criticism in translation

On Bakhtin, Philosophy, and Philology: Two Essays

M. L. GASPAROV

INTRODUCTION AND TRANSLATION BY MICHAEL WACHTEL

Introduction

MIKHAIL LEONOVICH GASPAROV (1935–2005) WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST AND MOST PROLIFIC RUSSIAN LITERARY SCHOLARS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.[1] Though associated with the Moscow-Tartu school of semiotics, Gasparov's writings were so diverse and multifaceted—and his scholarly personality so distinct—as to elude categorization.[2]

Gasparov's accomplishments are all the more remarkable when measured against the rigid Marxist-Leninist paradigms that ruled humanities education and scholarship in the Soviet Union. A philologist with a special interest in verse form, he managed to sidestep the procrustean bed of Soviet ideology, building instead on the barely tolerated work of the Russian formalists and structuralists. He embraced and developed their goal of turning literary study into an exact science by applying statistical analysis and probability theory to poetics. Gasparov's scholarship was based on unprecedented amounts of data, which he painstakingly compiled in the precomputer era. However, he was never satisfied with the data as such; he used them to reach profound and unexpected conclusions.

Much of Gasparov's work is accessible only to specialists, but he also wrote for broad and even popular audiences. He was an indefatigable translator, furnishing his translations with easily readable introductions. His books for students are models of the genre, and a book on Greek mythology and society, *Entertaining Greece* (Занимательная Греция), was a best seller. His *Jottings and Notes* (Записи и выписки), a unique combination of autobiography, poetic translation, vignettes, and aphorisms, made clear that he was a major literary talent in his own right.

Gasparov's life was not easy. His brief memoirs of childhood, while not without humor, suggest an alarming degree of trauma. Gasparov was a sickly child and survived his school years only because the bullies agreed that "it was no fun to beat him up" ("Школа" 78). He owed his academic career to one of Stalin's whims. Toward the end of his life, Stalin decided that the Soviet Union should revive the educational model of the humanistic gymnasium. This required considerable recalibration, since the field of classics had been put to death in the 1920s. However, university administrators, who

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knew better than to argue with the generalissimo, immediately embraced the directive. The students who enrolled to become the teachers in this newly mandated initiative were by and large those who had been rejected by the more desirable Russian literature programs. Gasparov was among the few who entered by choice. His decision undoubtedly had something to do with his permanent stutter, which prevented him from speaking even his native language with fluency. Though Stalin died shortly thereafter and the idea of the humanistic gymnasium was (rightly) recognized to be incompatible with Soviet reality, students of antiquity were allowed to finish their studies, and classics again became a legitimate research area ("Античность" 309–10). Gasparov began to work in the "antiquity sector" of Moscow's Institute of World Literature, where he was eventually recognized as an authority.

With the classics as cover, Gasparov analyzed and systematized the Russian poetic tradition, using formal criteria traditionally applied to classics rather than the methods of Soviet scholarship. One of the fruits of this labor was *An Outline of the History of Russian Verse* (Очерк истории русского стиха), a strong candidate for the greatest book ever written on Russian poetry. In a few hundred pages, Gasparov showed the dynamics of Russian verse form from its beginnings through the twentieth century. He singled out the salient characteristics of each period's poetry in terms of rhyme, meter, rhythm, and stanzaic form. The amount of information in the book is staggering; Gasparov studied more than 100,000 lines of verse to reach his conclusions. A more ambitious, if necessarily less detailed, application of the same methodology was published as *An Outline of the History of European Verse* (Очерк истории европейского стиха), in which Gasparov reconstructed the entire family tree of the European poetic tradition. To write it required a thorough immersion in European verse of all countries—from Lithuania and the Slavic countries to Spain, Germany, France, and England—and all periods, back to the ancient Greek and Roman eras.

This overview cannot do justice either to the subtlety and brilliance of Gasparov's interpretation of individual poems or to his inquisitive and far-ranging intellect, but it should make clear that he consistently used a bottom-up methodology. He was convinced that the study of literature, like any science, had measurable and quantifiable elements and that careful and imaginative analysis of these elements could contribute to a better understanding of any literary text. Though intrigued by literary theory, Gasparov had little patience for ahistorical approaches. In his view, the scholar should ask not "What does a given artwork mean to me?" but rather "How did this artwork speak to its contemporaries?" And to understand that communication act, one had to ask formal, structural, and literary-historical questions.[3]

The two essays published here constitute a spirited defense of philology, the science that loves words. The first, intended for a broad scholarly audience, critiques Mikhail Bakhtin's scholarship from a philological perspective. In Russia, where Bakhtin's views were lionized for their anti-Soviet implications, Gasparov was for many years the lone skeptic among serious scholars (Emerson). The second, aimed at the general reader, offers a succinct statement of philology's goals in ethical terms.

These essays speak differently to readers in the United States, but here too they challenge critical orthodoxies. To begin with, they celebrate philology, which in the last few decades has been either dismissed entirely or reserved for opprobrium.[4] Second, they question the assumption that interdisciplinary approaches in the humanities lead to better (and better-informed) interpretations. In Gasparov's view, different disciplines require different methodologies, which are not necessarily complementary. Finally, these essays are written with a disarming directness. Culture for Gasparov was a matter of the utmost importance. In writing for a wide readership, he wished most of all to be understood.

