A CONVERSATION WITH SASHA SOKOLOV
(OVER THE BARRIER: A SPECIAL BROADCAST IN HONOR OF SASHA SOKOLOV’S 60TH BIRTHDAY)

NAUM VAIMAN: What an amazing triptych of novels, we all want to know how this miracle came about. Of course, questions about predecessors and teachers come next. When did you become aware of your inclination to write and of your desire to become a writer?

SASHA SOKOLOV: Very early: I have been preparing to become a writer since childhood; that’s what interested me most in life. I remember clearly, that even as a child, I was fascinated by all kinds of spoken exchanges. I received good training at home. My mother was a fanatic about literature, especially Russian literature. She always supervised and watched over my progress in school, particularly, over my compositions and dictations. As in some musical families, where children are expected to practice violin or piano several hours each day, on top of my regular schoolwork, I was expected to write practice exercises daily. I am very grateful to my mother.

NAUM VAIMAN: What were your first literary passions?

SASHA SOKOLOV: Gogol’ – he always was and still is, for me, the number-one writer. At the age of six or seven, my mother and I spent several months in Ukraine visiting “Gogol’’s Places.” She, too, was in love with Gogol’.

NAUM VAIMAN: What about Platonov?

SASHA SOKOLOV: No, not Platonov. Platonov did not influence me at all; I feel absolutely nothing for Platonov. In this respect, Brodsky’s attitude always puzzled me. He held him in high esteem. Of course, I read him, but I never felt influenced by him. His first book, a collection of stories, appeared at the time we were completing school, around 1960, perhaps a little earlier, and that started a Platonov craze. His works were read aloud and discussed at evening literary gatherings in Moscow. These early Moscow “salons” were also an important part of my education.

NAUM VAIMAN: Which salons?

SASHA SOKOLOV: Those “literary salons” that were connected with readings in Maiakovskii Square. Sometimes we gathered at Apollon Shukht’s. But more often, we congregated in Maiakovskii Square. At the conclusion of readings at the monument, we dispersed to various apartments. Now and then, we all assembled in one place. At such times, some forty people, sometimes even more, piled into one apartment. These were the beginnings of the first free-floating literary gatherings.

NAUM VAIMAN: Did you read your own works to each other?

SASHA SOKOLOV: Yes, of course. You see, all of us considered ourselves poets then.

NAUM VAIMAN: And you? Did you also begin by writing verse?

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2. *Izbrannye rasskazy* [Collected Stories] was published in 1958 by Moscow’s Sovetskii pisatel’.