

**Title:** Table-talk as literary device in *The Reserve* of Sergey Dovlatov  
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By the beginning of the 19th century, Russian table-talk, under the influence of English and French table-talk, emerged in Russian high society and made its way to circles of friends, gradually transforming into liberated conversation and relocating from the cultural periphery to its center (Lotman 1979). A similar situation occurred one and a half century later; in Brezhnev's seventies, the generation that did not face Stalinist terror, but tasted Khrushchev's Thaw, embarked on kitchen conversations, where political, social and cultural subjects arose and, concurrently, anecdote-jokes and table-talk flooded into Soviet popular culture. However, as a result of harsh censorship, while Pushkin collected his table-talks in *Notes*, and Vyazemsky brought them into *The Diary*, table-talk in the Soviet times existed mainly as a primary speech genre until the nineties. Dovlatov, who continued Gogol's and Chekhov's tradition of transforming anecdote into story, also revitalized table-talk as genre in *Solo on Undervood*, in 1980 while in the West. He embraced this speech genre with storytelling from the first person, as in *The Zone* or *The Compromise* and deceives his reader-listener who perceives the stories and novellas as the author-narrator's biography or memoirs and the characters as real people.

In *The Reserve*, the narrator constantly interrupts the plot line—his life story—just as the narrator of a memoir would, and prompted by his associations, retells table-talks. The reader becomes not only a listener of the story but also a participant of a table-talk. At the same time, the narrator is a listener who overhears conversations to supply them in the proper place and moment. This paper explores *The Reserve* to illustrate Dovlatov's writing technique and to show how table-talk as a speech genre functions in a literary environment.