the life of post-Revolutionary Vitebsk, which became a 'cultural phenomenon' of its time. Striking testimony has been preserved about this fabled period.²¹ Liudmila Mikheeva (Sollertinskii's daughter-in-law) writes about the sheer scale of the work and the seriousness of the objectives that the subsection for the arts headed by Medvedev set for itself and achieved.²²

In 1918 Medvedev organised the People's (later renamed Proletarian) University and the Vitebsk 'Society for Free Aesthetics';²³ he was elected Rector of the University, where he gave a course on nineteenth-century Russian literature and society; he published the *Proceedings of the Proletarian University* (*Zapiski Proletarskogo universiteta*); worked on a 'specialised study' of the theory of artistic creativity and

¹⁹ See *Vitebskii listok* (14 November 1918), p. 4; cf. M. Bakhtin, 'Iskusstvo i otvetstvennost' and M. Kagan, 'Iskusstvo, zhizn' i liubov', *Den' iskusstva* (13 September 1919), pp. 2–3.

20 Bakhtin, *Besedy*, pp. 204–5; see also p. 201.

21 See Iu. P. Medvedev, 'Vitebskii period', pp. 66-7.

22 See Mikheeva, *I. I. Sollertinskii*, p. 22 ff.

²³ See 'V Proletarskom universitete', *Izvestiia Vitebskogo gubernskogo soveta krest'ianskikh, rabochikh, krasnoarmeiskikh i batratskikh deputatov* (16 November 1918), p. 3.

a book on the history of recent literature;²⁴ lectured tirelessly on literature and aesthetics not only in the town's academic lecture halls, which in the beginning were few and far between, but wherever an interested audience would gather, be it in a library or a club, a theatre or army division. He did not charge for these lectures: he felt an enormous need to express himself, a desire to share his knowledge. It was probably in these years that he consolidated his astonishing capacity for establishing contact with the most varied audiences, the talent for communication noted by all who knew and heard Medvedev (this sense of his audience, incidentally, is a feature of his written as well as his oral presentations). E. S. Dobin, the editor of the first edition of *In the Writer's Laboratory* and later a member of the Commission on Medvedev's Literary Legacy, did no more than express a common opinion when he wrote: 'With his broad erudition, oratorical brilliance and emotional verve he could engage equally well the most demanding intelligentsia audience and the completely unsophisticated listener, in whom he knew how to awaken (and implant) a burning thirst for knowledge'.²⁵ The conductor G. Ia. Iudin, who contributed actively to the cultural life of Vitebsk, remembered Medvedev first among those who gave lectures in Vitebsk in these years: 'The building of what used to be a male seminary ... became the site of the Proletarian University, where lectures were given, mostly in the humanities. Most of those who lectured (and indeed of the lecturers at the Conservatoire and Art School) were Petersburgers: the literary specialist Pavel Medvedev, the philosopher S. O. Gruzenberg, and the philologists Lev Pumpianskii and Mikhail Bakhtin'.²⁶ A. Krasnov-Levitin, who studied at the Herzen Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad in the 1930s, and was later a well-known human rights defender and religious writer exiled from the USSR by the KGB, remembered Professor Medvedev as 'our most popular teacher ... one known by the whole of Leningrad'.²⁷

24 See Vitebsk Region State Archive (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Vitebskoi oblasti), f. 204, op. 1, d. 64, l. 24.

25 E. Dobin, 'Pavel Nikolaevich Medvedev', in P. N. Medvedev, *V laboratorii pisatel'ia* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo pisatelei v Leningrade, 1960), p. 4; second, expanded edition (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1971), p. 4.

26 G. Ia. Iudin, *Za gran'iu proshlykh let: Iz vospominanii dirizhera* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1977), p. 19.

27 A. Krasnov-Levitin, *Likhie gody: 1925-1941. Vospominaniia* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1977), p. 320.

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Archive (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Vitebskoi oblasti), 'Pavel Medvedev', in P. N. Medvedev, *V laboratorii pisatel'stvo pisatelei v Leningrade*, 1960, p. 4; second edition: *Sovetskii pisatel'*, 1971, p. 4.

