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## Introduction

The fifth issue of «AvtobiografiЯ» continues the tradition of hosting special sections devoted to themes related to auto/biographical studies in Russian culture, a tradition inaugurated in the last issue with the publication of the special section on childhood. In this issue, we propose to our readers a series of contributions devoted to one of the most timely research topics of contemporary autobiographical studies, i.e. the biography. In fact, biography has become one of the top research topics in the humanities. Many facts testify to this: the creation in 1978 of the journal «Biography», which boosted research on biography over the last decades<sup>1</sup>; the ever increasing tendency of putting a dash between the words 'auto' and 'biography' in many academic publications, associations and institutions<sup>2</sup>; the impressive amounts of conferences, publi-

cations and research projects devoted to biography every year<sup>3</sup>. It seems that we are somewhat living in an 'age of biography', where biographies in various forms (private, public, performed, written, told, sung etc.) are relevant.

Russian culture is definitely living an 'age of biography'. However, as happens in many instances, the path followed by Russia is slightly different from that of other cultures. Leaving

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<sup>3</sup> In the last few months many titles have been issued, e.g. E. H. Halldórsdóttir, T. Kinnunen, M. Leskelä-Kärki, B. Possing (Eds.), *Biography, gender and history: Nordic perspectives*, University of Turku, Turku, 2016 and H. Renders, B. de Haan, J. Harmsma (Eds.), *The Biographical Turn: Lives in history*, Routledge, Abingdon; New York, 2016. Of the latest publications on biography, the online the Oxford Bibliography on Biography and Autobiography edited by Margaretta Jolly is noteworthy

(<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199846719/obo-9780199846719-0006.xml>). Finally, many institutions devoted to biography promote research on the topic. Among them, the Biography Society ([biographysociety.org](http://biographysociety.org)) and the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for the History and Theory of Biography ([gtb.lbg.ac.at](http://gtb.lbg.ac.at)).

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<sup>1</sup> See the «Biography» journal's website, <https://muse.jhu.edu/journal/25>

<sup>2</sup> Apart from our journal and other publications, the dash is present in the world's top association in the field, the International Auto/Biography Association (IABA).

aside the tradition of the 'zhitie', Russia took a long time to embrace the concept of 'biography'. The first occurrences of the word 'biografiia' seem to date back to the second half of the XVIII century<sup>4</sup>. However, the term was often confused with 'zhitie', thus showing some existing confusion in modern Russian culture between hagiography and biography. From the XIX century onward, the term 'biografiia' enters Russian culture in its Western connotation and meaning. Today, the word is defined as "the genre of the description of life"<sup>5</sup>, while Russian culture is flooded with biographies: the book series 'The Life of Amazing People' is one of the most successful on the book market; a considerable amount of tv series and movies have been (and still are) devoted to the life of prominent people; there are websites, research projects and almanacs devoted to the reconstructions of biographies, while biography is at the centre of both historical and literary research, as testified, for instance by the publi-

<sup>4</sup> See С. Барчударов и др. (ред.), *Словарь русского языка XVIII века*, Наука, Л., 1985, II, с. 34.

<sup>5</sup> See О. Соболевская, *Биография // А. Николькин* (Гл. ред. и сост.), *Литературная энциклопедия терминов и понятий*, Интелвак, М., 2001, с. 90-92.

cations of *Pravo na imia*<sup>6</sup>. This attention to biography is reflected in research by Russianists outside of Russia, where numerous academic initiatives are devoted to prominent Russian individuals<sup>7</sup>.

