

PHENOMENON OF INTELLECTUAL CONTRABAND: BAKHTIN'S CASE

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In this article I would like to raise an issue so called “intellectual contraband” in a context of M. Bakhtin’s heritage. The intellectual contraband is an essential phenomenon in history of spaces under ideological control. The notion of intellectual contraband is not widely used, so I’ll outline it briefly.

In a totalitarian society a scientist is placed in very complicated circumstances. Reference to works of colleagues with an “ideologically wrong” position is prohibited. Imagine a researcher who understands that important for him idea was acknowledged as ideologically wrong, so the idea is prohibited. If he realizes importance of the prohibited idea or concept, there are three ways before him. The first is to proclaim his solidarity with the prohibited idea and to be punished by authorities. It is brave, but not very productive in scientific perspective. The second is to write “for the drawer”. Sometimes it is the only way in the situation of ideological control. But it is as painful as the first one in a scientific work perspective. The third way is to “hide” the prohibited theory under some permitted titles. We say “a reputable X said...” inserting the prohibited theory in interpretation of X’s words. In this way we define the “intellectual contraband”.

The “contraband” seems to be the easiest way. But in fact, a researcher who dares to choose this way appears to be very vulnerable. Authorities have an opportunity to unmask a “contrabandist” and to punish him. Colleagues can define his acts as plagiarism. Analyzing examples the intellectual contraband we prefer to call it a courageous deed. Due to these investigators who risked inserting prohibited knowledge into a space behind the iron curtain, the Soviet scientists could maintain a normal intellectual level.

We can analyze different examples of the intellectual contraband in a Soviet tradition. In contemporary Ukrainian science there are few investigations of the intellectual contraband taken place in the Soviet period. For example, we know that Soviet philosopher

Merab Mamardashvili declared ideas of prohibited phenomenology through a permitted investigation devoted to Descartes. This case was revealed by Ukrainian philosopher Vahtang Kebuladze (Кебуладзе 2009). The author of these lines has analyzed availability of *École des Annales* ideas in Soviet medieval studies (Довгополова 2012). Soviet historian Aron Gurevitch approved himself as a mediator between European historical anthropology and the Soviet historical science. He also transferred into the Soviet space ideas of Russian emigrant historian Petr Bitzilli prohibited in his native country due to his Anti-Marxist position. Every Soviet humanitarian remembers a type of the intellectual contraband in a form of “criticism of bourgeois concepts”: detailed description of a Western scientific direction with obligatory conclusion “all these concepts are wrong through their bourgeois nature” very often appeared to be the only way to know what’s happened in the world science. One can easily find a great number of contraband examples.

A very special case of the intellectual contraband appears in the context of M. Bakhtin. All of us know about texts published under the names of Bakhtin’s friends, P. Medvedev and V. Voloshinov. In a situation when publication of Bakhtin’s works was impossible they agreed to publish his texts under their names. The most famous books are “The Marxism and the Philosophy of Language” (published under the name of V. Voloshinov) and “Formal Method in Literary Studies” (published under the name of Medvedev). Few articles were published under the name of Kanaev. Here we see a remarkable form of the intellectual contraband – a book of not just a foreign prohibited author but the undesirable Soviet author was published under names of other writers.

We know about active involvement of people who shared Bakhtin’s ideas in his life. Only due to friends’ help the Bakhtin’s family received sustenance in a Petersburg’s period. So called “circle” (or Bakhtin’s circle as we name it now) was formed in a period of Bakhtin’s life in Nevel and especially Vitebsk. The main part of this circle later gathered in Petersburg supporting a spirit of creativity and pathos of intellectual world rebuilding. When Bakhtin was charged of a crime, participants of the “circle” helped to change his sentence: instead of imprisonment in a Solovky camp Bakhtin was “only” exiled to Kustanaj. This change of the sentence

saved Bakhtin's life – level of his health was not compatible with conditions of the Solovky camp. When Bakhtin was under examination his friend Pavel Medvedev used his best efforts to publish a Bakhtin's book devoted to Dostoevsky.