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Of particular importance for our understanding of the Circle's sense of academic purpose in the Vitebsk period, apart from well-established facts, was the intention to open in the town, in 1919, an Institute for the Humanities and Arts, an independent higher education and research establishment along the lines of the Petersburg Zubov Institute (Institute for the History of the Arts). This ambitious undertaking reflected a fact of fundamental significance: Vitebsk at the time was home to intellectual forces seeking an academic outlet in philosophy, psychology, aesthetics and the study of art. A major role was to be played by those who had come to Vitebsk to escape the shortage of food in Petrograd. For various reasons the Pedagogical Institute (INO) could not function as an adequate academic base. Medvedev and Gruzenberg represented the Organising Committee charged with setting up the new institute. Medvedev, elected by the lecturing staff at the University to chair the Committee, drew up a prospectus for the institute's proposed integrated study of artistic creativity. In Medvedev's view:

The development of a theory of artistic creativity needs to be begun from the beginning and in a new way. Now the development of any domain of knowledge is impossible without first clarifying the methodological premises of that sphere of knowledge. Thus the methodology of a theory of artistic creativity is what the whole edifice must be begun with. ... It is essential to define the relationship between the theory of artistic creativity and at the very least the fundamental, historically established trends in aesthetics.²⁸

Medvedev's prospectus was predicated on a new view of literary history and a new interpretation of a whole series of Russian and foreign classics (Pushkin, Gogol', Turgenev, Tolstoi, Dostoevskii, Goethe, Shakespeare) and major contemporary writers (Valerii Briusov, Blok, Andrei Belyi). He believed that 'the artist ought to be studied not as an individual phenomenon, but as a social phenomenon', that the work of art ought to be studied as 'an object of artistic perception'.²⁹ These were the methodological bearings by which he mapped the route to be taken by the literary critic, whose professional task was

28 Medvedev's views in the late 1910s, the time when he was drawing up the prospectus for the Institute for the Humanities and Arts and writing *A Theory of Artistic Creativity and Methodological Premises for Literary History*, are set out clearly in a book published more than ten years later: P. N. Medvedev, *V laboratorii pisatel'ia* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo pisatelei, 1933), pp. 11-12.

29 Medvedev, *V laboratorii*, p. 22.

the interpretation of artistic phenomena, or, in his terms, 'a secondary creative process'.³⁰ This was the subject of lectures, and of *Essays in the Psychology of Artistic Creativity* (*Ocherki po psikhologii khudozhestvennogo tvorchestva*) and *Methodological Premises for Literary History* (*Metodologicheskie predposylki istorii literatury*), manuscripts written at the same time as he delivered a course of lectures in the late 1910s.

It was Symbolism that provided the grounds on which Medvedev (identified by the leading scholar on Symbolism, A. V. Lavrov, as 'one of the first to research Russian Symbolism') gave practical expression to his interest in the aesthetics of the word, and embarked on his polemic with its formalistic conceptions.³¹ In February 1914, with reference to Fedor Sologub's lecture 'The art of today', Medvedev noted that Symbolism had been given a better and more profound theoretical grounding by Andrei Belyi and Viacheslav Ivanov than by Sologub.³² In *The Formal Method* he would merely develop this observation further:

It was Symbolism that propounded the notion of the autonomous value and constructive character of the word in poetry. Symbolism attempted to combine this constructive character of the word with its extremely intense ideological quality. ... It was on the grounds of Symbolism that there appeared for the first time works of literary scholarship that sought to address the essence of poetic art, even if they were distorted by erroneous ideological views. Andrei Belyi's *Symbolism*, some of Viacheslav Ivanov's articles, and Valerii Briusov's theoretical works occupy an indisputably important place in the history of literary scholarship in Russia.³³

It is clear from prospectuses preserved in the Vitebsk archives that Medvedev sought to construct his theory of artistic creation at a distance from both metaphysical and empirical trends, as a scientific

30 Vitebsk Region State Archive, f. 204, op. 1, d. 49, ll. 107, 108 (unpublished programme for a lecture course on 'Theory of artistic creativity' which Medvedev proposed to deliver in the Department of Theory of Literature at the Vitebsk People's Educational Institute (INO) in 1919 and 1920).

