

Iurii Pavlovich Medvedev: An Obituary¹

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Iurii Pavlovich Medvedev passed away on 11 October 2013 after a protracted period of fragile health. He was born in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) on 30 March 1937. His father, Pavel Nikolaevich, was a prominent philologist, now best known for his 1928 book *Formal'nyi metod v literaturovedenii: kriticheskoe vvedenie v sotsiologicheskuiu poetiku* (*The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*), in which he presented a critical evaluation of both Russian and European formalism and an outline of his own conception of sociological poetics. Pavel Nikolaevich was arrested shortly before Iurii Pavlovich's first birthday, and was shot when his son was only fifteen months old. Iurii Pavlovich and his mother were exiled to the city of Kirov (Viatka); they returned to Leningrad, illegally, shortly before the war and the blockade.

From 1954 to 1962 Iurii Pavlovich studied in the Philology Faculty of Leningrad University, while publishing reviews of books and films in Leningrad newspapers and journals. He was admitted to the Union of Journalists in 1958, and remained a member until his death. In 1962 Iurii Pavlovich graduated with distinction in Czech literature, and in 1962-3 he studied at the Philosophy faculty of Charles University, and at the Cinema Faculty of the Academy of Arts in Prague.

On returning from Prague, until 1984, Iurii Pavlovich worked as an editor, a member of the editorial college, and the Chief Editor of the second creative section of the major Soviet film studio *Lenfilm*. It would be impractical to list all the films to which he contributed in one way or another, but the following give some sense of his contribution of Soviet cinema. He edited films of the internationally acclaimed director Gleb Panfilov, such as *V ognе broda net* (*No Path Through Fire*, 1967), *Nachalo* (*Debut*, 1970) and *Proshu slova* (*I Ask to Speak*, 1976). He initiated a series of cinematic projects that resulted in films that received Soviet and international awards,

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such as two adaptations of stories by Chingiz Aitmatov, Bolotbek Shamshiev's *Rannie zuravli* (*The Early Cranes*, 1979) and Karen Gevorkian's *Pegii pes, begushchii kraemoria* (*A Spotted Dog Running Along the Seashore*, 1990); Viktor Sadovskii's *Khod beloi korolevy* (*The White Queen's Move*, 1971); Nikolai Lebedev and Ernest Iasan's *V moei smerti proshu vinit' Klavu K* (*Please Blame My Death on Klava K*, 1979) and Viktor Sokolov's *Ia – Aktrisa* (*I Am an Actress*, 1980). He also wrote scripts for documentary films. He was the winner of the Critic's Award and a member of the Union of Cinematographers from 1978; from 1989 until 1997 he was a member of the governing body of the St. Petersburg branch, and from 1994 to 1998 of the national Union.

Iurii Pavlovich played an active role in the opening up of the cultural sphere during the years of *glasnost'* and *perestroika*. From 1984 he was head of the cultural section and a member of the all-Union journal *Avrora* (*Aurora*), where he published a series of articles about prohibited cinematic projects in which he had participated, and defended films such as Panfilov's *Zhizn' Zhanny d'Ark* (*The Life of Joan of Arc*); Vasilii Aksenov's *O, etot v'iuosha letuchii!* (*Oh, This Flying Youngster!*), and an adaptation of Aitmatov's *Voskhozhdenie na Fudziiamu* (*The Ascent of Mount Fuji*). He also wrote about the return of Solzhenitsyn's work to Russia, the cultural mission of the Roerich family, and published verses in *Avrora* and in the collection *Praga: Ruskii vzgliad* (*Prague: A Russian View*), which he had begun to write while in Prague. He was the head of the collection of publications *Iz arkhiva P.N. Medvedeva* (*From the Archive of P.N. Medvedev*) in which new materials about Akhmatov, Mandelshtam, Gumilev and Kliuev appeared, as well as publishing various articles, surveys, and reviews on literary, theatrical and cinematic themes.

In 1989 he was selected to be a member of the Council of the Leningrad section of the human rights organisation *Memorial*. He organised the first benefit concert for *Memorial* in December 1988 at Leningrad University.

One of Iurii Pavlovich's most urgent projects was to ensure that his father's contribution to scholarship was given due recognition. Following Khrushchev's accession, Iurii Pavlovich had become a member of the Writers' Union commission for the literary heritage of his father's work, and he edited a collection of his work *V laboratorii pisatel'ia* (*In the Writer's Laboratory*), published in two editions in 1960 and

1971, and in Czech translation in 1983. The appearance of editions of his father's work of the 1920s under the name of his friend Mikhail Bakhtin after the latter's death in 1975, and the appearance of critical works reducing his father to the status of Bakhtin's mediocre disciple, particularly offended Iurii Pavlovich. While there was inevitably a personal dimension to his motivations, as the above makes clear, Iurii Pavlovich was a man of strong professional ethics and intellectual probity, and he felt he had a unique responsibility to set the record straight. While he was keen to establish the independent contribution of his father, his main focus was to resist all attempts to 'monologize' the Circle as an intellectual phenomenon, presenting Bakhtin as the sole source of creative thought and his interlocutors as mute recipients of wisdom. His contribution to the critical re-evaluation of the genesis and historical context of the ideas discussed by the members of the Circle was significant, but he always maintained that it was the 'phenomenon of the Circle' itself that was his main object of study. For Iurii Pavlovich, the essence of 'Bakhtinian' thought was the 'philosophy of communication' that emerged from the discussions of a collective of like-minded scholars. In addition to this, Iurii Pavlovich took a keen interest in and was very supportive of younger scholars who were engaged in archival and other research that yielded new information about the irreducible contributions of the members of the Circle. In this he was always generous with the results of his own research, and appreciative of all new information that came his way.

In 1997 he was among the winners of an all-Russian analytical journalism competition organized by the Open Society Institute, publishing a series of articles on one unique dialogical phenomenon of Petersburg culture of the 1920s – what is now known as the Bakhtin Circle. He delivered plenary lectures on the Bakhtin Circle to an *International Bakhtin Conference* in Vitebsk (1998), at the Bakhtin Centre in Sheffield (1999), at the *XII International Bakhtin Conference* in Jyväskylä, Finland (2005), and at the *XIII International Bakhtin Conference* in London Ontario, Canada (2008). He published articles on the Circle (some co-authored with his wife Dar'ia Aleksandrovna) in a range of Russian and International journals such as *Zvezda*, *Avrora*, *Voprosy literatury*, *Dialog Karnaval Khronotop*, *Dialogism*, and a number of newspapers. His works have been translated into English, Polish and French. In 2006 he was named the leader of a project funded by the Russian National Humanities Fund to prepare a

publication of the works of Pavel Nikolaevich Medvedev. A number of early works and archival materials were published in Russian and other languages. This project remained incomplete at the time of Iurii Pavlovich's death.

Iurii Pavlovich made a significant contribution to the cultural life of Leningrad-St. Petersburg through his cinematic and publishing work, and in his later years made an important and unique contribution to scholarship on the Bakhtin Circle. While this work remains incomplete, his legacy lives on in the work of the many scholars who have benefited from his efforts.

Addendum: a personal note.

I knew Iurii Pavlovich and his wife Dar'ia personally for the last fifteen years of Iurii Pavlovich's life. During this time I was a regular visitor to their home and enjoyed their hospitality which, even at times when health concerns were pressing, was never less than overwhelming. I last saw him in September, when he knew he had only weeks remaining, but he would not allow this to spoil the time we had left. The loss of a personal friend is always a sad moment, but to have known someone of integrity is a cause for celebration. I am indebted to Dar'ia for information that forms the basis of the above obituary.

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