AvtobiografiЯ
Journal on Life Writing and the Representation of the Self in Russian Culture

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AvtobiografiЯ

Queer Life Writing in Russia and Beyond

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Queer Life Writing in Russia and Beyond

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Michela Venditti

Authors

Queer Life Writing in Russia and Beyond

Claudia Criveller, Andrea Gullotta

Introduction to the 10th issue of AvtobiografiЯ.

The 2022 issue of AvtobiografiЯ celebrates the first ten years of the journal, which was created by a group of scholars coming from various parts of the world who shared an interest in the several forms of narrating the self in Russian culture and in other Slavonic languages. Since its conception and over the course of time, we have tried to create a shared platform where different but equally rich traditions of Life Writing studies, such as Russian and Western, could confront and nourish each other. Over the years, many have been the results achieved in this sense, and many have been the difficulties, dissatisfactions, and mistakes, which have always urged us to change course and seek new perspectives. Our literary and culturological perspective has always informed our work – it is from these areas that we have drawn our definition of the word 'I'.

2022 turned out to be the year in which words in Russian culture – the culture to which most of us devote our work and passion – are once again used with meanings that cannot be naturally assigned to them, or with political undertones that empty them of their authentic value and reduce them to unnatural and senseless clichés. Words like 'war', 'gay', 'Nazi', or 'zombie' have been banned or altered in such a way, that the memory of their original meaning in Russian seems to have been lost. The events that have tragically marked this last year, 2022, are strongly intertwined with the topics to which this issue of AvtobiografiЯ is dedicated.

The representation of Ukrainian culture in all its richness runs the risk of being swept away by a bloody war; gender studies research centres have been classified as 'foreign agents'; LGBTQ+ movements have been seen as a threat to traditional Russian values and at the same time have been used to fuel anti-Western sentiments in Russia. In the West, superficial attempts to attribute political significance to Russian culture have partly harmed the freedom of expression of Russian identity and tra-

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ditions. What remains are the facts – literary and cultural, but mainly human and ethical – on which it is not admissible to negotiate. On these premises, it is necessary to redefine the dialogue that our journal still seeks to foster. In this year's issue, AvtobiografiЯ opens up to two perspectives: the first one – on Russian queer culture and the peculiarities of the autobiographical corpus in which it finds expression – had been planned for years; the second one – on Ukrainian autobiographical culture, on the need to preserve it and divulge it, removing it from the isolation in which it has long remained enclosed – was chosen over the course of this past year.

As the editor of the special section that gives the issue its title Connor Doak notes in his introduction, Russian queer culture has its own specific characteristics, and to impose Western interpretative models on it is not possible. The development of Russian Life Writing, Doak notes, is dialogical. The identity of Russian queers cannot be confined only within the limits of its national context – the Russian LGBTQ+ community is broader and is nourished by its relationship with the international queer community. Today, they exchange information through digital tools and social networking. They also share cultural practices such as the fictionalisation of the self and the mixing of autobiographical genres, which represents an ideal communication code on genres and forms in queer egodocuments between Russia and Western Europe. The presence of common traits between Eastern and Western European autobiographical traditions is further revealed in Persida Lazarević Di Giacomo's article in the Papers section, and in the works and authors discussed in the second section of this 2022 issue, dedicated to Life Writing in the Ukrainian literary tradition, edited by Tetiana Cherkashyna, who in her introduction to the section acutely reconstructs the history of autobiography in Ukraine.

Many of the articles published in this issue pose recurring and common theoretical questions, which mainly testify to the tendency towards the elimination of boundaries between genres and the creation of hybrid forms of self-representation, not only in contemporary literature but also in earlier works. Margarita Vaysman shows how narrative theory, queer history, and historical documentation merge in *Notes of a Cavalry Maiden*, an autobiographical narrative by

Aleksandr Aleksandrov (born Nadezhda Durova), a Russian-Ukrainian hero of the Napoleonic wars, dating from the 1830s. Rowan Dowling further testifies for this tendency in her article on the contemporary transgender collective autobiography published by the Russian LGBTQ+ activist initiative Vyhkod [Coming out], while Olga Andreevskikh analyses different semiotic codes, both visual and textual, published on social media. The forms of interaction between autobiographical reality and fiction are outlined in the work of Kadence Leung, who studies the strategies of self-representation in two novels by the emigrant writer and translator Valerii Pereleshin, who, as Leung notes, proposes an autofictional poetry that is entirely personal, but at the same time close to original forms of representation developed both in the West and in Russia. In some cases, as Brian James Baer notes with respect to Sergei Eisenstein's memoirs, such strategies have even become canonical in modern gay subcultures, leading to an emerging queer literary canon. The novel *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* by Oksana Zabuzhko is, according to Svitlana Kryvoruchko, an example of fiction critique. It is another textual domain in which different genres interact – it contains typical features of the essay and diary, but also biographical facts of the writer's life, all combined in the form of the novel. Persida Lazarević Di Giacomo examines a particular *paratextual autobiography* in Serbian literature. It is hidden in Pavle Solarić's *Predislovije*, a translation from German of Johann Georg Ritter's *Von der Einsamkeit*, an autobiography camouflaged as a preface, which not only dialogues with Ritter's text, but also with wider autobiographical traditions, for example with the genre of the *zhitie*, or life of the saint, a common archetype in Slavonic literature.

Several articles in this issue study how egodocuments contribute to the formation of identity, which is one of the key topics of Life Writing. Andreevskikh reflects on how in contemporary Russia confessional fiction writing through a digital self by activists for bisexual rights is used for the construction of one's bisexual identity. Masha Beketova shows how, through her novel *Severe Maiden*, Olga Zhuk – one of the most important early feminist activists in Russia, a Jewish non-heteronormative woman who migrated from Russia to Germany in the 1990s – outlines the evolution of her identity. In

some cases, particularly original and creative self-representation strategies are used to illustrate a coming-out narrative, as in the case of Valerii Pereleshin, whose strategies are unmasked thanks to the fusion of fictional elements. Finally, Vaysman reconstructs the identity path of Aleksandr Aleksandrov on the basis of a corpus of military and civil correspondence. Lazarević Di Giacomo also notes how Solarić's *paratextual autobiography* allows the author to shape his identity.

A key element in the definition of one's identity is language. This is confirmed by Dowling, who points out how, for gender fluid people, the grammatically gendered Russian language plays a specific role in the perception of the self and in the creation of characters, and by Oleksandr Halych, who brings out the struggle for the affirmation of Ukrainian language as a national literature in the diaries and memoirs of Serhiy Yefremov, a scholar of Ukrainian literature classics and an organiser of cultural initiatives for the affirmation of Ukrainian culture. Kryvoruchko also highlights how in Oksana Zabuzhko's novel the Ukrainian language is not only a tool, but also an emotional space and a sign of patriotism.

Style also plays its role in the formation of identity. This is what Brian Baer suggests in his article, where he outlines how stylistic choices are the key to accessing Sergei Eisenstein's memoirs, as they allow Baer to hypothesise an interpretation of encrypted references, word plays, symbols, and to capture queer subtexts, which reveal the unmasking of the director's coming-out. Egodocuments are used as biographical sources also in the case of Serhiy Yefremov's diaries and memoirs. In his study of Oksana Zabuzhko's novel, Kryvoruchko uses the biographic method to define the 'figure of the writer' and understand the relationship between author and work through such concepts as the 'author as subject of consciousness' and 'personality of the writer'.

The reconstruction of one's personality takes centre stage in the texts contained in the *Materials* section, thanks to the interview given to Connor Doak and Callum Doyle by Evgeny Pisemskiy, the director of a Russian LGBTQ+ organisation, who fled Russia and settled in the UK, where he continued his work supporting the Russian LGBTQ+ community, as well as in the annotated letters from the Soviet-era writer Grigorii Konovalov to the young student Evgeniia

Gutman, proposed and introduced by Dmitrii Shalin, in which Konovalov discusses the Russian literary tradition and his personal work as a novelist. A third example is provided by Giuseppina Larocca's interview with Andrei Andreevich Tarkovskii, which reveals biographical elements in the cinema of his father, Andrei Arsenevich Tarkovskii.

Tetiana Cherkasyna shows how the use of egodocuments is fundamental for the reconstruction of broader cultural contexts such as the portrayal of the city of Kharkov in works from the 1920s and 1930s, as they shed light on the city's cultural ferment and the terror experienced by its citizens. A special place in the section devoted to Ukrainian autobiographical culture deserves the work of Artem Halych, dedicated to the study of the literary portrait in the unpublished texts by 20th-century Ukrainian writers preserved at the Department of Manuscripts and Textology of the Taras Shevchenko Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in Kyiv, and in particular the diaries of Varvara Cherednychenko and Mykhailo Ivchenko.

In the Translations section, we publish the Italian translation by Martina Napolitano of two short stories by Evgenii Kharitonov, one of the most famous gay writers in Russian literature, although his works were only published posthumously.

In the year 2022 we lost two important contributors to our journal: Yuri Mann, who had generously accepted our proposal to join our Advisory Board and published one of his last articles with us, and our dear friend and colleague Natalia Rodigina, who was part of the *AvtobiografiЯ* team from its very beginning. To honour her memory, we have collected the bibliography of her many important works on autobiographical genres thanks to the help of Tatiana Saburova.

For this important and complex issue, our debt of gratitude goes to Connor Doak and Tetiana Cherkashyna, who have put together two clusters of articles capable of stimulating academic discourse on auto/biography on two topics that are particularly timely in such a time of crisis. Their work throughout the whole publication process – occurred through extraordinary times – has been outstanding, and we are grateful to both for that. We would also like to thank Anita Frison, who leaves her editorial role, and welcome Martina Morabito who replaces

her. Thanks also go to Stefano Aloe, Giulia De Florio, Bartosz Osiewicz, Adriano Pavan, Chiara Rampazzo, James Rann, Samuele Saorin and Raffaella Vassena for their contribution to this issue. Finally, we wholeheartedly thank Enza De Francisci, Greg Kerr and Josephine von Zitzewitz for their help with some of the texts published in this issue.

Disclaimer: The ideas and opinions expressed in this article by the editors are not necessarily shared by all members of the editorial and advisory board.

Claudia Criveller, Andrea Gullotta, Tatiana Saburova

In memory of Natalia Rodigina

A brief profile of the late Natalia Rodigina and a selected bibliography of her works on Russian auto/biographical studies.

On 19 February 2022 we were informed about the sudden death of our friend and colleague Natalia Rodigina. Her departure represented a devastating loss for our journal and for the whole scholarly community. Natalia was an outstanding scholar, whose contribution to the study of Siberian history, revolutionary movements and Russian autobiography earned her respect among colleagues and the title of *Vedushchii Nauchnyi Sotrudnik* [Leading Academic Collaborator] at the Institute of History of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Science, a title of which she was very proud.

Natalia was part of the very first group of scholars who supported the creation of our journal. Her 2010 monograph on Siberian memoirs and

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her articles on the study of egodocuments in relation to generational issues in the XIX Century, as well as the works written together with Tatiana Saburova, showed that auto/biographical studies in Russia were increasingly striving to create a dialogue with European and Western traditions, and therefore that the idea to create a journal to foster such a dialogue could count on the help of colleagues in Russia. Her 2012 article 'Changing Identity Formations in Nineteenth-Century Russian Intellectuals' – written with Tatiana Saburova – was part of the volume *Life Writing Matters in Europe*, which was comprised of a selection of articles taken from the founding conference of IABA Europe (Rodigina et al. 2012). Natalia's work was a bridge itself.

Natalia was one of the members of the research group of the project *The Refraction of the Self Autobiographical Forms and Genres and Memoirs in Russian Culture of 19th and 20th Centuries*, funded by the University of Padua in the years 2011-2012, which provided the ground for the creation of the journal. She was at the table when we proposed the idea of creating AvtobiografiЯ, and enthusiastically supported the idea. Over the years, we came to appreciate not only her work as an author and reviewer, but also as a member of the editorial board and person. We have shared together many panels at conferences and many memories. We will always remember her smile, her professionalism and her willingness to contribute to our journal.

To honour her memory and underline her outstanding contribution to Russian auto/biographical studies, we have decided to publish an abridged version of her full bibliography, published in the very first months of 2023 by the Novosibirsk Pedagogical State University (Kashkadarova 2023). The bibliography we publish enlists all her work devoted to a/b studies. We would like to thank Tatiana Saburova for preparing the bibliography for AvtobiografiЯ.

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Special Issue

Connor Doak

Introduction: Queer Life Writing in Russia and Beyond

This piece introduces the special issue of *AvtobiografiЯ* on 'Queer Life Writing in Russia and Beyond'. It begins by reflecting on the current climate for LGBTQ+ people in contemporary Russia, noting the legislation prohibiting the promotion of non-traditional relationships, and how the Kremlin has weaponized LGBTQ+ issues as part of Russian national exceptionalism. In place of this binary narrative, which pits a gay-friendly West against a traditionalist Russia, the introduction advocates an alternative course for exploring Russia's queer culture, one that is dialogic, transnational and multidirectional, revealing how Russia's homegrown LGBTQ+ community does not exist in isolation, but within a dialogue, speaking and responding to the rest of the world. Indeed, themes of border-crossing – literal or metaphorical – often figure prominently in Russian queer life writing, and the search for gender and sexual identity in these texts is often bound up with a search for national identity. Such journeying also happens at the theoretical level, and the introduction argues against methodological nationalism, suggesting that, when used sensitively, theoretical tools that emerged in one context may prove illuminating in another. Yet queer life-writing itself tends to resist the strictures of existing narratives, genres, and language, and the queer autobiographical 'I' often defies easy categorization. The piece concludes by summarizing each of the articles in the special issues, as well as the texts in the 'Materials' and Translations section.

