

**A Carnival Show: The Secrets of Stalin in Vladimir Voinovich's
*The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Private Ivan Chonkin***

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Abstract

Voinovich's satirical novel, *The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Private Ivan Chonkin* (1975) deals with the foibles and absurdities of Stalin and Stalinism through the protagonist Chonkin's fantastic and hilarious adventures before World War II. To break the Stalinist myth and its dogmas, Voinovich applies Chonkin as his satirical weapon to reveal the alternative truth about Stalinism by playing the historical secrets, gossips and rumors about Stalin with the use of dreams, jokes and misunderstandings. For example, Chonkin dreams that a bee tells him about Stalin's secret that Stalin is a woman; furthermore, Stalin appears in a woman's dress and sings in female voice in Chonkin's another dream. A seemingly carnival show is put on in *Chonkin* that everything was sacred and powerful about Stalin and Stalinism is subverted and turned upside-down by Chonkin through Voinovich's use of satire and laughter.

Therefore, I argue that Voinovich has employed the carnival sense of laughter to satirize Stalin. To examine the aspects of laughter and satire of Stalin's secrets in *Chonkin*, this paper will make use of Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of carnival from his *Rabelais and His World* (1984). His theory stipulates the importance of joy with satire that laughter appears to release and reduce people's fear to revive, renew, and grow from the official authority and culture. With his theory, this paper aims to discuss the secrets of Stalin and bring out some of the underlying meaning of the secrets behind the author's use of laughter and satire in the topsy-turvy show portrayed in *Chonkin*.

Keywords: secrets, Stalin, Stalinism, carnival