There were people who wished to risk for the sake of Bakhtin. And it seems normal that the only reaction to the noted participation in Bakhtin's life is adoration and gratefulness for the people who made publishing of Bakhtin's works possible.

The situation is well known to describe it. It is important to show not the situation itself, but its picture in the modern history of science. After ideological press has disappeared it was started intense intellectual "excavations" in the field of Bakhtin's heritage. Their aim was to put historical record straight by returning of Bakhtin's authorship to all the "contrabanded" works. A series of books under a common title "Under the mask of Bakhtin" was published.

A discussion which was launched after books had appeared reveals an additional side of "intellectual contraband" issue to us. Unfortunately, in pathos of putting the historical record straight some theorists didn't keep in mind the situation in which Bakhtin's went through the Soviet scientific era. In such researches Medvedev and Voloshinov sometimes show themselves as certain epigones, hence they have been a significant part of the so called "Bakhtin's circle". I'll try to illustrate my statement.

Bakhtin himself left his comrades for a few decades. Voloshinov passed away in 1936, Medvedev – in 1938. A authorship question was raised only in the 60^{ies}. During so called Thaw period few young philologists (Vadim Kozhinov, Sergej Bocharov, Georgy Gachev, Vladimir Turbin) reopened Bakhtin's name to the world and visited the old and sick researcher in Saransk. Some remarks of Bakhtin's wife in common conversations (such as "Do you remember, Masha, how did you dictate these lines?") revealed possible false authorship. When Bakhtin was asked about a desire to renew his authorship, he refused. He reminded of the common circle of thinkers existed in Vitebsk and Petersburg in the 20^{ies}. According to Bakhtin, that time there was a common space of thought, his friends are dead now, so he sees no reason to raise the authorship question.

In reply to the mentioned words of Bakhtin Sergej Averintsev offered to publish a of “Circle of Bakhtin collection” and to set the authorship problem aside. We know that this offer was ignored. The book series under the title “Under the mask of Bakhtin” was published, with the most high and clean inspirations, as I think.

These publications caused heated discussions. Sometimes these discussions did not support a tone of scientific debate. The strict statement of Bakhtin’s authorship caused indignation of authors who have not supported such rigorous position. The main opponent in this confrontation was a son of Pavel Medvedev – Jury Medvedev (Медведев 1995; Медведев 2000; Медведев, Медведева 2001; Медведев, Медведева 2006; Медведев, Медведева 2012). In the 90ies he entered into controversy with a chief editor of “Bakhtin under the mask” series Igor Peshkov (Пешков 1995). At the beginning of the 2000-ies the dialog between Medvedev and Peshkov appeared to be impossible due to acuity of their personal positions. Peshkov determined a position of Voloshinov-Medvedev’s authorship defenders as obscurantism (Пешков 2000). He ridicules assertion statement about mutual influence and common way of thinking of “Bakhtin’s circle”. “Kukriniksi” – he says mockingly, referring to a group of Soviet caricaturists who worked under the common name built from parts of their names.

Peshkov affirmed that his textological analysis clearly showed that Voloshinov and Medvedev had no relevance to the books “The Marxism and the Philosophy of Language” and “Formal Method in Literary Studies”. Proving Bakhtin’s authorship, he describes Medvedev as extremely narrow-minded and ignoble person. Wishing to prove his position Peshkov claims that in fact Medvedev had stolen Bakhtin’s texts. He reminds of a Pasternak’s positive remark of on *The Formal Method in Literary Studies*. Peshkov accused Medvedev in dishonesty – speaking with Pasternak the latter hadn’t acknowledged that the real author of the book is Bakhtin. Jury Medvedev carried out his own textological analysis proving authorship of Medvedev. We cannot verify results of these works but a common focus of author’s opinion excludes another decision.