In December 2022, as we were finalizing this special issue, the Russian Federation passed an expansion of the 2013 law that had prohibited the spread of 'propaganda' among minors promoting 'non-traditional sexual relationships' (Federal'nyi zakon 2013). The expanded version of the law is not limited to minors, but now forbids *any* promotion of 'non-traditional sexual relationships or preferences' (Federal'nyi zakon 2022). The new law also expressly forbids, for the first time, the promotion of 'sex changes' [smeny pola] (Federal'nyi zakon 2022), using a term that is now largely considered outdated in the trans community.[1] The implications of the Russian Federation's expanded law on LGBTQ+ people

[1] 'Transition' is now preferred over 'sex change', which can be taken to suggest that medical intervention is required in order to transition (GLAAD n.d.).

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and their lives are enormous. While the law stops short of criminalizing homosexuality, it makes everyday life highly challenging for the LGBTQ+ community in Russia. Any gay couple publicly displaying their affection, any trans person posting an affirming tweet about their gender identity, any bi individual publishing a poem celebrating their sexuality: all are at risk. While the law threatens to erase the presence of LGBTQ+ Russians, this special issue reveals their long history, within the country and beyond, analysing how they have written about, agonized over, and celebrated, their non-normative sexualities and gender identities.

The emergence of Russia's anti-gay laws coincides with an increased assertiveness in foreign policy and an anti-Western stance, with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The link between Russian exceptionalism and state-sponsored homophobia has been highlighted by scholars such as Emil Edenborg, who points out that 'the Putin regime has articulated [...] a narrative where resistance to LGBT rights appears as a logical choice for states seeking to position themselves in opposition to the "liberal West"' (Edenborg 2021). Indeed, Putin regularly casts Russia as a bastion of traditional notions of gender and sexuality against 'new' ideas from the West (Moss 2017). For example, when asked at a 2021 press conference whether Western notions of gender fluidity might take root in Russia, Putin began by affirming his own view that 'a woman is a woman... and a man is a man', before going on to declare that Russian society as a whole was uniquely placed to resist the influx of such ideas, because of the country's thousand-year-long multinational and multifaith nature, which provides a 'defence mechanism against this kind of obscurantism [mrakobesie]' (Prezident Rossii 2021). Here, Putin uses the moral panic around the trans community as a wedge issue, connecting it to broader ideas on Russian exceptionalism. This official Russian narrative might be understood as a kind of national life writing, casting Russia as a heterosexual and cisgender state, preserver of faith and tradition, with the strength to resist the advances of a decadent, queer West that has abandoned its roots.[2] Yet this kind of

[2] Here I am indebted to the scholarship on gendering the nation, including Yuval-Davis (1997), and, especially, the wave of work in queer international relations that reveals how nations style themselves in gendered and sexualized

binary thinking is also present in certain Western models that pit an enlightened, gay-friendly West against a benighted, homophobic, East, and assumes that Western configurations of gender and sexuality can and should be replicated across the globe, paying little attention to local context.[3] This introduction charts an alternative course for exploring Russia's queer culture, one that veers away both from the inflexible imposition of Western models, while also alive to the dangers of exceptionalism.[4] Rather, I see the development of Russia's queer life-writing as dialogic, with home-grown elements that speak and respond to the rest of the world, not only the West. Russian queers have never existed in isolation, but have been part of a multidirectional history of transnational encounters and exchange that transgress national borders. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere (Doak 2020: 217–20), in LGBTQ+ Russian literature, the experience of sexual discovery is often figured in terms of crossing national and linguistic boundaries. To take one example, in Mikhail Kuzmin's novella *Wings* [Kryl'ia, 1906], the protagonist Vania Smurov falls in love with the mysterious half-English Larion Shtrup, who teaches him Greek: Smurov's awareness of his sexuality is symbolized in part through his initiation into Hellenic culture and the Greek language.

Of course, such border-crossing is often literal as well as symbolic, with many of Russia's leading

terms in relation to one another (Weber 1999). In relation to Russia, Cai Wilkinson has pointed out how Putin has used the image of Mother Russia under threat to create the image of paternalist and hypermasculine state (Wilkinson 2018).

[3] Jasbir Puar has offered a forceful critique of how the West has used the agenda of LGBT+ rights in the service of nationalism and foreign intervention. Puar developed the idea of 'homonationalism' to critique how the US and its allies used a rhetoric of a gay-friendly West versus a homophobic Muslim other in the context of the war on terror (Puar 2007).

[4] This transnational approach to Russian sexualities builds on my earlier work, together with Andy Byford and Stephen Hutchings, in *Transnational Russian Studies*, where we advocate a move away from 'static and unitary conception of Russia as a discrete nation with a singular language and culture' to a 'systematic and critical reflection on the various ways in which "Russia" and "Russian culture" have been historically framed and defined' (Byford et al. 2020: 2). My own chapter in *Transnational Russian Studies* examines how queer Russian literary texts might undo, rather than reinforce, the familiar gendered and sexualized narratives that pit Russia against the West (Doak 2020).

queer figures now based outside of the country, including poet and critic Dmitrii Kuz'min (now in Latvia), the artist and writer Slava Mogutin and the journalist Masha Gessen (both in the USA), to name but a few. In the current special issue, Kadence Leung's article discusses the émigré poet Valerii Pereleshin, who lived in China for a time before settling in Brazil, while Masha Beketova focuses on Ol'ga Zhuk, a lesbian author and activist recounting her experiences in Germany. In the 'Materials' section, Peter Flew's memoir shows the journey in reverse: a gay man who travels from the West to Russia in the early 2000s in a narrative of self-discovery. Most recently, Russia's propaganda laws and the war against Ukraine have prompted a new wave of queer migration, one example of which is Evgeny Pisemskiy, the LGBTQ+ activist interviewed in this special issue. For some, like Pisemskiy, the move to a new country is personally transformative: he speaks warmly about the welcome he has received in the UK. However, as Beketova points out, migration is not always a positive experience for LGBTQ+ people, many of whom face new challenges and discrimination in their host country, as well as an expectation that they will conform to an assimilationist ideal that equates the move from East to West as a move from oppression to freedom, a narrative that may not match their reality. Life-writing thus provides an opportunity to unsettle or queer the dominant narrative, and to reimagine the relationship between Russia and the West.

Yet it is not just people who travel across borders; ideas do, as well. Many of the theoretical tools that we use to analyse LGBTQ+ literature and life-writing have their origins in Western Europe and North America, and some have questioned whether it is appropriate to use these paradigms when discussing non-Western societies. Here again, I would suggest something of a middle course: to assume that all such concepts must be universalizable risks a methodological imperialism, while to say that a framework can never be used outside of its 'native' home is rooted in an insularity and exceptionalism. A more nuanced approach will tentatively examine the explanatory power of theory with a sensitivity to local contexts, always considering how lived experience might speak back to theory. Within this special issue, scholars have taken various approaches to this question. Margarita Vaysman, for example,

draws on trans theory in making a compelling case to read Aleksandr Aleksandrov (born Nadezhda Durova) as a trans-masculine figure. Brian Baer uses Susan Sontag's 'Notes on Camp' to offer a fresh reading of Sergei Eisenstein's memoirs. Both employ theory in a sensitive way to revise and queer our understanding of canonical Russian figures. However, Beketova finds limited value in queer feminist theory as a lens to interpret Zhuk, offering instead a productive discussion of what we might learn when a theory does not fit.

Indeed, a recurring theme in the special issue is that queer life-writing resists the strictures of existing narratives, genres, and language. Here I draw on the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who observes that queer can refer to 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically' (Sedgwick 1993: 8). In the case of queer autobiography, it is often difficult to identify a single, steady 'I' in the narrative who can be seamlessly attached to the narrator. Brian Loftus has even suggested that 'queer autobiography' is a 'contradiction in terms': '[i]f the genre of autobiography demands the stability of both an 'I' and its genealogy to inhabit a coherent narrative, "queer" disallows the neat articulation or possibility of either' (Loftus 1997: 73). Indeed, the queer 'I' is often playful and deceptive, switching between different masks and employing irony to resist any easy categorization. Of course, this feature is hardly unique to Russian queer writing: Jean Genet and Patrick White, to name but two, both use this style. However, whereas many Western societies have come to acquire a fixed set of emancipatory narratives, such as the coming out story, or the normative trans narrative, Russians have arguably continued to resist these narratives. Leung's close readings of Pereleshin especially foreground the importance of masquerade and formal experiment in the expression of his sexuality, showing his departure from the coming-out story. The two pieces by Evgenii Kharitonov, presented here in Martina Napolitano's translations, also offer intriguing alternatives to dominant Western narratives.

When preparing this special issue, I was conscious of the need to include as much of the LGBTQ+ spectrum as possible. Historically, LGBTQ+ scholar-

ship has tended to focus predominantly on gay men, and indeed most responses to my initial call for papers were proposals to work on gay men. I therefore redoubled my efforts to cover other parts of the spectrum, with the result that the special issue includes work on bi, lesbian, and trans voices as well as gay men. The six articles show that some commonalities across the LGBTQ+ life-writing exist, not least in terms of the shared history of marginalisation, as well as the use of formal and generic experimentation to express non-normative sexualities, though it would be wrong to assume the existence of one single 'queer' narrative that unites all parts of the spectrum. Indeed, the articles in this issue by Rowan Dowling, on the trans community, and by Olga Andreyevskikh on bisexual activists, reveal how these communities have used life-writing to forge a distinctive space in the LGBTQ+ spectrum. Yet there remains an important gap in this special issue: more work needs to be done on the experiences of Russia's national and religious minorities in relation to gender and sexuality. In the special issue, Beketova includes a discussion of Zhuk's Jewishness and the effects of multiple marginalization, but scholarship on LGBTQ+ issues among Russia's racialized minorities remains in its infancy. As a field, Russian Studies is now entering a decolonial turn, the urgency of which has been underlined by the recent war in Ukraine. It is now incumbent on scholars working on queer topics to consider how issues such as race, ethnicity, and religion intersect with gender and sexuality.

* * *

The special issue includes six scholarly articles. First comes Margarita Vaysman's compelling re-examination of cavalry officer and writer Aleksandr Aleksandrov (1783–1866), born Nadezhda Durova. Vaysman argues that Aleksandrov identified as a man from 1808 until his death in 1866 through a close analysis of his correspondence. Based on this transmasculine identity, Vaysman suggests that it is more appropriate for scholars to refer to Aleksandrov by his male name and masculine pronouns. However, Vaysman draws an important distinction between the author's personal writings and the fiction, suggesting that while everyday life imposed a gender binary, demanding that he choose between 'Aleksandrov' and 'Durova', he

could inhabit both identities in his literary fiction.

Brian Baer's article examines the memoirs of film director Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948), which have often been neglected in favour of his cinematic output and his theoretical work. Previous scholarship has largely treated the memoirs as the product of repression, or simply mined it for references to cinema. However, Baer offers a new interpretation of the memoirs as an example of camp performance, making use not only of Susan Sontag, but also recent linguistic scholarship on 'camp talk'. Eisenstein's memoirs emerge as a new kind of queer, experimental, life-writing, showing another side of the avant-garde film director.

The link between formal experimentation and expressing queer sexuality is also crucial to Kadence Leung's study of Valerii Pereleshin (1913–1992). Leung focuses on two key works, the collection of sonnets *Ariel* [Ariel', 1971–1975] and *Poem without a Subject* [Poema bez predmeta, 1972–1976], which Simon Karlinsky had suggested constituted his poetic 'literary coming out' (Karlinsky 2013: 303). Leung, however, cautions against seeking a teleological coming-out narrative, instead suggesting that his sexuality is encoded in his poetry life-writing through strategies such as masking/unmasking, a blurring of distinction between fiction and fact, and creative appropriations of canonical poets such as Shakespeare and Pushkin.

Masha Beketova's article also explores a migrant writer who resists easy categorization, Ol'ga Zhuk (b. 1960). Zhuk's autobiographical novel *Severe Maiden: A Journey from St Petersburg to Berlin* [Strogaia Devushka. Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Berlin, 2013] depicts the journey of a Russian-Jewish lesbian from St Petersburg to Berlin in the 1990s. Beketova's article explores how Zhuk's work resists becoming the 'good lesbian citizen' who successfully assimilates into Western society. The unsettling depictions of intimate partner violence also make it challenging to read the novel from a queer-feminist perspective. Beketova ultimately calls *Severe Maiden* an 'uncomfortable' narrative that depicts multiple marginalizations (lesbian, migrant, Russian, Jewish) specific to the post-Soviet context, and while it cannot be called an optimistic novel, it can provide a platform for queer grieving.