Notes

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1. The most complete Gasparov bibliography lists 641 items (Gračeva, Orlickij, and Ustinov 75–215).

2. Though he published and collaborated with members of the Moscow-Tartu school, Gasparov considered himself an outsider (Šumilova 312; Gasparov, "Семиотика").

3. Gasparov was surprisingly well informed about poststructuralism (Šumilova 273–398, 399–417), but he remained dubious of its value (Šumilova 336; Gasparov, "Семиотика" 332).

4. American attempts to rehabilitate the concept of philology include Holquist; Pollock.

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Mikhail Bakhtin was a philosopher.[1] However, because two of his books were written about Dostoevsky and Rabelais, he is also considered a philologist.[2] This has caused many misunderstandings. In culture there are creative and scholarly realms. Creative work complicates our understanding of the world by bringing new values into it. Scholarship simplifies our understanding of the world by systematizing and ordering old values. Philosophy, like literature, is a creative realm, but philology is the realm of the scholar. Bakhtin deserves high praise for his creativity, but it would be a mistake to credit him with scholarly accomplishments. A philosopher in the role of a philologist remains creative but manifests creativity in a very unusual way, creating a new literature just as a philosopher creates a new system.

In the introduction to the recent collection *Bakhtin and the Classics*, we read that "Bakhtin's goal was to rewrite the history of European literature."[3] It would be more accurate to say "to rewrite European literature itself." And still more accurate to say "not to rewrite, but to create anew."

The new, fantastic literature whose program Bakhtin created was called the menippea. This term is confusing in its concreteness; it refers to the Greek satires of Menippus and the Roman satires of Varro, works that have been preserved only in incomprehensible fragments that lend themselves to a dizzying range of interpretations. In the fourth chapter of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin categorizes as menippean almost a dozen

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works of ancient literature, some of which have not been preserved (Antisthenes, Heraclides, Bion) and some of which have (Petronius, Apuleius, Lucian); he even includes the Hippocratic letters and Boethius. Then he extends the term to all of world literature, viewing as part of the menippean tradition Erasmus, Rabelais, Cervantes, Grimmelshausen, Voltaire, Hoffmann, Balzac, and, finally (if only in part), Dostoevsky. And numerous lesser authors follow in the wake of these famous ones. Almost every work that Bakhtin mentions turns out to be somehow connected to the menippean tradition. The significance of this one literary type is thus hyperbolically magnified at the expense of all others.

There are precedents for such large-scale literary-historical fantasies. In 1903 Hermann Reich published his two-volume *Der Mimus* ["The Mime"]. This monograph constructed a panoramic history of a powerful realistic genre with endless branches, of which only enigmatic names, paltry fragments, and contradictory testimonies had been preserved. Reviewers wrote that Reich "created an entire second dramaturgy of antiquity with his own Shakespeare, who went by the name of Philistion."[4] Just as Bakhtin did with the menippean tradition, so Reich extended the tradition of the mime centuries back before the English Shakespeare and the Russian Petrushka.[5] Just as Bakhtin deduced Socratic dialogue from the menippea (*ante litteram*), Reich deduced from the mime the complete peripatetic typology of drama.[6] No one reproached Reich for reconstructing major literary events on the basis of tiny fragments: in classical philology this is a bitter necessity. He was reproached for putting so much faith in the accuracy of his reconstructions and still more for making out of them a cultural history that was too grandiose and pathos-laden.

Bakhtin knew Reich's book; he mentions it in his monograph on Rabelais.[7] When Bakhtin studied classics in 1914–18, Reich's *Mimus* was not yet yesterday's philological scandal. In Thaddeus Zelinsky's classes, Bakhtin had ample opportunity to recall Reich's methodology of referring to the greatness of works that had not been preserved. It was at precisely this time that the venerable Zelinsky, using these same tried and true philological techniques, was focusing his energies on painstaking reconstructions of lost Greek tragedies ("Tragodoumena").[8] Of course, Zelinsky made all the appropriate caveats; he was able to stop at the most interesting point and say, "[B]ut let's not look too closely into the void: you can see whatever you want there" (this was in regard to Ariōn's dithyrambs).[9] Nonetheless, such study of nonexistent texts could have been a great temptation. In this instance a creative approach replaced a scholarly one. Reich the philologist did not adopt this creative approach, but Bakhtin the philosopher did. Reich's fantasies have been long forgotten, while Bakhtin's are celebrated throughout Europe.

Unlike Reich, Bakhtin concerns himself not with historical reconstructions but with typological generalizations that he then imagines as concrete reality. In other words, he turns a theoretical construct into a historical fact. Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is apparently at the center of Bakhtin's generalizations, and anything that might have features in common with it, be they ideological, thematic, or stylistic, is on the periphery. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin enumerates fourteen markers of the menippean satire, yet not a single one of them is common to all the examples that he mentions [114–19]. (The menippea is "laughter," but there is nothing humorous in Boethius; the menippea is "the topical," but there is nothing topical in Apuleius; there is no "slum naturalism" in the *Apocolocyntosis*, no "fantasticality" in Horace's satires, etc.) In the final analysis *the menippea* becomes simply an arbitrary evaluative term for everything that Bakhtin personally likes, whatever he considers good and important. Even the conversation of Ras-

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kolnikov and Sonia, we might remember, is called "a Christianized Menippea" [155]. From all of world literature what appealed most to Bakhtin was tragic chaos above (in Dostoevsky) and comic chaos below (in Rabelais); in the spirit of the Romantics he rejected the entire regulated sphere in between. He attempted to combine the two types of chaos he deemed acceptable in his concept of the "seriocomic" (*spoudogeloion*) menippea.