31 See the extracts copied by Medvedev from V. Chudovskii's articles on poetry published in the journal *Apollon* (*Apollo*) between 1915 and 1917 in Iu. P. Medvedev, 'Vitebskii period', pp. 68-9.

32 P. N. Medvedev, 'Na lektsii F. Sologuba', *Bessarabskaia zhizn'* (23 February 1914), p. 5, cited in M. M. Pavlova and A. V. Lavrov, *Neizdannyy Fedor Sologub* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1997), p. 345.

33 P. N. Medvedev, *Formal'nyi metod*, p. 82; *The Formal Method*, pp. 57, 58 (translation modified).

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theory (one resting, in particular, on the works of Aleksandr Veselov-
skii, Aleksandr Potebnia and the phenomenologists), that he viewed
art in association with philosophy of culture, but 'as such', as an
axiologically oriented aesthetic phenomenon. In Medvedev the
valencies of the 'aesthetic object' (a concept already employed by
Broder Christiansen)³⁴ are given to 'the artist-creator' and to 'the
counteragents of creation', the bearers of 'evaluation'. The 'synthesis'
holding out the greatest promise for aesthetics arose in the space of
the theory and psychology of creativity, but led to the 'construction'
of the aesthetic object. The aesthetic was thoroughly suffused by the
social. This was, probably, a theory of artistic creation that was
unfinished and still in the process of becoming, but one ready to take
to the air.³⁵

We will encounter some of this theory's heuristically fortunate
concepts, but now in different terms and thoroughly grounded, in
the later works of the Bakhtin group. 'The poles of the word', 'the
methods of prosaic thinking', the introduction into the aesthetic
event of the 'counteragents of creation', the theory of artistic per-
ception, the category of 'evaluation' (later 'social evaluation') were
all moves towards grasping the inner (immanent) sociality of artistic
phenomena, their inherent dialogicality.

Close attention to genre and to its 'aesthetics and history' acted
as a reliable reference point for Medvedev's theory of literature's
historical development.³⁶ Studying the ideological milieu of artistic
phenomena ('Ideology and aesthetics'), examining them in the
context of world culture ('in the West and in Russia'), analysing the
poetics of Symbolism, Acmeism and Futurism: all these elements of
Medvedev's 1919/20 lecture course, like everything else that has
been discussed, lead to the idea that his future book on the Formal
Method was not only 'posited' by time, but was also in many respects

34 See Broder Christiansen, *Philosophie der Kunst* (Hanau: Clauss & Feddersen, 1909), translated into Russian in 1911 as *Filosofia iskusstva* (St Petersburg: Shipovnik).

35 P. N. Medvedev, unpublished programme for lecture course on 'Theory of artistic creativity'.

36 In the questionnaire completed for the Institute for the History of the Arts (see n. 4) Medvedev wrote 'most often my ideas correspond with those of Veselovskii'. It is significant that in his editorial annotations to his edition of Blok's notebooks Medvedev calls Veselovskii 'the founder of historical poetics': see Aleksandr Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, ed. P. N. Medvedev (Leningrad: Priboi, 1930), p. 238.

already 'given' to its author in his own researches and intuitions.³⁷

During his Vitebsk period Medvedev completed the manuscripts of three books: *Methodological Premises for Literary History; Essays in the Psychology of Artistic Creativity*; and *Twentieth-Century Russian Literature* (*Russkaia literatura XX veka*). These were the very books that he informed the Vitebsk Pedagogical Institute that he was working on when in 1919 and 1920 he proposed lecture courses on theory of creativity to the Literary Theory Department. These three manuscripts subsequently became, respectively, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (*Formal'nyi metod v literaturovedenii: Kriticheskoe vvedenie v sotsiologicheskuiu poetiku*, 1928); *In the Writer's Laboratory* (*V laboratorii pisatel'ia*, 1933); and *A History of Russian Literature of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (*Istoriia russkoi literatury kontsa XIX-nachala XX veka*, 1937). The last of these was in press, but the type was broken up following the author's arrest; an outline was published as *A Methodological Handbook for a Course on the History of Russian Literature in the Age of Imperialism and Proletarian Revolution* (*Metodicheskaiia razrabotka po kursu istorii russkoi literatury epokhi imperializma i proletarskoi revoliutsii*, Leningrad, 1933), under the editorship of V. A. Desnitskii.