While the first four articles are all concerned primarily with individuals, the last two examine broader communities. Rowan

Dowling examines how trans* activists in contemporary Russia use life-writing, based on a study of materials published by the Petersburg-based LGBTQ+ organization Vykhod in 2017 and 2018. Dowling argues that these trans* stories constitute a collective autobiography that provides a sense of solidarity and a self-help resource. These trans* stories, Dowling suggests, aim less at political visibility than fostering a sense of community. Dowling also notes the diversity within trans* voices, as well as the complexity of negotiating competing and shifting sexual and gender identities, which often leads to creative linguistic experimentation within texts. Such diversity offers an alternative to the normative and monolithic 'trans-narrative' that emerged from the medicalization of trans people in the twentieth century.

Olga Andreyevskikh also explores how an activist community uses life-writing to build a shared identity, focusing specifically on how bisexual activists use confessional forms of life-writing online. She uses digital ethnography and interpretative content analysis method to examine textual, visual and video sources created by bi activists across Russia and published on social media platforms in 2020 and 2021. Like Dowling, Andreyevskikh emphasizes the power of life-writing for fostering a sense of solidarity across the LGBTQ+ spectrum, while also focusing on some of the unique challenges that bi people face. Andreyevskikh highlights how biphobia not only exists within mainstream community, but also persists even within sections of the LGBTQ+ community.

The 'Translations' section includes Martina Napolitano's Italian versions of two short works by Evgenii Kharitonov (1941–1981), a writer, director and choreographer who concealed his homosexuality in public, but wrote about it frankly in his private writings, which were publishable in Russia only after the fall of the Soviet Union.[5] A belated modernist, Kharitonov excelled at short, even fragmentary forms, with the expressive sensuality of a Joyce or a Proust. 'Racconto di un ragazzo: "Come sono diventato così"' is Napolitano's translation of 'Rasskaz odnogo mal'chika: kak ia stal takim', previously translated in-

[5] See Vitaly Chernetsky for a fuller account of Kharitonov, including a nuanced treatment of how Kharitonov engages with Rozanov, as well as Kharitonov's influence on a subsequent generation of queer writers in Russia, and the author's ambivalent depiction of Jews (Chernetsky 2007: 151–71).

to English by Kevin Moss as 'One Boy's Story: How I Got Like That' (Kharitonov 1997a). This is an account of sexual awakening in the Soviet period, more realist in style than many of his other works, yet alongside the explicit details, there are lyrical flourishes: Sasha takes a queer interest in Russia's medieval history and the lives of saints, and the narrator concludes by imagining him becoming a priest.

The second text, 'Volantino', a translation of 'Listovka', known in English as 'The Leaflet' (Kharitonov 1997b), is more typical of Kharitonov's style and shows a debt to Rozanov. This extraordinary text, no more than two pages long, is a manifesto for gay men as 'barren, fatal flowers', a people called to 'dance the dance of impossible love and to sing of it sweetly' (Kharitonov 1997b: 224–25), but heralding the end of the world. The manifesto is lyrical, playful, but also unsettling in places. The piece opens with an explicit parallel between gay men and Jews: both are oppressed yet chosen peoples; both excel in their own spheres (commerce and the feuilleton for the Jews; ballet and sensual arts for gay men). The stereotypes here, though presented ironically, remains uncomfortably ambivalent. Kharitonov's work was rediscovered in Russia in the mid-1990s and played an important role in the development of Russian queer life-writing, influencing figures such as Slava Mogutin. Kharitonov's writing deserves a wider readership and Napolitano's translations do a valuable service in bringing these works to an Italian audience.

The 'Materials' section includes two contemporary pieces prepared specially for this special issue. '*Greshniki*' is Peter Flew's lyrical reflection on the gay community in the 'half-light' of St Petersburg in the early 2000s, and on his own self-discovery through his relationships with Misha and Pavel (pseudonyms). Flew's lyrical piece depicts the shadowy, semi-secret nature of his encounters, yet it also offers a powerful demonstration of intimacy and its ability to transcend boundaries of language and culture. The second is an interview with Evgeny Pisemskiy, the director of an LGBT+ organization in Russia that was declared a 'foreign agent'. Pisemskiy shares his experiences as an activist in Russia, reflects on how the government's anti-gay laws affected his own life and work, and discusses his flight to seek refuge in the UK. Though divergent in style – Flew is delicate and evocative, where Pisemskiy is colourful and bold –

both pieces offer examples of gay men making transnational journeys that ultimately prove transformative. Flew recounts how Pavel and his mother made him a parting gift of a family icon of Tikhon Kaluzhskii, a fourteenth-century saint. The icon functions here not only as a window to the divine, but also a memento of a queer relationship, and the story of its journey to England offers a refreshing counterpoint to the Putinist view that Russian Orthodoxy provides a bulwark against an LGBTQ+ incursion from the West. Faith can unite, as well as divide.

'In the best way possible, I was a victim of propaganda', quips Pisemskiy, commenting on his personal journey as a gay man and an activist. Pisemskiy became infected with HIV through drug use, rather than sex, and seeking help from HIV support organizations led him to the LGBTQ+ community, to an acceptance of his own sexuality, and eventually to a life of community service. Pisemskiy explains how this work resulted in state persecution when the anti-gay laws were introduced: his organization was labelled a 'foreign agent' and he received personal threats, forcing his flight from Russia. Yet while the Russian state sought to exclude Pisemskiy, his life story is arguably deeply Russian, reflecting a canonical masterplot that sees great suffering as the root of personal transformation and the creation of new forms of community. This idea runs through Russian literature, from Alesha's speech at the stone at the end of Fedor Dostoevskii's *Brothers Karamazov* [Brat'ia Karamazovy, 1879–1880] to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's famous 'Bless you prison!' (Solzhenitsyn 1975: 617) statement in *The Gulag Archipelago* [Arkhipelag GULAG, written 1958–1968]. Seen in this light, Pisemskiy's narrative is not only a powerful individual testimony of a life of service, but also points the way towards a new, queer, more inclusive version of the Russian canon, and of Russianness itself.

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tury to the present day and from various parts of the LGBTQ+ spectrum. It has been a pleasure working with you all, and I have learnt a huge amount from reading your work and engaging in dialogue with you. I would also like to thank the twelve anonymous peer reviewers, all of whom provided valuable feedback and suggestions, helping to make the articles stronger.

Of course, this special issue extends into the 'Translations' and 'Materials' section of *AvtobiografiЯ* as well. Here, I would like to thank Martina Napolitano for her accomplished translations of Evgenii Kharitonov, Peter Flew for his evocative memoir of the gay community in St Petersburg in the early 2000s, and Evgeniy (Zhenya) Pisemsky for sharing his powerful personal story of activism in Russia and here in England. Zhenya has become a good friend, and our conversations have transformed my understanding of LGBTQ+ life and activism in Russia. My student intern, Callum Doyle, assisted me in interviewing Zhenya, and led on translating the interview into English. Matilda Hicklin, a PhD student here at Bristol generously volunteered help with the translation. Charlotte Hobson, Nick Mayhew, Claudia Olivieri, and Esther Jones Russell generously gave feedback on the materials and translations prior to publication. Thank you also to Raffaella Vassena, who edits the 'Materials' and 'Translations' section of this journal, for all your support.

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Margarita Vaysman

'I Became a Man in a Military Camp': Negotiating a Transmasculine Identity in Aleksandr Aleksandrov (Nadezhda Durova)'s Personal Documents and Literary Fiction

Notes of a Cavalry Maiden [Zapiski kavalerist-devitsy, 1836], an autobiographical narrative by Aleksandr Aleksandrov (born Nadezhda Durova) (1783-1866), a Russian-Ukrainian hero of the Napoleonic wars, has been popular with readers since its first publication in 1836. Despite the obvious gender ambiguity of the narrator in this text, most adaptations and biographies interpret 'Nadezhda Durova''s grammatically female gender as proof that her army service was a brief instance of military cross-dressing in the otherwise conventional life of a patriotic woman. However, Aleksandrov's legacy includes not just *Notes* and other published fiction, but also a substantial corpus of personal documents, some of which have only recently been recovered from the military archives. These texts form a record of Nadezhda Durova's documented transition to Aleksandr Aleksandrov and, I argue, testify that from 1808 Aleksandrov consistently identified as a man until his death in 1866. In this article, I focus on Aleksandrov's military and civil correspondence, to compare his transmasculine voice in personal documents to the more ambiguously gendered voices of his narrators in fiction. Using the narratological category of 'autofiction', I argue that even though Aleksandrov had to choose between two binary gender identities in everyday life, literary fiction created a space for him to inhabit the personas of both 'Nadezhda Durova' and 'Aleksandr Aleksandrov'.

Notes of a Cavalry Maiden [Zapiski kavalerist-devitsy, 1836], an autobiographical narrative by Aleksandr Aleksandrov (born Nadezhda Durova) (1783–1866), a Russian-Ukrainian hero of the Napoleonic wars, propelled its author to instant fame when it was first published in 1836.[1] That year, an extract from *Notes* appeared in *Contemporary* [Sovremennik], accompanied by a foreword by the journal's founder and editor, Aleksandr Pushkin. These 'curious notes' (Pushkin 1836: 54) introduced an

[1] An autobiographical novella *A Year of Life in St Petersburg, or the Trouble with Third Visits* [God zhizni v Peterburge, ili nevygody tret'ego poseshcheniia, 1838] recorded Aleksandrov's first-hand experience of literary fame after publication in *Contemporary*.

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unconventional first-person narrator: 'Nadezhda Durova', who used the feminine endings of Russian verbs, adjectives, and participles to tell her story. But, once the protagonist joined the army, he successfully presented the transmasculine identity of 'Aleksandr Aleksandrov', prompting others to address him as 'sir' and gender him as male in their speech. Despite – or because of – the protagonist's obvious gender ambiguity, *Notes* has maintained an important place in Russian culture and popular military history for over two centuries.

Still, most adaptations and biographies resolve this gender ambiguity of the text in favour of a heteronormative reading. In these interpretations, the grammatically female gender of the narrator in *Notes* is seen as proof that 'Nadezhda Durova''s army service was a brief instance of military cross-dressing in the otherwise conventional life of a patriotic young woman.[2] However, Aleksandrov's legacy includes not just *Notes* and other published fiction, but also a substantial corpus of personal documents, some of which have only recently been recovered from the military archives.[3] These texts form a record of Nadezhda Durova's documented transition to Aleksandr Aleksandrov and provide a unique glimpse at the wide spectrum of contemporary reactions to Aleksandrov's transmasculinity. I argue that they also

[2] For a comprehensive list of adaptations of *Notes*, see Zirin 1988: xxviii–xxix. Since 1988, this list has been expanded by another film adaptation *Now a Man, Now a Woman* [To muzhshchina, to zhenshchina, 1989, dir. A. Nagovitsyn], a bestselling historical novel *The Girl Who Fought Napoleon*, by Linda Lafferty (Seattle: Lake Union Publishing, 2016) and an Austrian opera (Die Kavalleristin, comp. Adriaan de Wit, Marianne Figl, 2011). Most adaptations present Aleksandrov as a cross-dressing young woman, who dons military uniform to find an acceptable outlet for her patriotism. Two Soviet adaptations, the Stalin Prize-winning play *A Long Time Ago* [Davnym davno, 1940] by Aleksandrov Gladkov and the 1962 musical *The Hussar Ballad* [Gusarskaia ballada, 1962, dir. E. Riazanov], based on this play, are an indicative example of such popular reinterpretation of *Notes*. For a recent example from popular military history, see Begunova 2011.

[3] There has a been a surge of archival investigations into Aleksandrov's life in Russia since 2012, because of the statewide celebrations of the 200th anniversary of victory over Napoleon in 1812. The most notable documents that would have been unavailable to scholars previously include records and letters from the Russian State Archive of Military History and local Russian archives, first published by A.I. Begunova in 2011; and reviews and encyclopaedia entries, collected and published by V.N. Belov in 2014.

testify that, since 1808 at the latest, Aleksandrov identified and lived as a man until his death in 1866.