Literary historians, especially classicists, are fully aware that such an all-encompassing tradition never existed. But this is usually forgotten, because Bakhtin's ideas are studied not by literary historians but by literary theorists, on whom Bakhtin's authoritative claims make a powerful impression. This is particularly true when he speaks with certainty about works of which almost nothing has been preserved, such as Menippus, Varro, or medieval parody. Bakhtin's detailed analysis of the psychological collision in Varro's satire *Bimarcus* [117] can only be appreciated by someone who has read the few unintelligible phrases that remain from that satire and the few unintelligible pages written on it by various generations of commentators. A. E. Housman once wrote in a review of Friedrich Marx's edition of Lucilius, "in his interpretations of the lines that have come down to us, the editor is not always successful, but in the interpretations of those that have not been preserved he is a god."[10] I dare say that Bakhtin tried to expand the literary-historical void in which one can always see something. As a result, the menippea—that "platonic idea of a genre, *universalia ante rem*" (in René Wellek's formulation)[11]—has entered contemporary literary encyclopedias as literary historical fact.

How could Bakhtin, with his serious training in classical philology, have so consciously permitted himself to lead his unprepared readers astray? To this question there can be only one answer: he looked at his material not as a philologist but as a philosopher. The realm of Bakhtin the philosopher is ethics, the study of what should be—rather than philology, the study of what is. Bakhtin transferred to literature his conceptions of what should be. In philosophy, it is axiomatic to contrast our world with the true world—the sharper that contrast, the better. Thus for Bakhtin the menippea was the incarnation of what should be, not of what is, and the less it resembled well-known and generally accepted literature, the dearer it was to him.

He is indifferent to Attic comedy, though its agons are full of Bakhtinian dialogism. He is indifferent to a carnivalesque writer such as Aristophanes (even going out of his way to set him apart from Rabelais in "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel"), because Aristophanes is too politicized, too goal-oriented in his satire, insufficiently chaotic [*Dialogic Imagination* 219–20]—and in the final analysis simply because he exists as a text and not as a conjecture. Instead, he refers to the *Epidēmiai* of Iōn of Chios and the *Homilai* of Kritias, about which nothing is known except the titles.[12]

He is a philosopher for whom philosophy is less important than philosophizing, who prefers process to system. For him the most important part of philosophy is ethics, which he understands as the realm of the undecided, of choice, of the act as it comes into being. And he transfers this same attitude to literature; for him, the works themselves are less important than their coming into being. He rejects everything that has been preserved because whatever is complete is simply a corpse, of use only to a necrophiliac philology. Through the dead text he wants to see the live person, complete with intentions and intonations, just as the characters in Saltykov-Shchedrin wrote their school essays on "Homer as a poet, a man, and a citizen."[13] Yet Bakhtin could not imagine such a Homer and therefore rejected the epic altogether. He renounced poetry in favor of prose and the epic in favor of the novel. Why? Because not

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just anyone could write verse, and this made verse authoritarian—that is, bad. But anyone could write a novel, at least in the nineteenth-century sense that "we are all capable of writing one book, the book of our life"—the story of our acts, of our moral choices in the tragic and comic chaos of all undecidedness. If we imagine this story as it is ideally expressed in words we apparently have Bakhtin's "novel." But there were no novels of this type in world literature. (Actually, in Russian literature there was one: Herzen's *My Past and Thoughts*.[14] But it seems that Bakhtin does not once mention it. Why not? Because this was a book that existed.)

And this draws his attention away from real literature to literature that is prehistoric and imagined, where nothing is decided—to a romantic phantasm of an ideal age-old folk creativity. Which, incidentally, despite its prehistoric nature, somehow directly influenced Rabelais more than Aristophanes did. Not the Platonic dialogues (though what could be more open-ended than they are?), because they have been preserved, but "Socratic dialogues generally." Not drama, because in it dialogue is complete and intelligible, but "dialogism generally," preferably within the human soul. He wants whatever has not been completed, because only this opens up the possibility of choice: of an act, of a path to God.

The ideology of the menippea was for him the inverted world of carnival. More than anything else Bakhtin wanted to talk about the transcendent—that is, about God (about that God who is present as a third party above every human dialogue). But it is impossible to speak commensurately about God in human language, even without the restrictions of Soviet censorship. One can only speak of God in paradoxes. Carnival was for Bakhtin a form of holy foolishness, superficially trampling on Christian values yet paradoxically affirming them. For Bakhtin both the Socratic dialogues and the crown of thorns are carnivalesque [*Rabelais* 121, 79]. A clear-thinking outsider would detect a contradiction here; this is why, for example, Maria Iudina categorically declared that the book on Rabelais was anti-Christian.[15] But even for insiders there was a contradiction between the literature that Bakhtin had invented and the actual literature, to the study of which he was at times willing to lower himself. Of literature that actually exists, he recognized only the novel (more precisely, only the *Prüfungs-*, *Bildungs-*, *Entwicklungsroman*: other types did not exist for him). But in Bakhtin's conception this type of novel affirmed the human character as it came into being, whereas carnival affirmed the immutability of human nature. These two things turned out to be mutually exclusive. Thus, Bakhtin the creator of nonexistent literature entered into conflict with Bakhtin the student of literature that actually exists. In his work this conflict remained unresolved, but hidden.