In letters from the Vitebsk period Bakhtin wrote to Kagan: 'Lately I have been working almost exclusively on the aesthetics of verbal creation' (20 February 1921); 'I am working a great deal, especially on aesthetics and on psychology' (March 1921); 'at present I am writing a study of Dostoevskii that I hope to finish soon; for the moment I have put "The subject of morality and the subject of law" to

37 Medvedev attached great importance in his teaching to the bibliography that he would usually recommend at the end of each lecture or at the conclusion of a course. Some idea of the kind of bibliography that he may have given to those who attended his lectures can be gleaned from his response to volume 1 of S. O. Gruzenberg's *The Psychology of Creativity* (*Psikhologiya tvorchestva*). Medvedev concludes his review as follows: 'The book has a bibliographical appendix of 639 items "on questions in the theory and psychology of creativity and neighbouring disciplines". This principle of bibliographical selection is excessively vague. Moreover, one cannot fail to notice the absence from the bibliography of virtually all the recent literature directly concerned with the theory and psychology of creativity: works and articles by Cohen, Walzel, Lanson, Fechner, Andrei Belyi, Viacheslav Ivanov, Nikolai Berdiaev, Viktor Zhirmunskii, Gershenzon, Wolfing and many others" (*Zapiski Peredvizhnogo teatra*, 59 (1923), 8). See also Medvedev's additions to the bibliography in Richard Müller-Freienfels' *Poetics* (*Zapiski Peredvizhnogo teatra*, 58 (1923), 7).

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his own researches and intuitions.³⁷ Medvedev completed the manuscripts *remises for Literary History; Essays in the Second Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*. These were the very books that he had at the Institute that he was working on. He proposed lecture courses on theory of literature in the Faculty Department. These three manuscripts, respectively, *The Formal Method in Literature* (*Formal'nyi metod vvedenie v sotsiologicheskuiu poetiku*, 1933); and *A Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Russian Literature* (*Posledniaia kontsa XIX-nachala XX veka*, 1937). The type was broken up following Medvedev's book was published as *A Methodological Study of Russian Literature in the Age of Modernism* (*Metodicheskaja razrabotka po istorii literatury i proletarskoi revoliutsii, imperiializma i proletarskoi revoliutsii*, 1937). The book of V. A. Desnitskii. In the period Bakhtin wrote to Kagan: "exclusively on the aesthetics of literature"; "I am working a great deal, a great deal" (March 1921); "at present I hope to finish soon; for the oral and the subject of law" to

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one side ...' (18 January 1922).³⁸ Every time he mentioned the topics of his research to Kagan he expressed a desire to discuss them with him. These were probably new themes and problems that had not been discussed in the Nevel circle (Pumpianskii had by this stage been living in Petrograd for some time).³⁹ The only ones of his friends remaining in Vitebsk were Voloshinov and Medvedev. They were also the people that Bakhtin had most contact with at this time, especially Medvedev, who was working on problems of poetics and the psychology of creativity in a professional capacity. Bakhtin's treatise 'The aesthetics of verbal creation' ('Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva'), which his editors entitled 'Author and hero in aesthetic activity' ('Avtor i geroi v esteticheskoi deiatel'nosti') was in many respects a *dialogic reaction* to Medvedev's works on the theory and psychology of creativity. It was no accident that many

It was no accident that many years later Bakhtin casually wrote that three books – Medvedev's *Formal Method*, Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (*Marksizm i filosofiiia iazyka*, 1929), and his own *Problems of Dostoevskii's Art* (*Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo*, 1929) – were based on 'a shared conception of language and discursive production', and that he laid particular emphasis on the independence and originality of each of these books.⁴⁰ This shared conception was developed in Vitebsk, in the dialogue between those who contributed to it. Voloshinov's personal file from his time as a research student at ILIaZV contains a document setting out some of the guiding thoughts behind this shared conception of verbal creation.⁴¹ A number of its founding ideas concerning the sign-based materialisation of ideological phenomena, problems of inner personality, and the science of ideologies as a whole, can be traced back to early statements by Medvedev that were subsequently, in the Vitebsk and Leningrad periods, developed and given more thorough grounding, particularly clearly in *The Formal Method*. Thus in an article of January 1917, 'On studying Pushkin', Medvedev wrote:

³⁸ These letters are published in Iu. M. Kagan, 'O starykh bumagakh iz seme-
inogo arkhiva (M. M. Bakhtin i M. I. Kagan)', *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop*, 1
(1992), 66, 68, 72.