In this article, I focus on Aleksandrov's correspondence and personal documents from the period of 1808 to the 1860s, to compare his biographical transmasculine voice to the more ambiguously gendered voices of the narrators in his published fiction. In view of Aleksandrov's consistent self-representation as male, mapped out below, I use masculine pronouns to refer to him and his work. Following critical theories of transgender presentation (Butler 1990; Valentine 2007; Stryker 2017), I rely on the term 'transmasculine' to describe Aleksandrov as a person 'assigned female at birth who has some degree of masculine identification or expression' (Stryker 2017: 36).[4] Deliberately inclusive, this term allows me to consider Aleksandrov's entire oeuvre, employing 'methodologies [that are] sensitive to historical change but [are] influenced by current theoretical preoccupations' (Halberstam 1998: 46) and to trace the dynamic of his gender presentation over the years. Ultimately, it brings nineteenth-century Russian literary studies in dialogue with other disciplines that are engaged in reassessing historical sources to answer 'a call for privileging the gender expression and identity asserted by a person over the sex or gender they were assigned at birth' (Manion 2020: 13)

The fact that *Notes* is a fictionalised, rather than an accurate, account of Aleksandrov's life was established as early as 1887. N.N. Blinov, a priest and amateur historian, discovered two major discrepancies between this text and the facts of Aleksandrov's biography, recorded in the church register of his hometown, Sarapul. *Notes* listed an incorrect

[4] Other terms used in this article are similarly informed by these studies: gender expression (performance of 'sense of self through how we comport our bodies to express our gender' (Stryker 2017: 20)); gender presentation ('to present yourself in such a way that you make you gender non-conformity visible' (Stryker 2017: 25)); gender identity ('subjective sense of fit with a particular gender category' (Stryker 2017: 21)). For recent scholarship and recommendations on using gendered pronouns in Russian, see Kirey-Sitnikova 2001: 143–58; for an example of popular guidance on the sensitive use of gendered pronouns in Russian, see Kazantseva 2020. To avoid confusion when referencing Aleksandrov's works, I follow the established bibliographies which credit the author of most nineteenth-century editions as 'Aleksandrov' and most posthumous editions as 'N.A. Durova', as published. All translations in this article are my own unless otherwise indicated.

date of birth (1788 or 1790, rather than the actual 1783) and omitted any mention of the 'cavalry-maiden's' marriage (in fact, by the time Aleksandrov joined the army, he had been married and given birth to a son) (Blinov 1888: 414–20). From this first publication to the latest academic studies, Durova/Aleksandrov scholarship has been defined by an impulse to 'recreate the [historical] truth' (Prikazchikova 2018: 25). Striving to establish their subject's accurate age, and marital and military status, scholars paid close attention to the many inconsistencies between Aleksandrov's literary narratives and the documents that have been uncovered over the years.[5]

My contention in this article is that the difference in gender representation between the voice of Aleksandrov's personal documents and his fiction is another such discrepancy, which has not been fully investigated until now.[6] Examined closely, it illuminates Aleksandrov's active efforts in negotiating his public transmasculine identity. Importantly, it foregrounds a discussion of his agency and self-determination in a discipline that has traditionally focussed on reconstructing the circumstances that might have led to his gender non-conformity. It also offers some answers to questions that have long puzzled scholars of this author's life and work: why has this discrepancy occurred? And why has the largely fictional persona of 'Nadezhda Durova' eclipsed that of its author, Aleksandr Aleksandrov, in the Russian cultural imagination?

To address these issues, the first part of this article reconstructs the bureaucratic record of Aleksandrov's transition by analysing the corpus of his military correspondence. I read letters, memos, and reports by Aleksandrov's superiors, such as military ministers and generals Christopher von Lieven, Aleksei Arakcheev and Michael Barclay de Tolly, to collate the Russians army's formal responses to Aleksandrov's transition.[7] I examine

[5] For a similar epistemological trajectory in a recent study, see Prikazchikova 2018: 24–111.

[6] This discrepancy has not gone unnoticed by scholars, even if the lack of historical sources has made an investigation into its causes almost impossible. For an informed discussion of this discrepancy that predated the publication of archival materials and therefore framed it as a question that 'one will never be able to answer definitively', see Schoenle 2001: 56.

[7] Aleksandrov's letters are addressed to 'Grafu Kh. A. Livenu', but I am following the custom of English-language scholarship in using this original spelling of the general's Baltic German name.

these documents alongside Aleksandrov's own official requests and statements, to showcase the dialogic nature of this negotiation of a public transmasculine identity between a private individual and one of the most rigidly conservative Russian governmental institutions.

The second part of my article focuses on Aleksandrov's correspondence with his editors, Aleksandr Pushkin at *Contemporary* and Andrei Kraevskii at *Notes of the Fatherland* [Otechestvennye zapiski]. I examine the gendered grammar of Aleksandrov's messages to both editors alongside Pushkin's preface to the excerpt from *Notes*, titled '1812', that he prepared for publication. Shifting the habitual focus of discussion from Pushkin's letters to his edits of Aleksandrov's original text, I argue that his framing of Aleksandrov's narrative has been influential in two important ways. Firstly, Pushkin's concerns about the financial success of *Sovremennik* led him to present '1812' as a playful narrative of military cross-dressing, in keeping with the audience's literary tastes as he understood them. The success of this publication has thus established 'Nadezhda Durova' as the implied author of *Notes*, a reading of the text that persist to this day. Secondly, Aleksandrov's respect for Pushkin's literary judgement – and the evidence of its accuracy in the popularity of *Notes* – convinced the aspiring author that this framing would be instrumental for a successful literary career, leading him to continue using gender ambiguous narrators in his fiction in contrast to the sustained transmasculine identity of his personal documentation. Using the narratological category of 'autofiction', I suggest that even though Aleksandrov had to choose between two binary gender identities in everyday life, literary fiction created a space for him to safely inhabit the personas of both 'Nadezhda Durova' and 'Aleksandr Aleksandrov'.[8]

The final part of my article examines a document from a later stage of Aleksandrov's life, a short curriculum vitae from 1860. Composed more than twenty years after his literary debut, this

[8] The term 'autofiction' refers to a form of fictionalised biographical writing, in which the protagonist, usually also a first-person narrator, shares either the first name, or first name and surname, with the writer themselves. For theory and history of autofiction in French and English, see Dix 2018. For a discussion of theory of autofiction in Russian, see Levina-Parker 2010: 12-40. On recent Russophone autofiction, exploring the linguistic and cultural 'otherness' as an example of trauma and marginalisation, see Wanner 2015:141–151.

document demonstrated that the autofictional impetus of Aleksandrov's literary works allowed him to carve out a niche in nineteenth-century Russian literary culture where his re-writing of his own life had assumed a status of an authentic biography.

This article proposes a new integrative framework, that combines insights from narrative theory, queer history, and historical documentation to approach Aleksandrov's legacy in a way that centres his transmasculinity. It builds, however, on an established critical tradition of examining the author's oeuvre through the lens of narrative analysis. The initial period of Durova/Aleksandrov studies in the late nineteenth century and the early Soviet period was shaped primarily by archival research (Nekrasova 1890: 585–612; Prikazchikova 2018: 9–12). Later on, however, scholars focused on Aleksandrov's literary works, aiming to contextualise them in the history of autobiographical narratives, military memoir and gothic literature in Russia (Savkina, 2007: 193-225; Prikazchikova 2015; Goller 1996: 75–92; Schoenle 2001: 55–71). Moreover, although the history of autofiction in Russia has been traced back only to modernist experiments of the early twentieth century (Rubins 2015: 39–46), such autofiction-adjacent phenomena as semi-autobiographical narratives, auto-documentary prose, memoirs, and even the modern multimedia narratives of the digital self, have been productively explored in Slavic studies, some in relation to Aleksandrov's writing.[9]

The prevailing approach to Aleksandrov's oeuvre across disciplines, however, has been, with very few exceptions, that of feminist historiography, foregrounding 'Durova''s achievements as one of the few successful 'women

[9] For a comprehensive overview, see Savkina 2007: 24-63. Prikazchikova's 2015 study *Zhenschina na fone…* is fully dedicated to the problem of contextualising *Notes* in the Russian military memoir tradition (Prikazchikova 2015). On the theory of autobiographical writing and *Notes*, see Renner-Fahey 2009: 191–93. On memoirs and gender in Russia more broadly, see Holmgren 2007, especially Jane Gary Harris on Ginzburg (Holmgren 2007: 5–34); Helena Goscilo on Elena Bonner (Holmgren 2007: 53–69) and Gitta Hammerberg on Dolgorukaia (Holmgren 2007: 93–127). On genderqueer Russian life-writing, see also Van Buskirk 2016: 109–61. On gender and digital self-representation, see Rutten 2017: 239–56; Howanitz, 2020: 191–224. Many historical autobiographical Russian narratives can be read as autofiction, and the recent introduction of this methodology to Russian studies will hopefully pave the way for a productive engagement with this narrative category.

writers' in nineteenth-century Russia.[10] As Oona Renner-Fahey pointed out in her insightful 2009 article, productive readings of Aleksandrov's work in the context of the history of transvestism in Russia were rare and often contested within the field (Renner-Fahey 2009: 190). Recent archival discoveries, revealing the extent of Aleksandrov's consistent transmasculine self-presentation, allow us to revisit the problem of his gender presentation in a way that builds on this existing body of scholarship and includes his entire oeuvre.

'Your Devoted Servant, Aleksandrov'

Throughout his life, the author of *Notes* was known under at least four different names. He was christened Nadezhda Andreevna Durova in 1783. In 1801, Nadezhda married Vasilii Chernov and, as was customary, took Vasilii's surname.[11] In 1806, Nadezhda Chernova joined a Cossack regiment quartered in Sarapul under the name of Aleksandr Sokolov.[12] In 1808, by a special decree signed by Tsar Aleksandr I, Aleksandr Sokolov was officially assigned to the Mariupol' Hussar Regiment as Aleksandr Aleksandrov. He was given the lowest rank of cornet and permitted to merge the service record he has acquired as Sokolov with this new appointment.[13] The sheer number of

[10] Two major recent studies can serve as examples here: Savkina followed Zirin's earlier suggestions and read *Notes* as one of the first published Russian autobiographies by a woman writer (Savkina 2007: 196–98); whereas Prikazchikova defined *Notes* as 'an example of a memoir written by a woman' (Prikazchikova 2018: 23). Two exceptions that seem to prove this overall rule include an innovative reading of Aleksandrov's gender presentation as performance in Boiarinova 2016: 57–68 and an exploration of gender fluidity in Aleksandrov's later fiction in Marsh-Flores 2003: 614, 622.

[11] For a copy of the marriage record, see Begunova 2011: 365. Aleksandrov's father, Andrei Durov, also referred to him as 'Nadezhda po muzhu Chernova' in his letters (cited in Prikazchikova 2018: 52). A son, Ivan Chernov, was born in 1803, but the marriage was not a happy one. One of Aleksandrov's novellas, *Elena, A Beauty from T-sk* [Elena, T-skaia krasavitsa, 1837] is a fictionalised account of this marriage. By 1825, Nadezhda Chernova was listed in Andrei Durov's list of dependants as a widow (Begunova 2011: 59–60).

[12] The first record of Sokolov's military service, from November 1807, noted that no identity documents were provided upon joining. The regimental records stated: 'Tovarishch Aleksandr Vasil'ev syn Sokolov' [Soldier Aleksandr son of Vasilii Sokolov], and further 'did not present any proof of nobility' [dokazatel'stv o dvorianstve ne predstavil] (Begunova 2011: 366).

[13] After Aleksandrov enlisted in 1806, his father tried to bring him home. Through his brother, Nikolai Durov, Andrei

different names – some acquired conventionally by marriage, and others through extraordinary military orders – meant that although this progression seemed 'necessary' (Durova 1983: 456–57) to Aleksandrov, it has also created confusion in official records documenting his life. The names 'Durova', 'Chernova', 'Sokolov' and 'Aleksandrov' crop up with various regularity in military and civil records, correspondence, and medical reports up until 1808. After that, however, most available sources indicate that 'Aleksandrov', or 'Aleksandrov (Durova)', became, for all intents and purposes, Nadezhda Chernova's official name.

The name 'Aleksandr Aleksandrov' was consistently used throughout most of the surviving post-1808 documents, from those produced to accommodate the bureaucratic demands of Aleksandrov's army service by the Russian Imperial and Military Chancelleries to contemporary bibliographic records.[14] Military and medical reports switched from 'Sokolov' to 'Aleksandrov' in 1808 and used the latter name consistently until Aleksandrov retired in 1817.[15] Both army and civil pension records listed two

managed to submit a request directly to the tsar's chancellery to return 'Sokolov' home. Intrigued, the tsar arranged for a private meeting with Aleksandrov and agreed to allow the unusual officer to continue his service under a new name. The two meetings with Alexander I were described in *Notes*, and, although no record of this meeting in the tsar's chamber registry survived, it is corroborated by the correspondence regarding this meeting between the tsar's chancellery, military campaign chancellery, and Aleksandrov's direct commanders (for reprints of these letters, see Begunova 2011: 367–70). For an insightful analysis of the description of these meetings in *Notes*, see Schoenle 2001: 67–70. Among other things, the description of this meeting in *Notes* indicates that Aleksandrov saw the new name given to him by the tsar as a kind of symbolic re-birth, with the tsar, as Schoenle suggests, as his notional new father.

[14] The original documents are spread across several archives in Moscow (The Russian State Archive of Military History), St Petersburg (M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin State Library), Sarapul (local and state and museum archives) and Elabuga (Durova House Museum Archive). Some documents (for example, the correspondence between Andrei Durov and the tsar's chancellery) have not survived in their original form but have been preserved in reprints and quotations in late nineteenth-century Russian periodicals and early biographies, such as A. Saks's *Cavalry-Maiden: shtabs-rotmistr A.A. Aleksandrov (Nadezhda Andreevna Durova)* (Kavalerist-devitsa: shtabs-rotmistr A.A. Aleksandrov *(Nadezhda Andreevna Durova)*, 1912*)*, although the authentication of these documents is problematic.