Not all authors who write on the authorship problem in “Bakhtin’s circle” are so rigorous. So, V.M. Alpatov analyzes the problem very cautiously (Алпатов 1995; Алпатов 1997). Most part

of serious researches appears to be quite prudent in their researches. But a fact of such discussions caused a strange effect in Voloshinov-Medvedev's perception. Each following notion about the authorship problem became boring. And now in the common humanitarian space Bakhtin's close friends (who suffered for their close relation to Bakhtin) are represented as some puppets without their own will and thoughts. Specialists are able to analyze the situation. But the "Bakhtin under the mask" project was launched to reveal situation of the intellectual contraband for wide circles of humanitarians. It was very clear and noble idea with the aim to reveal the dramatic situation in the Soviet science. As a result all participants of the situation are humiliated.

One side of discussion tiredness is humiliation of Voloshinov and Medvedev. We mentioned narrow-mind seeing of Medvedev in works of Peshkov. The situation of Voloshinov I dare to illustrate by the glance for the page, devoted to Valentin Voloshinov in Wikipedia. The article is organized in a very strange manner. Brief and correct article is accompanied by a few lines from a book of memories of Olga Freidnberg. She told about Voloshinov in very hostile manner. "He was a subtle young man and esthete, author of a linguistics book which has been written for him by Blochin. This Voloshinov had cynically offered me to work for him too... I refused – and our relations became cold as an ice. Soon Voloshinov had fallen, as after this fall Jakovlev did, and then – Desnitsky... The people, who built the Soviet power, have been removed by this power. Predators devoured one another". It is remarkable that this quotation was posted in Wikipedia on the page of Voloshinov, the most popular source of information in the modern world. This is the only quotation! No more memoirs about him are available! After this biased and wrong (Bakhtin is confused with some Blochin) quotation accurate paragraphs on the authorship problem look absolutely redundant. The image of Voloshinov appears to be quite repulsive. Any other memoirs are absent here.

The role of Volosinov and Medvedev in Bakhtin's fate turned out to be perverted. If today we would like to say about their courage we'll listen something like "O, well-well, we know, they said that they supported Bakhtin, but they stole his books! And the only aim of their defenders is to gain copyright and money". This

is very sad and dramatic result of the noble objective of putting the historical record straight, and a good illustration of the dramatic effect caused by the intellectual contraband. A person who dared to be a contrabandist falls under attack in any case.

But the case of Bakhtin's text contraband shows us another side of the problem too. Not only Voloshinov and Medvedev appeared to be victims of the contraband but Bakhtin himself! Let me remind of a study conducted by Swiss researchers Jean-Paul Bronckart and Cristian Bota who accused Bakhtin in stealing works of his dead friends. The Genevan researches claim that Voloshinov and Medvedev were famous scientists in the 1920-ies when Bakhtin was an aspiring and eccentric author. Voloshinov and Medvedev were close friends of Bakhtin but they had other ideological positions. After Bakhtin's arrest in 1929 his friends gathered scattered fragments written by Bakhtin about Dostoevsky into a comprehensive study and published it. This fact raised Bakhtin's weight in the Soviet society and saved him from Solovki camp. In the 60ies when a new edition of the book about Dostoevsky was published Bakhtin has altered nothing in text. What does it mean? That the text wasn't written by him. Followers of Bakhtin saw similarity between the work about Dostoevsky and researches of Voloshinov and Medvedev – so they decided to refer them to Bakhtin too. The title of the Jean-Paul Bronckart's and Cristian Bota's book is representative – “Bakhtine Demasque. The History on Thief, Fraudulence and Collective Insane” (Bronckart, Bota 2011). The Swiss authors tried to unmask Bakhtin in another way. So the thinker, whose only aim was looking for the Verity, appeared to be a careerist and thief. The Swiss authors describe Bakhtin as a middling person who passively used a chance to appropriate his friends' works. Acknowledgement of this appropriation by the world humanitarian science indicates some collective insane, nothing more.

This case of the intellectual contraband reveals very important ethical aspect of the problem to us. We see how *all* the participants of the “contraband” process are vulnerable. And how useful could be researches of scientific traditions in a perspective of the “intellectual contraband” problem. Scientific development could be defined as an ethical process from this perspective. If we

remember the Bakhtin's concept of a "responsible being" and see the "intellectual contraband" problem such complicated knots of the scientific traditions could be analyzed more fruitfully.

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