39 In his letter of March 1921 Bakhtin wrote: 'Lev Vasil'evich has already been in Petrograd for six months, but has yet to find even the kind of audience that he had in Vitebsk' (Iu. M. Kagan, 'O starykh bumagakh', 67).

40 Bakhtin, letter to Vadim Kozhinov of 10 January 1961, in 'Pis'ma M. M. Bakhtina', *Literaturnaia ucheba*, 5–6 (1992), 145.

41 This section of Voloshinov's personal file is published as 'Report on work as a postgraduate student, 1927/28' in the present volume, pp. 226–50.

But the mysterious roots of the spirit, which reach down to the very depths, send out shoots on the surface, take on spiritual flesh, tangible and visible, which we call personality, the soul, or character [*natura*]. All this is susceptible of being represented in words, of being captured in a formula, it can be studied, revealed, elucidated. Not only 'can', but must be studied ...⁴²

In Vitebsk Medvedev developed these ideas in his lecture course on the theory and psychology of creativity (particularly in the section entitled 'The act of materialisation'), in the book that he was writing at the same time, and in drawing up the academic prospectus for the Institute that he was fighting to establish in 1919.

The historical and cultural phenomenon that is the 'Bakhtin Circle' is a constituent part of the Vitebsk cultural Renaissance of the 1920s. None of the Bakhtinian pléiade, with the exception of Bakhtin himself, set himself the task of creating a 'first philosophy', but it was this phenomenal creative orientation that guaranteed Bakhtin primacy in a circle of humanities scholars who came to think in the same way as he did, just as philosophy, which they all firmly believed was the 'metalanguage of all sciences', made Bakhtin a unique and much sought after partner in discussion for each of them. Not, though, a chance partner, one gifted by some whim of fate, but one whose partnership was *earned*, earned by virtue of 'unity of experiences' (Medvedev), by virtue of community and depth of intellectual enquiry and demeanour, by virtue of the distinctive originality of the participants in the dialogue.

Bakhtin's sovereignty as philosopher and primacy as thinker cannot be convincingly established with reference to the brief trajectory (1918) of the Nevel philosophical circle (something that is clear from the work of the late Professor Aleksandr Mikhailov, who uncritically granted the scholarly primacy in the Nevel school to Pumpianskii).⁴³ Both these qualities emerge in a historically broader space, that of the work of the Bakhtin Circle, on which Bakhtin himself placed the emphasis ('There was a circle around me...'). Bakhtin's philosophical anthropology fecundated the life and work of this Circle, giving it the qualities of a unitary cultural phenomenon. But unitary *in a particular manner*. A significant role in its formation was

42 P. N. Medvedev, 'Ob izuchenii Pushkina', *Bessarabskaia zhizn'* (29 January 1917), p. 2.

43 See A. V. Mikhailov, *Problemy istoricheskoi poetiki v istorii nemetskoj kul'tury. (Ocherki iz istorii filologicheskoi nauki)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1989), p. 55.

the spirit, which reach down to the very surface, take on spiritual flesh, call personality, the soul, or character of being represented in words, of it can be studied, revealed, elucidated, died ...⁴²

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phenomenon that is the 'Bakhtin Circle' cultural Renaissance of the decade, with the exception of Bakhtin, is a 'first philosophy', but it was in that guaranteed Bakhtin primacy who came to think in the same way which they all firmly believed was made Bakhtin a unique and much more than each of them. Not, though, a whim of fate, but one whose value of 'unity of experiences' (Medvedev's) of intellectual enquiry and the originality of the participants

philosopher and primacy as thinker with reference to the brief Bakhtin Circle (something that is shared by Aleksandr Mikhailov, who was a maverick in the Nevel school to emerge in a historically broader Bakhtin Circle, on which Bakhtin himself was a central figure around me...). Bakhtin's life and work of this century cultural phenomenon. But its central role in its formation was

Bessarabskaia zhizn' (29 January 1992), *poetiki v istorii nemetskoi kul'tury*. Moscow: Nauka, 1989), p. 55.

played by Bakhtin's closest colleagues, who were older than he and who, before they met him, already had their own academic and philosophical outlooks and completed works to their names: Kagan the professional philosopher and Medvedev the literary critic with a track record of research in problems of the theory and psychology of creativity. Dialogic interaction with both these men, at various stages in Bakhtin's own career, was of fundamental importance to him. The dialogic 'echoes' between Bakhtin's works and those of his friends constitute reliable evidence of this.