[15] After Aleksandrov's retirement the publication of *Notes* produced some confusion: in 1837, the tsar's chancellery primarily referred to the author as 'maid [devitsa] Durova' (Begunova 2011: 327–28).

names from 1817 onwards, referring to their recipient as 'N.A. Durova (A.A. Aleksandrov)'.[16] The documents produced by Aleksandrov himself after 1808 (reports, letters, requests, explanatory notes, a short curriculum vitae) are also consistent in the use of his 'army' name. Most are signed 'Your devoted servant, Aleksandrov', or simply 'Aleksandrov', and use masculine endings for verbs, adjectives, and participles throughout.

In Aleksandrov's lifetime, his publishing credits also reflected the 1808 name change. After the initial publication in *Contemporary* as 'Notes of N.A. Durova, published by A.S. Pushkin' [Zapiski N.A. Durovoi, izdavaemye A. Pushkinym], subsequent editions of *Notes* as well as other texts published before 1866 were signed either 'Aleksandrov', or 'Aleksandrov (Durova)', or sometimes 'Aleksandrov (kavalerist-devitsa)'. Historically, it is of course not unusual for writers to use pseudonyms that do not correspond to the gender that they themselves identify with. For example, in the second half of the nineteenth century in Russia, it was common for women writers, especially novelists, to publish their work under male pseudonyms, following the example of popular European writers like George Sand.[17] However, Aleksandrov's signature indicates a different relationship 'between the authorial gender and narrative voice', underscoring the presence of a 'voice that is textually ambiguous, or subverts the conventions of sex, gender, or sexuality' (Lanser 2018: 926–27). It foregrounds a refusal, where possible, of the name 'Durova' and a commitment to the name 'Aleksandrov'.

Aleksandrov's official military correspondence with his superiors was, chronologically, the first corpus of sources in which he consistently articulated a sustained transmasculine gender

[16] Pension records of the Russian Literary Fund list 'A.A. Aleksandrov (Nadezhda Andreeevna Durova)', and 'Nad. Andr. Durova (ona zhe sht.-rotmistr Aleksandr Andreev. Aleksandrov – izvestnaia devitsa-kavalerist)' (cited in Iudina 1963: 132).

[17] For a discussion of this type of 'narrative transvestism', see Vaysman 2021: 229–45. An interesting example of the many ways in which nineteenth-century Russian authors handled their pseudonyms is Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaia. Having published as 'V. Kresotvskii' for years, once another writer with the same name became prominent, she switched to 'V. Krestovskii-pseudonym' [V. Krestovskii-psevdonim]. For Aleksandrov's full bibliography, see either Begunova 2011: 400–02; or Prikazchikova 2018: 573–74.

identity. This correspondence started in February 1808 with a letter to adjutant general Count Christopher von Lieven, signed 'Your excellency's most obedient servant [pokorneishii sluga] Aleksandr Aleksandrov' (Begunova 2011: 369–70). In this letter Aleksandrov was requesting funds to pay for his new uniform with the Mariupol' regiment. In March and April of the same year two letters to the military minister Aleksei Arackheev reported receipt of 500 roubles from the treasury and were similarly signed 'Aleksandrov' and 'Cornet Aleksandrov' (Begunova 2011: 372–73). The same signature reappeared in 1809 and 1811, in two letters to the same addressee, requesting more funds, and in 1815 in a letter to the military minister, M.B. Barclay de Tolly (Begunova 2011: 376–77; 382). Formal responses to these letters give some idea about how Aleksandrov's situation was perceived by the army officials. Approving the newly minted hussar's request for money, von Lieven wrote to Arakcheev:

Last year, the daughter of the collegiate councillor Andrei Durov having concealed her sex [pol], enlisted into the Polish Uhlan regiment as an ordinary under the name of Sokolov and served all through the previous campaign with distinction, for which she was promoted to non-commissioned officer and awarded the St George medal. (Begunova 2011: 371).

The same letter explained the use of the name 'Aleksandrov' in all subsequent records: Lieven points out that the decision to enlist 'Durova' as 'Aleksandrov' had been taken by the tsar in order to 'to conceal her real status, because her family is not aware of this new assignment' (Begunova 2011: 371).

In March 1816, Aleksandrov retired from the army, but was quickly disillusioned with civilian life. Nine months later, he attempted to rejoin, generating several official letters in response to his formal request. His first application was refused in a reply addressed to 'Aleksandrov', but no reason for rejection was provided (Begunova 2011: 385). In March 1817, Aleksandrov attempted to appeal this decision, requesting a copy of his dismissal report. This request was also refused, but an internal memo from the army headquarters provided an explanation: 'a new report needs to be commissioned, to see if we can indeed supply this record, because the applicant [prositel'] is not of male but of female gender and is perhaps in possession of a husband' (Begunova 2011: 385). A further

internal report from March 1817, titled 'Regarding the issue of the dismissal report requested not by a woman Aleksandrova, but shtabs-rotmistr (staff captain) Aleksandrov' [O vydache Svidetel'stva Prositel'nitse Dat' ukaz ob otstavke ne zhenshchine Aleksandrovoi, a Shtabs-rotmistru Aleksandrovu] addressed this administrative confusion directly:

> The lady [dama] who served [sluzhivshaia] in the Lithuanian Uhlan regiment as shtabs-rotmistr under the name Aleksandrov, dismissed [uvolennaia] from service on 9 March 1819, is requesting to be provided with a copy of her [ee] dismissal. However, this is an unusual case for the Department of Inspections, and therefore they have deemed it necessary to inform your Excellency and to await your decision as to fulfilling this request, reporting that the department believes it more appropriate to issue the applicant [prositel'nitsu] with a record of service and campaigns, rather than with the record of dismissal. (Begunova 2011: 386).

At first, it might seem that from the perspective of the army bureaucrats, once Aleksandrov retired, the inconsistences of his multiple names and gender identities could no longer be overlooked.[18] However, once the question of Aleksandrov's retirement was settled, his correspondence with the army authorities responsible for his pensions returned to the established formula of 'retired [otstavnoi] shtabs-rotmistr Aleksandrov', as well as the use of masculine pronouns, suggesting that, despite a few snags like the one quoted above, the use of this name in official military correspondence went on well beyond the years of his service (Begunova 2011: 387). The tone and actions of the Russian government in its dealings with Aleksandrov suggest a lenience, even a lack of interest, in the sexual determination of its military celebrities. Aleksandrov's correspondence with his literary editors, on the other hand, demonstrated that the Russian literary institutions and their representatives played an

[18] For a discussion of the circumstances of Aleksandrov's retirement, see Prikazchikova 2018: 75–84. Prikazchikova also suggests that the reason for Aleksandrov's failure to obtain reinstatement was that tsar Aleksander I had by then withdrawn his personal support of Aleksandrov's case.

active role in shaping his public gender expression.

'Durova's Notes'

Another part of the corpus of Aleksandrov's personal documents consists of exchanges with the editors and publishers of the literary journals that printed his work. His main literary correspondent was Aleksandr Pushkin, with whom Aleksandrov exchanged eleven letters sent over a period of sixteen months in 1835–36. As Aleksandrov recounted in his autobiographical novella *A Year of Life in St Petersburg, or the Trouble with Third Visits* Pushkin was an acquaintance of his brother, Vasilii Durov.[19] Vasilii, always looking for ways to boost the family's income, approached the poet and offered him Aleksandrov's manuscript. Once the publisher's interest was secured, Aleksandrov wrote to Pushkin directly to discuss editorial matters and Vasilii stepped in to discuss finances, when needed.

These letters have benefited from the high literary status of their addressee throughout the twentieth century and have often been reprinted in modern editions of *Notes* as a kind of a paratext, contextualising Aleksandrov's prose (Durova 1983; Durova 2012). Despite this sustained critical attention (Zirin 1988: xii–xiv; Savkina 2007:193–95), the gendered grammar of Aleksandrov's responses has often gone unnoticed by scholars and general readers alike and would benefit from the closer examination offered below.

The very first letter from August 1835 informed Pushkin that the author of *Notes* was happy to sell their manuscript and willing to accept any edits suggested by their future publisher. Throughout the letter, Aleksandrov used masculine verb endings ('I would like [zhelal] to sell my notes to you', 'there is more I would like [khotel] to say') and ended the letter with his by then customary signature 'your devoted [predannyi] servant Aleksandrov' (Durova 1983: 456). His next letter from September the same year updated Pushkin about postal delays with the manuscript and was similarly signed 'Aleksandr Aleksandrov'. Importantly, it included a full postal address 'Aleksandrov at Elabuga',

[19] Pushkin called Vasilii 'an old, pleasant acquaintance' to his face (Durova 1983: 453-54) but also described Durov as a strange, eccentric character in his collection of gossipy essays *Table Talk* published in 1835–36 (Pushkin 1949: 167–68).

indicating that this name was used for local residency records. The letter itself has survived, but its attachments did not: Aleksandrov wrote that he included with his missive a portrait of himself 'made when I was sixteen years old'. This portrait has now been lost, but Aleksandrov's description of it provides an indicative example of his own attitude to the change in his gender expression ('[the portrait] looks and reflects, obviously, the way it was necessary for me to look then' (Durova 1983: 456–57) as something that required little further explanation.

Pushkin was undoubtedly aware of this change but might have misunderstood its nature, believing it to be an instance of playful literary cross-dressing. Writing directly to Aleksandrov, Pushkin followed his correspondent's lead and addressed his replies to 'Dear Sir [milostivyi gosudar'], Aleksandr Andreevich', using masculine pronouns and endings throughout. Pushkin's letters to Vasilii Durov were more varied: for example, in his initial reply to Vasilli's first letter, Pushkin referred to the 'author of *Notes*' as male throughout. Although 'author' [avtor] has until very recently been used in Russian to refer to authors of any gender, the pronouns used in this letter were also masculine.[20]

In another letter from March 1836, negotiating payment terms, Pushkin first referred to Vasilii's 'brother', but as the letter progressed and its tone became more playful, 'brother' [brat] turned into 'little brother' [bratets] (Durova 1983: 459). Pushkin signed off with an ironic allusion to Aleksandrov's gender ambiguity: 'Farewell, be happy and may God let you become richer with the help of Aleksandrov's lucky little hand, which little hand I entrust you to kiss on my behalf' (Durova 1983: 459). In discussion with others, Pushkin would invariably call the manuscript he was editing 'Durova's notes' [zapiski Durovoi], and this was how the text finally appeared in *Contemporary*, prefaced by the publisher's introduction that highlighted the 'mystery' of the author's gender identity.[21] Subtitled '1812', this excerpt was just under eighty pages long and formed part of a bigger manuscript that Aleksandrov was

[20] 'If he [on] decides to sell his manuscript while it is still unpublished, let him define the price himself' (Durova 1983: 453–54).

[21] In March 1836, Pushkin wrote in a letter to his wife: 'What about Durova's *Notes*? Has the censor approved them? I need them – I am in big trouble without them' (Durova 1983: 459).

hoping to print as a standalone edition.

Originally, Aleksandrov hoped that Pushkin would arrange the publication himself, using his connections at court to ease the manuscript's progress through the literary censorship committees. Pushkin's sudden death in January 1837 meant that Aleksandrov could not count on his patron's support, but even before the poet's death Aleksandrov decided to self-publish.[22] One of the factors that contributed to this decision was a disagreement between author and editor over the title of the upcoming publication. In five letters, exchanged between him and Pushkin in summer 1836, Aleksandrov attempted to negotiate a change in credits from 'Durova's Notes' to another title that would be more in keeping with his transmasculine gender presentation.

In a letter from June 1836, he implored Pushkin to find a way to avoid the 'misfortune' [gore] of the previous title and to credit the author as 'Aleksandrov'. Previously reserved and business-like in his correspondence with the famous poet, here the author of *Notes* proclaimed that the name 'Durova' made him 'shudder', and once again signed off as 'Aleksandrov'. Aleksandrov suggested a solution that would have preserved the name 'Aleksandrov' while still maintaining the sensationalist air of the manuscript and underscoring the 'female masculinity' (Halberstam 1998: 2-45) of its author: 'Personal Notes of a Russian Amazon, Known under the Name Aleksandrov' [Svoeruchnye zapiski russkoi amazonki, izvestnoi pod imenem Aleksandrova]. Apologising for the directness of his tone, Aleksandrov reminded his correspondent: '...remember, I was born, grew up and became a man in a military camp' (Durova 1983: 463).