If Bakhtin had had an artistic gift, he might have truly rewritten world literature along different lines. The result would have been something like the "Královédvorský Manuscripts" (which did not, but should have, existed), or Shakespeare's sonnets in Marshak's translation (these were not the sonnets Shakespeare wrote, but what they should have been), or, in the most extreme case, something like Kleanthēs's "Hymn to Zeus" (now *this* is how one should pray to the gods).[16] This was deontological poetry, a truly philosophical approach to word creation. But Bakhtin had no pretensions to artistic abilities, so he only described and discussed this alternative literature. There were also historical precedents for this: in the wilds of seventh-century Gaul, aesthetically minded grammarians (the "Toulouse futurists") discussed the verses of "four Lucans," three of whom had never existed.[17]

What drives someone to create from within (like a solipsist) another world in place of the real one, another literature in place of the one that is already known? Like the for-

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malists, Bakhtin was a child of his time (his parodic rejection of the past closely recalls Shklovsky and Tynyanov's conception of literary evolution).[18] But unlike them, he did not attempt to move with his time but instead pushed against it.[19] Where was he going? Into a solipsistic niche, where he could communicate with God in an unmediated fashion and create his fantastic menippean world, while communicating with people through Medvedev and Voloshinov.[20] (After the invention of literature came the invention of scholarship: of an entire scholarly movement, supposedly represented by Medvedev and Voloshinov. In their books one finds a masked pathos of self-affirmation that turns into self-rejection. It recalls Kierkegaard's play with pseudonyms.)[21]

A softer form of solipsism is called egocentrism. To the egocentric, authors are important not for what they are in and of themselves but for what they are for me. Bakhtin calls this dialogism and considers it respect for the Other. Hence his egocentric certainty that we know Shakespeare better than Shakespeare's contemporaries did: "I make Shakespeare great insofar as I read him."[22] (Similarly, in Tsvetaeva's memoirs one finds a recurring motif: "How wonderful Belyi and Voloshin were when they were bathed in my radiance!"[23]) Here we find another paradox: philology with all its necrophilia respected the Other more than Bakhtin does. The philologist would say, "I exist insofar as I read Shakespeare." Bakhtin's dialogue with the past ultimately covers up an expropriation of the past; it only appears to be a dialogue, because it is one-sided: the past remains silent.

The illusion of dialogue with the text arose from the illusion of first reading. (It was Romanticism that began to cultivate first reading instead of rereading.) We reread a text many times, but each time in a new, unrepeatable spiritual condition, and for this reason we seek something different each time and of course we find it. We are the ones who change as we look over the text, but it seems to us that the text-interlocutor is changing. Yet in reality it is only a mirror that reflects our changing faces. Bakhtin looks into the mirror at his own "I" but imagines it to be a "you." When Kristeva called dialogism the logic of a dream, perhaps it was this fictiveness that she had in mind.[24]

A dialogue is an individual's internal condition, which clearly cannot be expressed in a text. It is a phenomenon within the personality, not among personalities. For the interlocutor it is at best something that can be reconstructed. In his notion of dialogue Bakhtin concentrates on himself, not on the Other. This is a form of egocentric self-affirmation: the idea is not to imagine the interlocutor on the basis of one's own words but to imagine oneself on the basis of the interlocutor's words (cf. Mandelshtam's "On the Interlocutor")[25]—for example, to imagine oneself as the addressee of all of world literature. Egocentrism is aggressive: the interlocutors in a dialogue engage in a battle over the word as sign, fighting for the power of their own meaning. This occurs, probably, because Bakhtin only uses these everyday dialogisms to distract us from his main dialogue with God; in his heart of hearts he looks at them with disdain. And in Voloshinov this battle for language explicitly becomes a class struggle.[26] After all, carnival is also first and foremost aggressive. How is carnival opposed to everyday life? Everyday life beats me in accordance with established rules, whereas carnival beats me without any rules whatsoever. Bakhtin surely did not want to laud this: thus we encounter another paradox.

His notion of carnival is itself fantastic. According to Caryl Emerson, the essence of carnival for Bakhtin was that we should look at ourselves from the side and laugh ("Whom are you laughing at? You're laughing at yourselves!"),[27] thereby cleansing and perfecting ourselves.[28] It is unclear why this cannot be achieved when one is alone, why a

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carnivalesque throng is necessary, unless it goes back to the romantic commonplace that everything popular and collective is good. Carnival becomes a refined form of asceticism, which has nothing to do with real forms of carnival culture, the purpose of which is to allow an outlet for aggressive passions that are dangerous for society.