Paraphrasing Bakhtin, we might say that monological ideologism in the conception of the 'Bakhtin Circle' after the historical *fait accompli* of its diverse creative actualisation over the course of many years becomes mere 'Bakhtinism' (*bakhtinshchina*), however academically respectable the names it gives itself, and whatever masks it forces upon Bakhtin. Bakhtin cannot be understood without reference to his Circle, and not only in respect of their shared scholarly and philosophical enquiry, which is an obvious enough point. He cannot be understood without reference to his pléiade because the 'Bakhtin Circle', alongside his books about Dostoevskii, Rabelais and novelistic discourse, is, perhaps, his major creation. The 'Bakhtin Circle' is at once the source, the creative end-point, and the peculiarly unitary literary monument of the dialogic doctrine. If Dostoevskii's polyphonic novel was the most brilliant and perfect expression of the polyphonic tendency in artistic literature, in the 'Bakhtin Circle' the dialogic principle inherent in every scholarly community reached a high, perhaps the highest, degree of expressivity. Apart from Bakhtin, it is only the poet Iosif (Joseph) Brodskii who has bequeathed to us a lesson in understanding dialogic creation. Only Brodskii was able to hear clearly the concealed dialogue (the 'echo', as he calls it) between Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Rainer Maria Rilke.⁴⁴

Although the culturological phenomenon that is the 'Bakhtin Circle' has shown itself to have sound historical and creative credentials and, crucially, was identified as important by Bakhtin himself (with particular clarity in his well-known letter to Vadim Kozhinov of 10 January 1961, in his 1973 conversations with Duvakin, in his

44 See Iosif Brodskii, 'Primechaniia k kommentarii', in Victoria Schweitzer et al. (eds), *Marina Tsvetaeva: One Hundred Years. Papers from the Tsvetaeva Centenary Symposium, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts, 1992* (Modern Russian Literature and Culture: Studies and Texts, 32; Berkeley: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1994), p. 263.

responses to his interrogation in 1928, and in other sources),⁴⁵ it remains misunderstood and unstudied.

The Vitebsk stage of the 'Bakhtin Circle' was continued and developed in the Leningrad period, a period marked by the production of articles that were manifestoes for a new direction in scholarship (Medvedev's 'Scholarly Salieri-ism' (1925) and 'Sociologism without sociology' ('Sotsiologizm bez sotsiologii', 1926), Bakhtin's 'The problem of content, material, and form in verbal artistic creation', Voloshinov's 'The word in life and the word in poetry' ('Slovo v zhizni i slovo v poezii', 1926), and others), and later, when publishing opportunities presented themselves, of their three major books.

For Medvedev, who returned to Petrograd in the spring of 1922, this period was preceded by the very important moment when he was invited to join the company of Pavel Gaideburov and Nadezhda Skarskaia's Travelling Theatre, one of the most distinctively original phenomena of Petersburg culture (as Medvedev put it, 'a phenomenon unique in contemporary artistic culture').⁴⁶ Medvedev plunged into the thick of theatrical life, becoming editor of the theatre's journal, *Zapiski Peredvizhnogo teatra*, which, with his appointment, was transformed into a weekly literary-critical publication. On the palaestra of the Travelling Theatre Medvedev gave a course on the psychology of artistic creativity and a series of papers on Dostoevskii,⁴⁷ and published numerous articles in the journal. Just as in Vitebsk in 1918-19 Medvedev had brought together a circle from the 'Society for Free Aesthetics', the Vitebsk People's University and the planned Institute for the Humanities and Arts, so he succeeded in gathering around the *Zapiski Peredvizhnogo teatra* a circle of some of the most interesting figures of the time who were actively engaged in research on the theory of creativity, poetics and textology. In the year and a half that Medvedev was editor of the journal it published work by Viktor Zhirmunskii, Boris Tomashevskii, Boris Kazanskii, Adrian Piotrovskii, Il'ia Gruzdev, E. Gollerbach, Ernest Radlov, D. Vygodskii, Mikhail Tubianskii, Voloshinov, Nikolai Kliuev, Konstantin Vaginov and others. Not all of them subscribed to the Travelling Theatre's ideology and aesthetics, but they were brought together on the pages