In her reading of these well-known letters, one of Aleksandrov's first English-language translators and biographers, Mary Zirin, argued that his hesitation to see the name 'Durova' in print was a result of an internalised conviction that women

[22]The first standalone edition of Aleksandrov's memoirs came out in November 1836, published with the help of his cousin, Ivan Butovskii. It was titled *Cavalry-Maiden. An Incident in Russia* (Kavalerist-devitsa. Proisshestvie v Rossii, 1836) and included an introduction by Butovskii, which framed Aleksandrov's story as a heroic adventure. This framing, as well as the title, added an even more sensationalist aura to the publication and, according to Aleksandrov, made his life in St Petersburg high society increasingly difficult (Durova 1983: 450).

should not publish personal accounts of their lives (Zirin 1998: xii–xiv). Irina Savkina's reading of *Notes* developed Zirin's argument further, comparing the memoirs to other auto-documentary texts by women in her study (Savkina 2007: 198–99) (both Savkina and Zirin read *Notes* as proto-feminist narrative). Although well-grounded in the literary history of period, I believe this explanation misreads Aleksandrov's gender expression in his letters and, with the appearance of the new sources published by Alla Begunova, is no longer convincing.[23] It seems more likely that Aleksandrov was invested in maintaining his public transmasculine identity, for personal but perhaps also for bureaucratic reasons: by 1836, the military pension was his main source of income, issued based on 'Aleksandrov''s record of service. Aside from emotional distress caused by public misgendering, a return to the use of the name 'Durova' in print threatened to revive the kind of administrative investigations that Aleksandrov had had to contend with in 1808 and 1817, analysed in the first part of this article.

As far as Pushkin was concerned, the argument that ensued in the next three letters suggests that he did indeed misunderstand Aleksandrov's commitment to his transmasculine identity. The poet's reply to Aleksandrov's plea was brisk and dismissive: *Notes* are already in print, but even if it were possible to make changes, he would object to the new title on the grounds of style. Deliberately or not, Pushkin ignored Aleksandrov's requests and emphasised the importance of marketing for a new writer's literary debut instead. Echoing the change in his correspondent's tone, Pushkin's own replies became increasingly patronising: first he advised Aleksandrov to be 'brave – and enter the literary profession with the same courage with which you have entered the profession that has brought you fame', called his letter 'sweet' [milo] and then emphasised his inexperience as a writer ('you have achieved fame in one profession, and now you are entering another one, still new to you') (Durova 1983: 461–63).

Pushkin's reaction might be seen as an attempt to make sure his publication did not contradict the binary gender categories

[23] A more recent analysis of the publication history of *Notes* suggests that the question of gender would have been secondary, in any case: the authors of the new *Oxford History of Russian Literature* consider *Notes* to be the first Russian biography to be published while its author was still living (Kahn et al. 2018: 388).

typical for the mid-nineteenth-century Russian society. And yet, Aleksandrov's correspondence with other literary editors, for example, Andrei Kraevskii, shows no such insistence on excluding the name Aleksandrov from the publishing record. Kraevskii invited Aleksandrov to become a staff writer in *Notes of the Fatherland* in 1838; Aleksandrov accepted and worked there for about a year. The letters between editor and writer discussed deadlines, negotiated payments and, importantly, were addressed to and signed by 'Aleksandrov' throughout. The pieces published in this journal were signed 'Aleksandrov (Durova)', in a compromise similar to the one Aleksandrov suggested to Pushkin in 1836 (Iudina 1963: 130-35).

My contention is that, more likely, Pushkin's insistence on keeping the title 'Durova's Notes' was a result of his conviction that this would make the text easier to market as a conventional narrative of a female cross-dresser in military service. An unusual, but by no means unprecedented story, this was also a recognised trope of the early nineteenth-century literary culture, from the popular adaptations of Shakespeare's plays to Vasilii Zhukovskii's 1821 translation of Friedrich Schiller's *The Maid of Orleans* [Die Jungfrau von Orleans, 1801].[24] Crediting 'Aleksandrov' as the author of a story told by a first-person narrator grammatically gendered as female would have undermined such a reading. The suggested title – 'Personal notes of a Russian Amazon, known under the name Aleksandrov' – would also draw attention to the fact that 'Durova' continued to 'renounce her sex', as Pushkin put it in his foreword (Pushkin 1836: 54) even after 'her' retirement from the army twenty years prior.

Stylistic considerations were also important: as Hilde Hoogenboom demonstrated, one of Pushkin's aesthetic bugbears was 'Kotsebiatina' – sentimental prose in the manner of the prolific German novelist and playwright August Kotzebue (1761–1818) (Hoogenboom 2015: 553–

[24] These nineteenth-century tropes were in themselves a continuation of an earlier transnational cultural trend: 'the popularity of the theme of female cross-dressing' as 'a general European phenomenon', 'not limited by national boundaries', with many translations circulating from and into Dutch, French, English and Italian (van de Pol et al. 1989: 93). For more historical case studies, see van de Pol et al. 1989. I am grateful to Philip Bullock for drawing my attention to the publication date of Zhukovskii's translation.

74). Pushkin's literary reputation depended on establishing a distance between his own writing and the 'German novels', to which, as he argued in one of the letters to Aleksandrov, the 'too sophisticated, pretentious' title *Personal Notes of the Russian Amazon* would necessarily allude to (Durova 1983: 461). Instead, he chose to foreground other elements of Aleksandrov's original text, through the use of the foreword, an epigraph, and the composition of the excerpt itself.

The foreword did not just remind the readers about the facts of Aleksandrov's biography but framed it specifically as a sensationalist cross-dressing narrative. As scholar of a similar phenomenon in Spanish culture Sherry Velasco puts it, in framings like Pushkin's, quoted below, 'a private experience of the transgenderist is shifted to the public sphere and thereby marketed as a hybrid spectacle for the curious gaze of the general audience' (Velasco 2000: ix). Pushkin writes:

> In 1808 a young boy by the name of Aleksandrov enlisted as a private [...], he distinguished himself, was awarded the Soldier's Cross of St George for bravery, and that same year was promoted to officer with the Mariupol' Hussars Regiment [...] and he continued to serve as zealously as when he first joined. This might seem to be a regular course of action, and a fairly ordinary occurrence, but this same case created a stir, provoked a lot of gossip and made a big impression on the public because of one circumstance that was accidentally revealed: Cornet Aleksandrov was a maiden, Nadezhda Durova (Pushkin 1836: 53).

The epigraph played a similar role, setting a playful tone: a quotation from Ovid, 'Modo vir, modo foemina' [*sic*] ('Now a man, now a woman'), had cropped up in Pushkin's writing before, as an epigraph to his poem 'Little House in Kolomna' [Domik v Kolomne, 1830]. This light-hearted riff on a cross-dressing narrative (the inhabitants of the little house hire a cook, Mavrusha, who turns out to be a man wearing a dress), written during Pushkin's residence in Boldino, had little connection to Aleksandrov's narrative of military adventures in

1812, but was well-known to Pushkin's readers.[25]

The composition of the excerpt offers another glimpse of Pushkin's editing process. Because the original manuscript of *Notes* has not survived, and since Aleksandrov repeatedly stated his preliminary agreement with any edits (Durova 1983: 456, 458), it is difficult to reconstruct the extent of Pushkin's changes to '1812'. One of the first scenes of the excerpt depicted the protagonist's struggles to find a discreet place to bathe during a short break in fighting. In contrast to later editions, in which this section was expanded, meaning this scene was preceded by two other subchapters (Durova 1983: 143–54), this excerpt literally undressed its protagonist on the first few pages, underscoring the erotic undertones of this cross-dressing adventure.

Pushkin must have judged the audience's tastes correctly: the publication was a success. Moreover, his marketing ploy meant that cross-dresser 'Nadezhda Durova', rather than retired shtabsrotmistr Aleksandr Aleksandrov, was now considered to be the implied author of *Notes*, an assumption that persists to this day. This reading remains influential partly thanks to Aleksandrov's own efforts in marketing his later fiction: a comparative analysis of the protagonists in Aleksandrov's literary texts suggests that the success of 'Durova's Notes' convinced its author that maintaining the ambiguity of his gender presentation was indeed the best way to present his work to the reading public.

Aleksandrov's Autofiction

For a twenty-first-century reader, *Notes* read less as a cross-dressing story and more as an account of a lived experience of a person with a non-binary or fluid gender expression. The first-person narrator used feminine endings of the verbs, adjectives, and participles to tell her story, but once the protagonist joined the army, most other characters addressed him as 'sir' [barin] and used masculine pronouns in reported speech. This discursive 'gap' (Savkina 2007: 196) between the narrator and the protagonist

[25]'Little House in Kolomna' had been published twice, in 1833 in an almanac *Housewarming* [Novoselie] and two years later in a collection *Poems and Novellas* [Poemy i povesti] (1835). Pushkin's other treatments of the topic of cross-dressing (for example, the social cross-dressing in *The Squire's Daughter* [Baryshnia-krest'ianka, 1831] suggests that he saw this practice as a form of a practical joke rather than a serious statement of gender difference.

underscored their transitional status between two very gendered worlds: a young provincial woman's parlour and the barracks of the junior army officer, neither of which was particularly welcoming. However, the autofiction of *Notes* seemed to have offered a safe narrative space, in which the protagonist did not need to make a choice between either a masculine or a feminine identity and could successfully inhabit both.[26] I believe that this, in addition to Aleksandrov's desire to capitalise on the success of *Notes*, explains why narrators in his later fiction continued to be gendered as female in the first-person and male in reported speech, in contrast to the consistently masculine voice of his private documentation.

As the critic Hywel Dix points out, autofiction

> offers to fill the gap created when more traditional forms of autobiography are rendered sociologically unavailable by the status of the writer [...]. It is, moreover, a form of autobiographical writing that permits a degree of experimentation with the definition and limits of the self, rather than the slavish recapitulation of known biographical facts (Dix 2018: 3).

The protagonist of *Notes* felt ill at ease in both worlds he belonged to, before and during their army service (Schoenle 2001: 59, Savkina 2007: 213–21). The first part of the full *Notes*, 'My Childhood Years' [Detskie leta moi], told of multiple situations in which the protagonist felt like a misfit, and not just because of the social expectations regarding gendered behaviour. The subsequent parts of the narrative, detailing the protagonist's time in the army, were also a catalogue of physical and psychological discomforts, some common for military service and some specific to the protagonist's situation, like an inability to bathe in public. The freedom of Aleksandrov's life away from his family came at a cost, but autofiction presented him with a way of narrating this traumatising experience.

The success of *Notes* meant that Aleksandrov used references to this text to promote his later publications: short stories and novels published first in literary

[26] On the significance of the choice of pronouns for protagonists in queer autofiction, see Pellegrini et al. 2020: 109.

journals, and then, to maximize profits, as standalone editions (Durova 1983: 451). The subjects of these texts ranged widely from a story about a dog with supernatural powers who sniffed out an underground production line of medicinal herbs to a tale of a young woman trapped in a loveless marriage. The settings were equally diverse and included not just the Russian empire but also neighbouring European countries. Relying on a popular structural trope of Romantic prose – an accumulation of nested narratives – most of these texts featured a narrative frame that explicitly set up a narrator identical to the protagonist of *Notes*. Aleksandrov's texts assumed their readers' familiarity with this unusual protagonist: aside from a casual reference to *Notes*, none provided either a backstory or an explanation for why both masculine and feminine endings and pronouns were used throughout the text. None of these published texts mentioned the name 'Durova' on its own, and, in most cases, credited the author as 'Aleksandrov (Durova)'.[27] The autofictional world of Aleksandrov's later fiction followed on from *Notes* in establishing a narrative space in which 'Durova' and Aleksandrov co-existed.

Most of Aleksandrov's later texts were published in two years, between 1837 and 1839. This relatively short period of intense literary activity might explain why the framing narratives are similar, if not identical, across these sometimes very different pieces. For example, the opening paragraph of *Pavilion* [Pavil'on, 1839], a story of a tragic love triangle between a Polish priest, a servant girl, and a young nobleman, featured a first-person narrator called Aleksandrov. Discussing housing arrangements with a fellow soldier, this Aleksandrov noted: 'I, however, did not overly trust [very davala] his words and praises' (Aleksandrov 1839: 2). The absence of any contextualisation of Aleksandrov's use of feminine endings to talk about himself soon after he was addressed as a man by another cavalry officer presumed the reader's familiarity with this narrator. Having established the setting and introduced a nested narrative – the story of the priest's deceased son – the narrator stepped back and did not play a key role in the story, seemingly important only for the framing itself.

[27] Some texts were evidently written by Aleksandrov years before and only revised for publication in this period.

Gudishki (1839), a novel in four parts set in Lithuania, also constructed an explicit frame. The text was preceded by a dedication to Princess Tat'iana Iusupova, from her 'loyal servant Aleksandrov' (Aleksandrov 1839: n.p). The opening of the novel presented it as a companion piece, or a follow-up, to *Notes*: the first-person narrator remained unnamed throughout the text but was recognisably the Aleksandrov of the dedication and *Notes*. The setting – a conglomeration of villages all called Hudzishki – was somewhere Aleksandrov's regiment was quartered a few years ago, and the locals remembered this young officer and his faithful horse, Alkid. As in *Pavilion*, the opening conversations about army housing arrangements established a frame for a nested narrative. This time, the overarching epic story was told by a rabbi rather than a Polish priest, and each of the four parts of the novel introduced their own nested narratives, but the overall framing structure remained similar to Aleksandrov's other texts.