Bakhtin's sense of his right to creation follows from our universal sense of a right to cocreation. This right to cocreation is so obvious to Bakhtin that he takes it for granted at every step of his reading. For him the text does not consist of words that are common to all and therefore not our own; it consists of utterances, each of which is "an unrepeatable event of the text."[29] (What certainty in the originality and unrepeatability of one's feelings is required to make such a claim!) Bakhtin derives this unrepeatability of the utterance from its unique intonation, which expresses an intention—but he never considers the fact that this intonation could be understood in different ways. He identifies himself with the interlocutor of a dialogue, be it his neighbor in the tram or Dostoevsky, and he regards their utterances from the perspective of a creator, from inside, knowing in advance their sense, and not from the perspective of a scholarly reader, who hesitates among various possible intonations and their corresponding interpretations. And Bakhtin attributes cocreative rights to this imperious understanding. Only after Bakhtin did we come to understand that utterances, like words, once uttered, become alien and form a constantly expanding stream of discourse from which one can mechanically scoop out utterances and through bricolage build from them those not very individual texts among which we live.

Let us end this discussion about a creator's right to the nonexistent, the nonestablished, and the unresolved with Bakhtin's utterance on a considerably more important topic that was preserved only in the record of his interlocutor. The subject no longer has anything to do with literature: "But the main thing is this: what really matters is that His existence cannot truly be proved. Detailed realia make everything disappear; faith disappears, truth disappears. It turns into a classification."[30]

The Ethics of Philology

Philology is the science of understanding.[31] The word is ancient, but the concept recent. In the contemporary sense it comes into being between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. This is the time of the founding of historicism, the basis of our contemporary human sciences. Classical philology began when people started to feel the historical distance between themselves and the ancient world that so interested them. Scholars of the Middle Ages also knew, loved, and valued antiquity, but they imagined it entirely in their own image: Aeneas was a knight and Socrates a professor. The Renaissance began to sense that this was wrong, that these familiar images were inadequate, that to understand antiquity correctly an unfamiliar type of knowledge was required. The science of philology offered this knowledge. And classical philology was followed by other types of philology: Romance, Germanic, Slavic. The philological approach was applied first to antiquity and the Middle Ages and then to culture of the most recent times. And all this

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occurred because the quickening pace of history increasingly forced us to recognize that what was close in time was distant in spirit.

This recognition did not come easily. Our thinking is egocentric; in the people of other epochs we easily recognize what is similar to us, but we are not eager to notice what is different. For centuries humanism had assumed that man is the measure of all things, yet when applied to all things, that measure turned out to accord not with humanity generally but at times with a citizen of Athens, at times with a Renaissance aristocrat, at times with a modern European professor. For centuries humanism had spoken of eternal values, yet these eternal values revealed themselves to be the temporary values of earlier epochs, cut off from and without application to the values of the present. This is hardly surprising: to enjoy Aeschylus or Tyutchev, we need not constantly bear in mind that the former was a slave owner and the latter a monarchist.[32] But pleasure and understanding are different things. There are no eternal values, only temporary ones, and therefore they can be comprehended not in an unmediated fashion—to think otherwise is self-deception—but only by overcoming historical distance. And philology teaches us to set the binoculars of our knowledge at the necessary distance.

Philology brings us closer to the past by distancing us from it. It teaches us to see a great dissimilarity, against which the tiniest similarity becomes more precious and valued. The general reader has the right to relate to literary characters "as if they were living people." Philologists do not have this right; their duty is to break down this relation into its constituent parts: the author's relation to the hero and our relation to the author. It has been claimed—though I do not agree—that the distance between Gaev and Chekhov can be intuited by a sensitive ear.[33] But such a sensitive ear is definitely insufficient to fathom the distance between Chekhov and us. Because in this case we must listen not only to Chekhov but also to ourselves—from a remove and critically.

Philology is difficult not because it demands that we study other systems of values but because it forces us to set aside temporarily our own system of values. It is difficult, though possible, to read all the books that Pushkin read. But it is much harder to forget (even briefly) all the books that Pushkin did not read but that we have read. When we open up a classic, we avoid asking ourselves the most basic question—for whom was this book written?—because we know the most basic answer: not for us. No one knows how Horace imagined his readers in future centuries, but one thing is certain: he did not imagine us. There are people who do not want to read or even to see the letters of Pushkin, Chekhov, and Mayakovsky: "after all they are not written to me." Yet this same feeling of ethical discomfort, of inappropriate intrusiveness, should trouble the philologist who opens up *Eugene Onegin*, *The Cherry Orchard*, or "A Cloud in Trousers." We can atone for this intrusiveness only by renouncing ourselves and dissolving in our lofty interlocutor.