⁴⁵ The most complete published record of Bakhtin's responses during his interrogation is in Iu. P. Medvedev, 'Na puti', 46-8.

⁴⁶ P. N. Medvedev, 'Tochki nad "i"', *Zapiski Peredvizhnogo teatra*, 44 (1922), 1.

⁴⁷ See 'Khronika: Na Palestre Peredvizhnogo teatra', *Zapiski Peredvizhnogo teatra*, 67 (1923), 7.

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i *Peredvizhnogo teatra*, 44 (1922), 1.
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of its journal by Medvedev's philosophical, scholarly and editorial drive, his virtuosity.

The conclusion to Bakhtin's 'Art and responsibility' ('Art and life are not one, but they must become united in myself, in the unity of my responsibility') has its complement in Medvedev's 'at the extreme verbal creation and life-creation merge and dissolve in one another'.⁴⁸

What is important for our purposes is that the socio-cultural phenomenon of the Travelling Theatre formed a distinctive parallel in terms of practical life to Bakhtin's 'philosophy of the act'. 'The individual must become responsible through and through':⁴⁹ Bakhtin's postulate could have been taken as an epigraph for the creative activity of this large and integral artistic collective. It is also important that the 'life-creating' conception of the Theatre and its journal, along with its orientation not towards 'overcoming' (Berdiaev) but towards 'transfiguring' (Medvedev) the present moment,⁵⁰ formed the basis of the 'Bakhtin Circle's' ideology in its Leningrad period. The Circle's position in this period may be characterised as an attempt to 'transfigure' Marxism, thereby justifying its own place in the new materialistic culture.

Without reference to Medvedev's acute dissatisfaction, reflected in his early articles, with the state of contemporary literary-critical thought; to the zeal for 'life-creation' that inspired him in his Vitebsk period of scholarly and socially useful activity; to the positive charge of neo-Kantian thought, assimilated to a significant extent in his philosophical exchanges with Kagan⁵¹ and Bakhtin; to the school of 'creative transfiguration of life' that he went through with the

48 M. M. Bakhtin, 'Art and answerability', in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, tr. Liapunov and Kenneth Brostrom (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 2 (translation modified); Russian 'Iskusstvo i otvetstvennost', in *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, p. 6; P. N. Medvedev, 'Tochki nad "i"', 2.

49 Bakhtin, 'Art and answerability', p. 2 (translation modified); *Iskusstvo i otvetstvennost*, pp. 5-6.

50 See P. N. Medvedev's polemical article about Berdiaev's *The Meaning of Creativity* (*Smysl tvorchestva*, 1916), 'Russkii Brand', *Bessarabskaia zhizn'* (31 January 1917), p. 2; see also Iu. P. Medvedev, 'An encounter', 20-1; 'Vstrecha', 160-1.

51 From his contacts with Kagan, a Marburg philosopher, Medvedev was able to gain an impression of Marburg neo-Kantianism that was not only based on reading, but immediate and vivid. 'To dear Matvei Isaevich, teacher and friend' - so reads Medvedev's inscription on a photograph of himself in the Kagan family archive. We are grateful to Kagan's late daughter, Iudif' Matveevna, for this information.

Travelling Theatre in his Petrograd period; to the urge and need to find his place in the materialistic culture of his time – without reference to all these factors it is impossible to understand the meaning and the particular character of the Marxism of *The Formal Method*. Bakhtin's characterisation of Medvedev in his conversations with Duvakin ('He was one of my closest friends'; 'he was a theorist of literature'; 'he was an individual of some considerable courage and initiative')⁵² is fully borne out in this book too. Personal zeal, personal passion, personal audacity suffuse Medvedev's Marxist study. In the philosophical space of the science of ideologies Medvedev, taking support from a circle of like-minded thinkers, his own 'WE', engaged in dialogue with the Marxist state as one Power with another.