In *Caprice of Fate, or Unlawful Love. A Real Incident that Happened at the Author's Homeland* [Igra sud'by, ili protivozakonnaia liubov'. Istinnoe proisshestvie, sluchivsheesia na rodine avtora, 1839)],[28] the framing formed part of the plot. The first-person narrator (the implied 'Aleksandrov (Durova)' of the title page) introduced the protagonist, Elena, as his childhood friend. Underscoring this connection, Elena's unhappy life and death were mapped onto the timeline of Aleksandrov's biography as presented in *Notes* (Durova 1983: 308). The novella *Count Mavritsii* [Graf Mavritsii, 1838] did not foreground the frame or feature Aleksandrov as a named character, but the narrator appeared in the last few lines, mentioning that he personally knew the characters.[29] In the journal publication of this novella in *Library for Reading* [Biblioteka dlia chteniia], this last paragraph was followed by a signature 'Aleksandrov (kavalerist-devitsa)', reinforcing the connection with the first-person narrator of earlier texts (Aleksandrov 1838: 192). Other texts, such as 'Sulphur Spring' [Sernyi kliuch, 1839] or 'Treasure' [Klad, 1840] also featured young cavalry officers or older hussars as characters, or as narrators, like in 'Werewolf'

[28] The same text was published earlier as *Elena, the Beauty of T-sk* [Elena, T-skaia krasavitsa] (1837), signed also 'Aleksandrov (Durova)'.

[29] *Count Mavritsii* was first published as part of *Notes* in the first standalone edition in 1836.

[Oboroten', 1840]. Some, like *Nurmeka* [1839], a historical novella set in the time of Ivan the Terrible, problematised gender ambiguity with plots centred on cross-dressing adventures (Marsh-Flores 2003: 615), and all established either overt or implied connections to *Notes* and their author.

Despite direct references to Aleksandrov's literary debut, none of his later texts were as explicitly autobiographical as *Notes*. One exception to this rule was the 1838 novella *A Year of Life in St Petersburg*, which detailed Aleksandrov's uncomfortable experiences in St Petersburg high society after the success of *Notes*. Because of Pushkin's framing of *Notes*, the reading public expected to meet a dashing Cavalry Maiden, a cross-dressing military celebrity. But by 1838 Aleksandrov was fifty-three years old, retired from the army and long accustomed to his everyday transmasculine identity. He wore civilian male clothes, cut his hair short, smoked a pipe, and was not interested 'performing on display' [vystupit' na pokaz], contrary to society's expectations (Durova 1983: 414). The kind of transmasculine gender expression he portrayed in *Notes* relied heavily on the established conventions of military masculinity as reference points. However, such qualities as directness or courage in the face of immediate physical danger were no longer relevant in the highly gendered spaces of the capital's salons and ballrooms, and Aleksandrov's sojourn in the capital quickly turned sour.[30]

In a key scene in this novella, Aleksandrov described one of the few meetings he had with Pushkin in 1837. During his first visit to Aleksandrov's temporary lodgings in St Petersburg, Pushkin struggled to comprehend his contributing author's transmasculine presentation. Bewildered by Aleksandrov's grammatical masculine self-gendering in his speech, in the course of the meeting Pushkin attempted to kiss Aleksandrov's hand while taking his leave, to Aleksandrov's surprise and embarrassment. This scene, as well as the rest of the novella, was narrated by the first-person voice familiar to readers from *Notes* and Aleksandrov's other fiction: gendered as female in first-person, and as male in reported speech. The text did not offer any comments addressing

[30] I offer a detailed reading of this novella in 'The Trouble with Queer Celebrity: Aleksandr Aleksandrov (Nadezhda Durova)'s *A Year of Life in St Petersburg* (1838)', *Modern Language Review*, 118:97-113.

the obvious contradiction: the scene in which the protagonist argued for the importance of his presentation as male was narrated by a first-person voice gendered as a female. Paying attention to the dynamics of gender presentation in Aleksandrov's texts and thinking of them as a form of autofiction helps us understand how he constructed a narrative space in which these contradictions did not matter. Instead, they were a matter of course to the author who had by 1837 lived for more than twenty-five years as 'Aleksandrov (Durova)' and was used to the complications of an unconventional gender presentation.

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After two years spent in St Petersburg managing his literary career, in 1841 Aleksandrov retired to Elabuga, a town near his native Sarapul, where he lived until his death in 1866. A few years before that, in the summer of 1860, M.A. Mikhailov, editor of the *Encyclopaedic Dictionary, Compiled by Russian Scholars and Writers* [Entsiklopedicheskii slovar', sostavlennyi russkimi uchenymi i literatorami] (1861–63), commissioned Aleksandrov to provide an entry on his own biography. Aleksandrov agreed and produced an informal curriculum vitae that listed major events of his life in chronological order, accompanied by personal comments. In terms of gender expression, this *Autobiography* occupied a kind of a middle ground between Aleksadrov's personal documents and his autofiction. On the one hand, this text followed Aleksandrov's correspondence in using exclusively masculine pronouns and endings, from noting his date of birth ('I was born [rodilsia] in 1788') to describing his current circumstances ('In 1841 I said farewell [prostilsia] to Petersburg forever and since then have been living in my cave – in Elabuga') (Durova 1983: 452). On the other, Aleksandrov used this publication as an opportunity to reinforce the factual edits he made to the story of his life in *Notes* and other fiction, from a distance of almost forty years. *Autobiography* once again stated an incorrect date of birth, made no mention of marriage or children, and referred to *Notes* as a source of information about Aleksandrov's life up to the end of his army service.[31]

[31] The reasons why Aleksandrov decided to hide the fact of his marriage are unknown. My analysis of the documentation, presented above, suggests that

Written towards the end of Aleksandrov's life, the text was also remarkably frank in summarising the emotional toll of his non-conventional gender presentation through the years. *Autobiography* juxtaposed the periods of Aleksandrov's life when he lived as a private citizen (in the army and later in retirement) with the time he spent in St Petersburg as a literary celebrity. Despite all the hardships he endured, forty years later Aleksandrov nostalgically lauded the army for the uncomplicated sense of community it offered. His resignation in 1816 is presented as an experience more traumatic than military service, one that plunged Aleksandrov into 'despair' [otchaianie] and 'alienation' [otchuzhdenie] and complicated the already uneasy period of adjustment to unwelcoming St Petersburg society (Durova 1983: 447–48). By contrast, Aleksandrov's descriptions of his family life in the Russian provinces were almost bucolic. An evocative scene, in which Aleksandrov remembered his aunt making fun of his tanned face, more appropriate for 'simple peasant' rather than a 'young nobleman' (Durova 1983: 450), showed his family at ease with Aleksandrov's transmasculinity. Other contemporary sources, such as the articles published in the 1890s in popular historical periodicals like *Russian Antiquity* [Russkaia starina] or *Historical Messenger* [Istoricheskii vestnik] suggest that the public reception of Aleksandrov's transmasculinity was also not hostile. Whether out of respect for his achievements on the battlefield (Kutshe 1894: 788–93), his role in the local community (Lashmanov 1890: 657–64) or his extraordinary life (Nekrasova 1890: 585–612) his transmasculine public persona was acknowledged and respected by many in his immediate social circle – and, through the medium of their writings, by general readers also. Contemporary Russian audiences remain fascinated by Aleksandrov, both as a historical figure and as a writer. In 1993, the first memorial state museum opened in Aleksandrov's former home in Elabuga. A few years later, permanent exhibitions and guided tours were established in nearby Sarapul.[32] Several

avoiding misgendering might have been an important consideration.

[32] For a video tour of the museum, see 'Muzei-Usad'ba N.A. Durovoi <http://www.elabuga.com/durova/aboutDurovaMuseum.html> [Accessed 2 December 2021]. For a report on the 2016 Sarapul festival *Gorod Nadezhdy* [Nadezhda's City], see Gorod Nadezhdy 2016.

monuments depicting Aleksandrov at various stages of his life are now dotted around the two towns. In 2012, Aleksandrov's face appeared on the commemorative two-rouble coin in the series marking the 200th anniversary of the victory over Napoleon in 1812, alongside other 'generals and heroes' [polkovodtsy i geroi] (CBR 2012). Most recently, in 2021, the story of Aleksandrov's life featured in a video by one of the most popular Russian journalists and YouTubers, Iurii Dud', which has gathered over five million views (Dud' 2021). On the one hand, this ongoing engagement with Aleksandrov's legacy testifies to a continued public interest in his unconventional life. However, in stark contrast to nineteenth-century sources, these adaptations gloss over any issues of gender ambiguity, raised by Aleksandrov's biography — or, rather, ignore them as a curious footnote in a tale of heroic patriotic duty, presented in *Notes*, which remain Aleksandrov's most well-known text among scholars and general public alike.[33] Reading Aleksandrov's personal documents alongside his literary fiction does not just allow us to trace the emergence of different ways of gender presentation across his entire oeuvre. More importantly, it showcases Aleksandrov's agency and significant literary skill in using effective narrative strategies to convey his own understanding of his gender identity to his correspondents and readers.

[33] The infamous law 'against propaganda of homosexualism, lesbianism, bisexuality, [and] transgender' (Healy 2018: 2) passed by the Russian government in 2013, also means that public discussions of Aleksandrov's gender identity have become increasingly rare in Russia. A recent *Russia Beyond the Headlines* English-language article on Aleksandrov exemplifies the paradoxes of modern Russian discussions of his life: a click-bait-y title ('Nadezhda Durova, The First Transgender Officer in Tsarist Russia?') precedes a text that discusses 'the first female officer', who 'raised the topic of women in society' (Guzeva 2021: n.p.).

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Brian James Baer

Beyond the Censor and the Closet: Re-framing Eisenstein's Memoirs as Queer Life Writing

The voluminous, albeit fragmented, memoiristic writings of Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein are often cited in biographical works on the director to document historical events and his attitude toward those events, or to enhance our understanding of his theoretical writings on cinematography—the memoirs do indeed contain important theoretical passages on filmmaking and the creative mind. The memoirs, however, have yet to be analysed as queer life writing, despite the author's self-conscious thematization of sex and sexuality and of their place in life writing, which takes place throughout the memoirs, and Eisenstein's profound playfulness on these topics, which demands interpretive readings. This article represents the first attempt at a systematic interpretation of the memoirs as queer life writing and, together with recent studies of Eisenstein's homoerotic drawings, of the homoerotic imagery in his films, and of his interest in 'those who love strangely', aims to contribute to our understanding of Eisenstein's distinctly queer performance of his sexuality. To that end, the article analyses Eisenstein's life writing through the theoretical lens of camp, as defined by Susan Sontag in her seminal essay 'Notes on Camp' (1966), and further elaborated by queer linguists, such as Keith Harvey (2002), who focus on the double-voicedness and citationality of camp talk.

> 'And… did you know the most effective way of hiding something is to put it on display'. (Eisenstein 1995: 453)[1]

While for much of the Cold War, Soviet and Western biographers diverged in their interpretations of Eisenstein's life and work, they expressed surprising unanimity in their assessment of his life writings. Critics and scholars on both sides of the Iron Curtain characterized them as highly opaque and offering little definitive evidence of the director's 'true' nature. As the Soviet film critic Nina Zorskaia wrote: 'Even though we had hoped these autobiographical notes would reveal the

[1] All citations to the memoir are taken from the English translation, *Beyond the Stars* (Eisenstein 1995), referred to in the paper as BTS. Due to the fragmentary nature of Eisenstein's memoiristic writing and the fact that the fragments were written at different times, I will refer to BTS in the plural, as Eisenstein's memoirs.

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truth about the author [...] the varying expressions of the author, articles, notes, certain pages of the diary now published, unfortunately even now cannot serve as irrefutable evidence of the true intentions and views of their author' (quoted in Marshall 1983b: xvii). Scholars writing in the West drew similar conclusions. Herbert Marshall, one of Eisenstein's English biographers and the translator of the first collection of Eisenstein's life writing published under the title *Immoral Memoirs: An Autobiography* (1983), remarks in the introduction to that volume:

> When I consider his personality, however, I have to say he always seemed like a Russian *matriushka* [*sic*]—the famous carved wooden doll, hiding within it another doll, hiding another doll, and so ad infinitum. Outside he was a Soviet Russian; inside, according to some, he was a Christian. According to others, he was a Jew; to yet others, a homosexual; to a few, a cynical critic ... and what else? It was difficult to know what he was fundamentally. *He never expressed it verbally* [italics – B. J. B.]. Still, there was one medium through which he expressed his innermost feelings—his drawings and caricatures (Marshall 1983a: vii).