Philology begins by distrusting the word.[34] We trust only the words of our own language, and the words of another language we experience primarily to the extent that they correspond to ours. If we lose sight of this, if we accept the presumption of a mutual understanding between the writer and the reader, we are consoling ourselves with a soothing lie. Books answer for us not the questions that writers were posing to themselves but those that *we* are in a position to pose to *ourselves*, and these are often different things. Books surround us like mirrors in which we see only our own reflection; if it is not always the same reflection, this is because the mirrors are crooked, each in its own way. Philology studies precisely the way these mirrors are constructed—not what is depicted in them but their material, their form, and the operative laws of verbal optics. In a long and roundabout

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way, philology allows us to imagine both the face of the mirror maker and our own face—genuine and unrefracted. But if we are to look only at the reflection ("to go beyond the word," as some would have it), then we should know in advance that we will find only ourselves.[35]

Linguistics and literary study vie for philological dominance, linguistics on the offensive and literary study on the defensive (or perhaps deflective). And rightly so. Philology began with the study of dead languages. We all know what dead languages are, but we rarely think that there are also dead literatures, even in living languages. Even when reading the literature of the nineteenth century, we are forced to translate it mentally into the language of our own concepts. That is to say, language in the broadest sense: lexical (everyone is familiar with the *Dictionary of Pushkin's Language*),[36] stylistic (such a dictionary has already been begun for the poetry of the twentieth century), on the level of images (on the basis of a frequency dictionary: such dictionaries already exist for certain poets), and on the level of ideas (this is the most distant and important goal, but initial steps have been made).[37]

Only when we can rely on fundamental works of this type can we recognize among the ever-expanding mass of interpretations of Hamlet's or Gaev's soliloquies those that are at the very least not anachronistic.[38] This is not to denigrate other interpretations but only to demarcate the border between the creative work of writers and the cocreativity of their readers and critics.

Linguists have one other advantage over literary scholars. In linguistics there is no evaluative approach: linguists differentiate between words declined and conjugated, bookish and colloquial, archaic and dialectical, but they do not distinguish good words from bad. In contrast, the literary scholar, whether openly or discreetly, seeks to separate good works from bad ones and to focus his attention on the good ones. *Philology* means "love of the word": a literary scholar is more discerning in dispensing such love, but also more prejudiced. And that kind of prejudice can hurt favorites and those out of favor in equal measure. How happily we give to Griboedov and Chekhov the honors that they should share with Shakhovskoy and Potapenko![39] It has been said that in Rubens's pictures we appreciate not only *his* works but the works of all the innumerable artists who did not turn into Rubenses. To remember this is the moral duty of each of us, first and foremost of the philologist.

Yury Lotman has said that philology is ethical because it teaches us not to be tempted by simple ways of thinking. I would add that philology is ethical not only in its means but also in its ends: it teaches us not to be spiritually egocentric. (It seems that all arts teach us self-affirmation and all sciences teach us humility.) Every culture builds its present from the bricks of the past; every epoch tends to think that that past was only concerned with providing it with these bricks. But buildings of this type often collapse; old bricks cannot be used everywhere. Philology serves as a technical control board at the construction site, checking that the material is being used correctly. Philology studies the egocentrism of other cultures and thus forces us not to give in to our own egocentrism, not to delude ourselves into thinking that cultures of the past were created for us but to think about how we ourselves should be creating a new culture.

Translator's Notes

1. "Literary History as a Creative and Scholarly Task: The Case of Bakhtin" was first published as "История литературы как творчество и исследование: Случай Бахтина" in Fleishman, Safran, and Wachtel (1: 23–31).

2. The books are *Rabelais and His World* and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.

3. The original passage reads, "Bakhtin's turn to literature from philosophy proper was nothing less than

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'an increasingly ambitious attempt to rewrite the history of Western European literature'" (Branham, Introd. xiv). The editor of *Bakhtin and the Classics*, R. Bracht Branham, is quoting here from David Lodge's *After Bakhtin*.

4. It is unclear which reviewers Gasparov has in mind. However, one need look no further than Reich's own book to find this claim: "Philistion is the Shakespeare of antiquity or, still better, the British poet is the Philistion of the modern period" (2: 880; my trans.). This passage is cited in a contemporary review that criticizes Reich's "cult of Philistion" (Körte 543–44).

5. Petrushka, a jester, is a stock character in traditional Russian puppet theater, best known to Western audiences through Stravinsky's ballet of that name.

6. Gasparov refers to the third chapter of Reich's book, "Des Aristoteles und der Peripatetiker mimische Studien und mimische Theorie" (1: 231–95).

7. If anything, Gasparov understates Reich's importance to Bakhtin. In his introduction to *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin devotes three paragraphs to *Der Mimus* (55–56). He praises the book highly, though not without serious reservations.

8. Thaddeus Zelinsky (1859–1944)—more accurately, Tadeusz Zieliński—published in his native Polish and in Russian, German, and Latin. He taught in St. Petersburg (Petrograd) for more than three decades, until he emigrated to Poland in 1920. The reconstructions of lost tragedies were part of his three-volume Russian translation of Sophocles, published in Moscow in 1914. In that publication, Zelinsky fondly recalls working on these texts in his seminars from 1912 to 1914 (Sofokl 3: 193). Bakhtin considered Zelinsky "the closest thing to a teacher I ever had" (Clark and Holquist 30).

9. Sofokl 2: 27.

10. Gasparov paraphrases Housman. The original reads, "For interpreting those words and sentences which we possess in black and white, his aptitude, as we have already seen, is not remarkable; but in the invisible world he is quite at home" (Housman 73).

11. "All these reifications in which Bakhtin indulges can be defended only on the grounds of a theory which believes in universalia ante res, instead of what I and most others think of as universalia in rebus" (Wellek 38).

