

Nikolai Pan'kov

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My first contacts with Nikolai was my letter, when as a graduate student spending time living in St. Petersburg I wrote to him in Vitebsk with the idea of publishing some material about the Bakhtin Circle in *Dialog Karnaval Khronotop*. Though the post was very slow, Nikolai's response was very gracious and encouraging, and displayed none of the hierarchical pretensions common among scholars. I published some of my earliest work in the journal, which Nikolai managed to establish and maintain throughout the catastrophic economic situation of the time. I eventually met Nikolai at the International Bakhtin Conference in Calgary, Canada, in 1997 and found him to be, in person, very much the same person as he was in correspondence.

Nikolai's unassuming and balanced attitude, while maintaining a clear orientation on evidence allowed him to rise above the ideological and personal schisms that ran through Bakhtin Studies in Russia at the time. Disputes over the authorship of the so-called 'disputed texts' were often intemperate, overwhelmingly ideological and sometimes rather personal, but Nikolai somehow managed to maintain the respect of all parties. While he published a wide range of material, his own interventions in the field were always evidence-based. His publication of Voloshinov's personal file from the RANION archives was perhaps the most important piece of evidence published to that point, and Nikolai simply allowed the facts to speak for themselves. Nikolai's diligent and persistent archival research added a great deal to our knowledge of the period, and set the work of the Bakhtin Circle in a much more rounded perspective. His publication of the archival research of others was no less important, and this led the journal to become a crucial reference point for anyone working in the area rather than the fetishistic celebration of an individual scholar that may well have resulted from a lesser scholar.

I visited Vitebsk for the *Bakhtinskie chteniia* shortly before Nikolai relocated to Moscow, and found he ran these events in the very same spirit as his journal, with graduate students and established scholars engaging in productive discussions with hardly a sign of deference and arrogance. I met a number of people who were to have an influence on my future work at the event and a number of friendships were formed. Nikolai invited myself and some other visitors to his flat one night and he was a generous host who clearly enjoyed discussing a variety of topics and encouraging others to do so. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to host Nikolai in Sheffield, for some nights at my house, where he quickly found material on the bookshelves to consume while staying there.

Nikolai and I kept in touch over the coming years and we often met up when I was in Moscow until his cruel illness made both work and socializing very difficult for him. After two or three years' gap Mika Lahteenmaki and I were able to invite Nikolai for dinner at DomZhur on Novyi Arbat in Moscow. We were both quite shocked by the physical change in Nikolai and I remember one of us noting afterwards that it was almost as if thirty years of his life had simply been taken from him. I still remember, however, the interest with which he looked at the books that I had purchased on my visit and that I was carrying around. It was rather sad to see that inquisitive mind and keen intelligence locked in a body that seemed close to exhaustion.

It was nevertheless impressive how Nikolai managed to continue working, albeit at a lower intensity, and his unfinished work towards the third volume of Bakhtin's *Sobranie sochinenii* made that volume so valuable. The publication of a later and more complete version of the important essay *Slovo v romane*, which Nikolai discovered during his archival work, was a very significant addition to the corpus of Bakhtin's work. I was also very happy to have the opportunity to contribute to the *festschrift* in honour of Nikolai's 55th birthday, and to see the number of scholars who did the same. It was, I thought, most appropriate to contribute a piece of archival research that touched on the work of Voloshinov.

Nikolai's contribution to Bakhtin studies was simultaneously fundamental and modest. The work he facilitated is undoubtedly as important as that which he produced himself, and this is always something that fails to attract enough attention. Fortunately Nikolai left plenty of evidence of that behind for us all to continue to benefit from