For Medvedev and the Bakhtin Circle as a whole Marxism became a 'conductor' of science, a symbol of scientific quality.⁵³ That said, Bakhtin's uncompromising characterisation of himself as a 'revisionist Marxist' during his interrogation in December 1928 introduces an essential corrective.⁵⁴

Medvedev's works have long been part of the currency of literary studies, and they earned plaudits from his contemporaries. Viktor Zhirmunskii cited Medvedev's works frequently in print and orally; his works on the psychology of creativity were noted by Academician Pavel Sakulin and referred to by Viktor Vinogradov; Medvedev's treatment of the problem of the creative history of the individual work was acknowledged by the founder of the discipline, Nikolai Piskunov; and there is a whole literature devoted to Medvedev's publications from Blok's archive. Apart from its purely academic value, the publication of the poet's diary and notebooks brought back into the purview (ideological, historical and cultural, literary, academic) of a new age that had already 'thrown overboard from the ship of contemporary life' its own cultural heritage, the extensive cultural stratum of the 'Silver Age', an important link in the chain of cultural continuity. Aleksandr Lavrov, a leading 'Silver Age' specialist and corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences, writes:

Medvedev was one of the first to research Russian Symbolism; his study of the creative legacy of Blok was particularly profound and thorough. His books and other publications, including *In Memory of*

52 Bakhtin, *Besedy*, pp. 215, 222.

53 See Iu. P. Medvedev, 'Na puti'.

54 See Iu. P. Medvedev, "Nas bylo mnogo na chelne ...", 97.

etrograd period; to the urge and need for an idealistic culture of his time – without reference to which is impossible to understand the meaning of the Marxism of *The Formal Method*.³² Medvedev in his conversations with his 'closest friends'; 'he was a theorist of individualism of some considerable courage and without in this book too. Personal zeal, personality suffuse Medvedev's Marxist study. In the science of ideologies Medvedev, taking account of the views of other, more open-minded thinkers, his own 'WE', engaged with the state as one Power with another. Bakhtin Circle as a whole Marxism, a symbol of scientific quality.³³ That characterisation of himself as a Marxist, his interrogation in December 1928 intro-

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Aleksandr Blok (*Pamiati A. A. Bloka*, 1922), *Aleksandr Blok's Dramas and Narrative Poems: The History of their Creation* (*Dramy i poemmy Al. Bloka* (Iz istorii ikh sozdaniia), 1928), his editions of Blok's *Diary* (*Dnevnik*, 1928) and *Notebooks* (*Zapisnye knizhki*, 1930), laid the foundations for the academic interpretation of one of the twentieth-century's major poets; in many respects these publications set the standards for Blok scholarship in the 1920s.⁵⁵

But the work by Medvedev with the greatest resonance, undiminished to this day, is *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, written in dialogue with Bakhtin, and a brilliant literary monument of Russian intellectual history that has not lost its cognitive potential even today.

Not for nothing is Bakhtin's moral philosophy, which united his circle of fellow thinkers, known as a 'philosophy of the act'. Within this philosophy the word is responsible for the deed. In 1929, in arranging publication by the publishing house where he worked of *Problems of Dostoevskii's Art*, whose author had already been arrested and sentenced to hard labour in Solovki, Medvedev not only predetermined in many respects Bakhtin's literary fortunes, but also saved him from the academic oblivion that was virtually inevitable in the wake of political repression. As we know, it was through his study of Dostoevskii that Bakhtin's young admirers from the Institute of World Literature were able to find him in Saransk. Today this baton of responsibility has been passed to us as students of the Bakhtin Circle.

55 A. V. Lavrov, editorial commentary to Andrei Belyi, 'Pis'ma k P. N. Medvedevu', in *Vzgliad: Kritika, polemika, publikaitsii*, 1 (1988), 430.

The Bakhtin Circle

IN THE MASTER'S ABSENCE

*edited by Craig Brandist,
David Shepherd & Galin Tihanov*

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