12. See the glosses in Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 21.

13. Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin (1826–89), a satirical writer, was much admired by Gasparov. The citation comes from the work "A Diary of a Provincial in Petersburg" (1872), ch. 5.

14. Alexander Herzen (1812–70) was a Russian socialist and writer.

15. Iudina (1899–1970), one of the great Russian pianists of the twentieth century, was a close friend of Bakhtin's. In 1946 she was instrumental in getting an early version of his work on Rabelais accepted as a dissertation (Pan'kov 13). Her reference to the Rabelais book as "blasphemous" is known only from Bakhtin's recounting of the episode in an interview of 11 October 1973 (Kuznetsov 53). Iudina's comment should be understood as a reflection either of the changes to the original manuscript required by Soviet censors (Iudina 402–03) or of her preoccupation with Russian Orthodoxy, which became ever stronger in the last decades of her life.

16. Vaclav Hanka (1791–1861), a Czech linguist, poet, scholar, and ardent patriot, claimed to have discovered the "Manuscript of the Queen's Court" (or "Královédvorský Manuscripts"), containing Czech poems of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They were subsequently proved to be mystifications, written by Hanka himself. "Hanka's intuition was staggering. He was not a prominent scholar . . . , yet he was able to create the illusion of Old Czech and of Old Czech poetic form so convincingly and in such a refined way that it required many decades of intensive development in Czech philology . . . before it was possible to clearly expose the manuscripts as forgeries" (Jakobson 399). Samuil Marshak (1887–1964) was a Russian poet and translator of, among other things, Shakespeare's complete sonnets. Gasparov (with N. S. Avtonomova) wrote an essay on these celebrated Shakespeare translations ("Сонеты"), praising their "stylistic unity" but pointing out their anachronistic qualities, since the lexicon and style were based on Russian poetry of the early nineteenth century. Only thirty-eight lines of the "Hymn to Zeus" by Kleanthēs (c. 331–c. 232 BCE) have been preserved. In an essay for a nine-volume Russian history of world literature, Gasparov mentions this hymn as an example of how the philosophers of late antiquity used the Olympian gods to personify abstract elemental qualities and first principles ("Литература" 306).

17. The expression "Toulouse futurists" appears to be Gasparov's invention, intended to remind readers of the Russian cubo-futurists of the early twentieth century (e.g., Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksey Kruchenykh), whose work teems with neologisms, paronomasia, and other forms of linguistic experimentation. Gasparov refers to an author who existed, though whether he was from Toulouse (or even French) is disputed (Law 2–3). In an article written for the above-mentioned history of world literature, Gasparov wrote of "the works of a grammarian from Toulouse (apparently from the beginning of the seventh century), who wrote under the imposing pseudonym 'Vergilius Maro': he writes about 'twelve Latins,' about 'the scrambling of words,' about anagrams, inversions, abbreviations of words, about languages 'for making mysteries known,' and he addresses his writings to his grammarian brothers, who have names like 'Homer,' 'Cicero,' the three 'Lucans,' etc. and refer to unknown grammarian authorities from Romulus's time who engage in two-week disputes about the vocative case of the word 'I' and who consider 'philosophy'—which includes sciences—to be not so much useful as a means of satisfying curiosity" ("Темные века" 451).

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18. According to the Russian formalists Yury Tynyanov and Viktor Shklovsky, literary traditions "evolved" when authors rejected (often by parody) the work of their immediate predecessors or contemporaries.

19. Both Shklovsky and Tynyanov were fascinated by the art of their time, especially modernism and the avant-garde. Bakhtin had little interest in these recent developments, even in cases where they might have confirmed his ideas.

20. Valentin Voloshinov and Pavel Medvedev were like-minded interlocutors of Bakhtin. Together with Lev Pumpyansky, they formed what later became known as the Bakhtin circle. Several books published under their names are believed to have been written in collaboration with Bakhtin. On these controversies, see Clark and Holquist 146–70; Brandist 1–26.

21. "Kierkegaard insisted upon the importance of his pseudonyms, noted that there were contradictions between their views, [and] begged that anyone quoting from their works would cite the name of the responsible pseudonym" (McKinnon 116).

22. This presumably derives from Bakhtin's statement that "[w]e can say that neither Shakespeare himself nor his contemporaries knew that 'great Shakespeare' whom we know now. There is no possibility of squeezing our Shakespeare into the Elizabethan epoch" ("Response" 4).

23. The great Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva (1892–1941) wrote a number of memoirs about her contemporaries. Gasparov has in mind "A Living Word about a Living Person" (on Maksimilian Voloshin) and "A Captive Spirit" (on Andrey Bely).

24. Kristeva writes that "[t]his 'dialogic' of the coexistence of opposites, quite distinct from the 'monologic,' (which presupposes a *tertium non datur*), and discovered by Freud in the unconscious and the dream, is what Bakhtin, with surprising insight, calls 'the logic of the dream'" (111). Kristeva, however, appears to have misunderstood what Bakhtin meant by "the logic of a dream." He used the phrase not to describe the concept of dialogue but in the most literal sense, when discussing passages in Dostoevsky that concern dreams (*Problems* 168).

25. In this 1913 essay, Osip Mandelshtam likened a poem to a message in a bottle thrown off a sinking ship and addressed to a future, unknown recipient.