The present issue of «AvtobiografiЯ» is a contribution to this 'age of biography', i.e. a cluster focussed on theoretical aspects related to the study of the Biography of the Writer. This way, we aim to link current researchers to the glorious Russian tradition of critical studies on biography, a tradition that

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<sup>6</sup> *Pravo na imia* is the title of the annual conferences on biography devoted to the memory of Veniamin Iofe, dissident, activist, and researcher. The conferences are organised by the St. Petersburg office of Memorial (and lately by the Fond Iofe) with the European University of St. Petersburg. In 2013, the organisers have produced a volume containing some of the most important contributions on biography, see Т. Притыкин (red.), *Pravo na imia: Биографика XX века. Чтения памяти Вениамин а Иофе: Избранное. 2003-2012*, НИЦ «Мемориал» (СПб.); Европейский университет в Санкт-Петербурге; Норма, СПб., 2013.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, the recent biographies of Chekhov published in Italy by Fausto Malcovati (F. Malcovati, *Il medico, la moglie, l'amante: come Čechov cornificava la moglie-medicina con l'amante-letteratura*, Marcos y marcos, Milano, 2015) and of Tchaikovsky by Philip Ross Bullock (Philip Ross Bullock, *Pyotr Tchaikovsky*, Reaktion, London, 2016).

was sanctioned by the creation of the 'Biography institute' (Biograficheskii institut) in 1918. The institute was created and led by Nikolai Rybnikov, who believed that the best way to study biography was to collect as many self-orientated documents as possible, from autobiographies to diaries, from obituaries to medical records, etc. The institute was short lived, but it started a path followed soon afterwards by some of the greatest names of Russian criticism, including Grigorii Vinokur, Iurii Tynianov, Boris Tomashevskii, Vladimir Zhirmunskii, Mikhail Bakhtin, and others.

The special section edited by Aleksey Kholikov features articles by biographers, who deal with several theoretical issues related to the scholarly biography of the writer. The first article by Violetta Gudkova shows how biographies can be a fundamental tool for the analysis of the 'anthropological turn', which occurred with the birth of the Soviet state and continued until the 1930s through the analysis of documents related to Bulgakov, Olesha and other writers. The article is followed by a contribution by Valerii Tiupa, who compares different biographies of Chekhov in order to identify specific strate-

gies linked to the genre of biography. Ol'ga Bogdanova's article presents the author's privileged point of view on a text that she has brought to light, i.e. the biography of Dostoevskii written by Georgii Chulkov between 1935 and 1936 and published only in 2015. Another first-hand account follows Bogdanova's article: is Elena Pogorel'skaia's paper on Isaak Babel'. Like Bogdanova, Pogorel'skaia discusses the difficulties of a biographer who deals with endangered or limited sources. A similar issue is discussed in the last article of the cluster by Nina Malygina, who shows her last findings on the relationship between Platonov and Pil'niak relying on newly found documents related to the biography of the two writers.

The special section is followed by an article by Mikhail Velizhev on the different representations of the self proposed by Ivan Dmitriev, who other than being a poet, was also a successful civil servant (he became a minister in 1810). The negotiation, or rather the fight between these two careers in Dmitriev's writing is analysed in depth by the author.

The 'Materials and Discussions' section of the journal contains two contributions written on request for our journal. Both

contributions are related to the theme of the special issue: the first is by Angela Brintlinger, a specialist in Russian biography. Brintlinger proposes a passionate and lively reflection on biography as an oratorical genre relying upon her experience as a scholar, teacher and recently blogger. The second contribution is by the renowned novelist and translator Elena Kostioukovitch, who explains in a truly thought-provoking text the many intriguing autobiographical and biographical aspects of her acclaimed novel *Zwinger*<sup>8</sup>, inspired by the actions of her grandfather, the writer Leonid Volynskii-Rabinovich.

Other than thanking all the authors (including the reviewers) for their contribution, we would like to express our gratitude to Daniele Tagliavia who, after being our director from the birth of the journal, has been forced to leave his position. We wish him all the very best and welcome the new director, Ulisse Spinnato Vega, who has written a welcoming address to the present issue. May this be the start of a fruitful journey together.

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<sup>8</sup> Е. Костюкович, *Цвингер*, Корпус, АСТ, М., 2013.