26. Gasparov presumably refers to Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, published in 1929.

27. This famous line appears in the fifth act of Gogol's comedy *The Inspector General*.

28. This summary is either derived from several passages in Emerson, "Coming," or based on Emerson, "Plenitude" 185.

29. The phrase comes from the essay "The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis." Bakhtin argues that each time a reader returns to the text, the experience is unique, "a new, unrepeatable event in the life of the text" ("Problem" 106).

30. Собрание сочинений 522. The passage comes from Bakhtin's conversation of 7 July 1969 with I. L. Krupnik, concerning (among other things) the difference between the two Russian words for truth—правда (*pravda* [truth generally]) and истина (*istina* [the highest truth]). In the passage quoted in the text this latter word is used.

31. "The Ethics of Philology" was first published as "Филология как нравственность" in the Soviet journal Литературное обозрение ("Literary Review") in 1979 as part of a "roundtable" (a series of brief essays that appeared in a number of issues) on the state of philology in the Soviet Union. Gasparov edited and republished his contribution in Записи и выписки in 2000 (98–100). I used the later text for my translation, though I cite passages from the earlier version in the notes to elucidate otherwise obscure references. Gasparov appended a parenthetical statement about the essay's origins to orient the post-Soviet reader: the editors of Литературное обозрение "did not want to publish it, but it turned out that M. B. Khrapchenko had selected it for official condemnation. So they had to print it." Khrapchenko (1904–1986) was a high-ranking Communist Party functionary and literary bureaucrat, a Lenin Prize winner and a "hero of Soviet labor." His contribution to the philology discussion closed the roundtable. It appeared directly after Gasparov's, which Khrapchenko criticized at length, in particular objecting to the claim that philology should avoid evaluative judgments (Xrapčenko 31–32).

32. Fedor Tyutchev (1803–73), one of Russia's great Romantic and mystical poets, was a political archconservative. In Soviet scholarship, this subject was generally avoided.

33. Gaev is the landowner in *The Cherry Orchard*. In the 1979 version of "The Ethics of Philology," Gasparov names V. V. Kozhinov, the scholar who made this claim ("Филология"). In discussing Gaev (46), Kozhinov himself was following the lead of earlier participants in the philology roundtable (Bilinkis 35–36; Fedorov).

34. The 1979 text makes clear that this comment was polemically directed at Jakov Bilinkis, whose essay "Trust in the Word" opened the philology roundtable. That Bilinkis was allowed to initiate the discussion (his essay immediately preceded that of the far more erudite Dmitry Likhachev) indicates that his views hewed close to the party line. Bilinkis's overall position can be deduced from his apodictic first sentence: "Over the past two decades the persistent attempts of the adherents of structuralism to examine art as a sign system have clearly not produced any serious results" (34).

35. Gasparov's Nietzsche-inflected formulation (the Russian for *beyond* [по ту сторону] is the expression used in translating "beyond good and evil") likely refers to Kozhinov's essay, where "the word" is considered less important than "the art of the word." Kozhinov was attacking the formalists in order to champion Bakhtin. In this

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sense, Gasparov's complaint here anticipates the arguments he would direct at Bakhtin twenty-five years later.

36. The result of more than fifteen years of preparation, this four-volume dictionary (with a brief supplementary volume) is one of the great achievements of Soviet scholarship. Published between 1956 and 1961, it lists every word Pushkin used and its precise meaning in each usage. In the earlier version of his essay, Gasparov had written, "*The Dictionary of Pushkin's Language* showed its readers how much in Pushkin's semantics had slipped by us, while we, not thinking about how incomplete and unsystematic our knowledge was, were guided by our sensitive ears and subtle taste" ("Филология" 27).

37. This passage appeared in the first version of the essay as well. In 1979 most of these dictionaries were only in the planning stage, but as a member of the Institute of World Literature and of the Academy of Sciences, Gasparov was well aware of them. His colleague V. P. Grigorev, whose contribution to the roundtable singles out Gasparov for praise, also stresses the importance of these dictionaries ("Вкус слова"). A distinguished linguist, Grigorev was himself at work on a dictionary of Soviet poetry, which to date consists of one volume. For other works that Gasparov probably had in mind (some of which only came out decades later), see Bakina; Koževnikova; Ivanova. The first frequency dictionaries had been prepared by members of the Moscow-Tartu school (Minc and Šiškina; Levin).

38. Once again, Gasparov's polemic is directed at an earlier essay. M. Girshman had—with reservations—cited the claim that "it is as if each new reader of *Hamlet* writes the work anew."

39. Aleksandr Shakhovskoy (1777–1846), a writer of comedies, was a towering figure in Russian theatrical life in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Today his works are known primarily because they are briefly mentioned in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. Ignaty Potapenko (1856–1929), now largely forgotten, was in his day an enormously successful playwright and a friend of Chekhov's. (An episode from his personal life was the transparent model for the plot of *The Seagull*.) Aleksandr Griboedov (1795–1829) was the author of the classic comedy *Woe from Wit*. With these examples, Gasparov emphasizes that only masterpieces are remembered, while the works that paved the way for them are consigned to oblivion (cf. Gasparov, "Мой отец" 74).

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