Little changed with the fall of the Soviet Union. For example, in the introduction to the 1997 two-volume Russian edition of Eisenstein's memoirs, the editor and Eisenstein scholar Naum Kleiman resorts to the elliptical language of the Soviet era when suggesting that Eisenstein did not and could not have discussed his true (sexual?) nature in the memoirs: 'The reader will not find much here about that which today we would like to know about Eisenstein himself. He could not then write about a lot—due to the conditions of the time. About certain things he didn't want to write, assuming, following Pushkin, that a celebrity, like any other person, has the right to a private life, not subject to disrespectful public discussion' (Kleiman 1997: 16).[2] Oksana Bulgakowa expresses something similar in the opening of her German-language biography of the director: 'Was Eisenstein homosexual? A Stalinist? A conformist? A dissident? He left no clear answers for his biographers. The answer lies

[2] All translations from Kleiman's introduction are my own.

somewhere *between the line of his diaries and letters* [italics – B. J. B.], in his drafts to scripts, films, drawings, projects, and scientific research' (Bulgakowa 2001: xi). Against the backdrop of such statements, which construe Eisenstein's life writing as a site of repression and concealment – a product of the censor or the closet – this article proposes an alternative hermeneutic lens through which to understand them, that of camp performativity.[3]

Eisenstein's Sexuality and Cold War Polarities

American writer and editor Joseph Freeman recounts a phone conversation he overheard between Eisenstein and the critic Sergei Tret'iakov, during which Eisenstein declared: 'Had it not been for Leonardo, Marx, Freud, Lenin and the movies, I would in all probability have been another Oscar Wilde' (Seton 1978: 119). For most of the Cold War, the two sides treated Eisenstein's inspirations separately: the Soviets focusing largely on Marx and western biographers largely on Freud. The Freudian frame allowed for Eisenstein's homosexuality to be mentioned (Seton 1952; Fernandez 1975; Marshall 1983a, 1983b), although typically in the terms suggested by Eisenstein himself in regard to Freud's

[3] In the past, the absence of a straightforward 'confession' or eyewitness testimony provided a pretext for historians to ignore the sexual life of queer cultural figures – arguing that they were refraining from overreading or reading into the historical data – a position that was buoyed by the general belief that such a perspective was irrelevant and/or would unduly sully the reputation of these great individuals and offend contemporary readers. Such scholarly reticence not only circumscribed the range of available interpretations that could be applied to their life writing but also affected the publication and editing of relevant historical material, as was the case with queer philosopher Ludwig Wittengenstein's notebooks from the first half of World War I, which were, until quite recently, heavily abridged. This created a vicious circle, or a conspiracy of silence, in which the need for overwhelming evidence led to the suppression of various pieces of circumstantial evidence. In the case of Wittgenstein's notebooks, the right side (recto), containing his philosophical writings, has been widely available in German and in English translation since the early sixties, while the pages on the left side (verso), which concerned his private life, including his sexual proclivities, and were written in a code, were published in German only in 1991, under the title *Secret Diaries* [*Geheine Tagebücher*], and translated into English only in 2022. Moreover, Marjorie Perloff, the editor of the English edition, rejects the notion that the encoding of the verso pages was the major impediment to their publication as, 'the cipher that Wittgenstein employed was both basic and known to his siblings, who used it as children (z is a, y is b, etc.)' (Perloff 2022: 9n).

psychobiography of Leonardo da Vinci as repressed. (That being said, Dominique Fernandez was the only Cold War biographer to make Eisenstein's sexuality a central feature of his biography.) The repressive hypothesis in this case aligned neatly with the broader western narrative of the creative individual stifled by the oppressive politics of the Stalinist state, as is evident in Marshall's 1983 volume *Masters of the Soviet Cinema: Crippled Creative Biographies* (Marshall 1983a) and more recently in Andy McSmith's 2015 *Fear and the Muse Kept Watch* (McSmith 2015).

Freud was largely ignored by Soviet biographers, except to lambast the vulgar psychologizing of the director's life by their Western counterparts. As Soviet film critic Rostislav Iurenev insisted in his 1985 biography of Eisenstein: '[Eisenstein's interest in Freud] was only academic in nature and did not at all influence his daily life, his personality, or his worldview' (Iurenev 1985: 6). Elsewhere Iurenev turns the lens of vulgar psychologizing back onto Eisenstein's biographer, Mary Seton, suggesting that her interpretation of Eisenstein's sexuality was the result of unrealized romantic ambitions: 'There is no doubt that she was sincerely attracted to Eisenstein both as an artist and as a man. Her hopes for greater intimacy with him were probably unsuccessful. Perhaps this explains in part her nervous, biased description of Eisenstein's personality' (Iurenev 1985: 4–5). (Incidentally, Iurenev also rejected the notion that Eisenstein's paternal grandparents were Jewish (Iurenev 1985: 5), another theme that played an important role in Western psychological portraits of the director.) Soviet critics could compare Eisenstein with da Vinci as long as they foreclosed any hint of queerness, as in the following statement by Nina Zorskaia: 'Eisenstein, this Leonardo without his *Mona Lisa*, this Le Corbusier without his House of the Sun' (quoted in Marshall 1983a: 213), indexing the traditional view that da Vinci was in love with Mona Lisa.

The opening of archives in the years before and after the fall of the Soviet Union alongside the emergence of sexuality studies in the Western academy over the course of the 1990s – not to mention the unanticipated surfacing of Eisenstein's erotic drawings and their publication in 1999 (see Ackerman 2017) – have led to more open and nuanced treatments of the direc-

tor's sexuality.[4] That being said, they were rather slow in coming. The 1993 collected volume *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, edited by Richard Taylor and Derek Spring, ignores the director's sexuality entirely, while the volume *Eisenstein Rediscovered,* edited by Ian Christie and Richard Taylor and published in the same year, makes only two brief mentions. By the late 1990s, however, there had emerged an unprecedented willingness, at least outside of Russia, to interpret the historical record in favour of a queer reading of Eisenstein's sexuality (see Bergan 1999: 119; McSmith 2015: 160; Bershstein 2017) and of his oeuvre (see LaValley 2001; Bershstein 2010; Bershstein 2021; and Ackerman forthcoming).[5]

Among that new scholarship, one of the most detailed and systematic discussions of the director's sexuality to date is Evgenii Bershtein's 'Eisenstein's Letter to Magnus Hirschfeld: Text and Context' (Bershtein 2017). In this essay, Bershtein establishes both the director's deep and abiding interest, his 'intellectual obsession', to use Bershtein's phrase, in what Eisenstein himself referred to as 'people who love strangely' (Bershtein 2017: 77), as well as 'Eisenstein's tendency to see the connection between one's creative world and one's sexual character as a very direct one' (Bershtein 2017: 84). This and other recent works provide a convincing rationale for reading Eisenstein's memoirs as queer life writing, something Eisenstein himself cued his readers to do in a variety of ways, which I outline below.

Framing the Memoirs as Queer Life Writing

The place of sex and sexuality in an individual's life and in life writing is thematized from the very opening of Eisenstein's memoirs. The author does so, first, in the short preface titled 'About Myself', in which he rewrites the French novelist Stendhal's epitaph, 'I lived, I wrote, I loved' as 'I lived, I contemplated,

[4] As LaValley and Scherer (2001: 1) note, 'The atmosphere of glasnost also allowed an exploration of the way in which [Eisenstein's] films are infused with sexuality, politics, and religion—areas which had previously been largely avoided by Soviet commentators. Western scholars had also left these topics largely unexamined'.

[5] The outing of Eisenstein in western popular culture would culminate in the films *What Is This Film Called Love* (2012), by Mark Cousins, about Eisenstein's time in Mexico, and *Sergei / Sir Gay* (2017), by Mark Rappaport. The title of the latter film references the young Eisenstein's habit of signing his first name Sergei in English as Sir Gay.

I admired' not simply replacing 'loved' with 'admired', but also drawing attention to the replacement by including both Stendhal's original and Eisenstein's 'translation'. Then, in the 'Foreword' which immediately follows he invokes several works of 'sexual' life writing: Giacomo Casanova's diary, *Story of My Life* [Histoire de ma vie, written in the late eighteenth century, but first published in German in 1822]; Frank Harris's autobiography *My Life and Loves* (1922); and Marcel Proust's autobiographical cycle of novels *In Search of Lost Time* [À la recherche du temps perdu (1913-1927)]. He mentions Casanova's diary in order to reset reader's expectations for his own memoirs: 'This is not Casanova's diary, or the history of a Russian film director's amorous adventures' (Eisenstein 1995: 4). He then discusses Harris's autobiography, which was something of a *succès de scandale* due to its explicit descriptions of Harris's (heterosexual) encounters. Although he describes Harris's memoir in very negative terms – 'This highly unpleasant, caustic and importunate author set down his life and the catalogue of his affairs with the same distasteful candour and tactlessness that characterised his relations with most of his eminent contemporaries' (Eisenstein 1995: 4) – he later admits to reading three out of the four volumes of the autobiography (!) in a paragraph that highlights the perverse workings of censorship: it draws attention to that which it seeks to silence: 'I read three volumes of his autobiography in the USA – naturally, bought "under the counter" – in an unexpurgated edition, where, for convenience's sake, everything that the censor had cut from the usual edition was printed in a different typeface— – 'for the convenience of its readers'!" (Eisenstein 1995: 4). It should also be noted that Harris was the first biographer of Oscar Wilde, an artist with whom Eisenstein expressed some degree of identification.

A few paragraphs later, Eisenstein mentions Proust: 'I have never enjoyed Marcel Proust. And that has nothing to do with snobbery—deliberately ignoring the terribly fashionable interest in Proust' (Eisenstein 1995: 5). In situating his memoir between these two autobiographical works – rejecting the former for its overly explicit depiction of the author's sex life and the latter, perhaps, for its modesty (namely, Proust's practice of disguising homosexual relations by presenting men from his real life as women in his fiction; e.g., Albert becomes Albertine) – Ei-

senstein sets the stage for the kind of arch performance of his sexuality that both invites and confounds, or at least complicates, interpretation, a mode of writing alien both to the prudery of official Stalinist culture and to the binary logic of the closet.

This genre consciousness is evident throughout the memoirs in references to other 'sexual' biographies and autobiographical writings, such as Colette's writings (Eisenstein 1995: 237–38) and Herbert Gorman's biography of Alexander Dumas, *The Incredible Marquis* (1929). Like Harris's autobiography, Gorman's biography stood out for its lack of sexual reticence: 'With a frankness that is as Gallic as its subject, [Gorman] portrays the amoral life of Alexandre Dumas who conquered women as easily as he conquered the French stage and the French field of the novel' (from the dust jacket of the first edition). As Eisenstein notes, 'Mr. Gorman's biography wittily exonerates the Marquis [de Sade – B.J.B.], calling him the learned predecessor of Dr Freud, and explaining his novels as the only available form in the eighteenth century for disquisitions into case histories of psychoses and pathological portraits of a particular proclivity' (Eisenstein 1995: 519).

Perhaps the most consequential sexual biography in Eisenstein's memoirs, however, appears in the chapter titled 'Encounters with Books', where Eisenstein recounts his first 'chance' (fateful?) reading of Freud's biography of da Vinci, which interprets the artist's interest in scientific investigation and his inability to complete works of art as the effects of sublimating his homosexual desires. The importance of Freud's biography for Eisenstein lies, first of all, in authorizing the open treatment of sex and sexuality in biographies of this kind. As Freud writes in Chapter 1:

> If a biographical effort really endeavors to penetrate the understanding of the psychic life of its hero, it must not, as happens in most biographies through discretion or prudery, pass over in silence the sexual activity or the sex peculiarity of the one examined. What we know about it in Leonardo is very little but full of significance (Freud 2020: 8).

Also important is the notion that sublimation does not eliminate the targeted desire; rather, it disperses it: 'it is naturally distorted and not free, but forceful

enough to sexualize even thought itself and to accentuate the intellectual operations with the pleasure and fear of the actual sexual process' (Freud 2020: 17). Or, as Eisenstein puts it in his memoirs: 'Impressions lodged like splinters and emerged in unexpected shapes' (Eisenstein 1995: 548). Such sublimation can manifest itself in what might be referred to as unproductive neuroticism – e.g., da Vinci's chronic inability to complete works of art – as well as productive neuroticism, informing the symbolic world of the artist: 'A kindly nature has bestowed upon the artist the capacity to express in artistic productions his most secret psychic feelings hidden even to himself, which powerfully affect outsiders who are strangers to the artist without their being able to state whence this emotivity comes' (Freud 2020: 50).

Especially relevant to the genre of the memoir is Freud's claim in Chapter 2 that memory is a privileged site for the expression of sublimated desire: 'As a rule the memory remnants, which he himself does not understand, conceal invaluable evidences of the most important features of his psychic development' (Freud 2020: 24). And so, one could argue, instead of inuring the artist's work to unwanted interpretations of a sexual nature, by invoking Freud's theory of sublimation Eisenstein invites just such interpretations while also greatly complicating the act of interpretation. As Freud notes: 'When one considers what profound transformations an impression of an artist has to experience before it can add its contribution to the work of art, one is obliged to moderate considerably his expectation of demonstrating something definite. This is especially true in the case of Leonardo' (Freud 2020: 50). This is also true of Eisenstein, who continually invokes the notion of the sexual secret or riddle while eluding or confounding any definitive interpretation.

Here is Eisenstein's account of his first encounter with Freud's biography of da Vinci, playfully mystifying the workings of the subconscious:

> Books open up at the quotation I need. I used to check—and sometimes I needed nothing before and nothing after, in the whole book.
>
> Here are some syndromes in the pathology of the nervous system. The book opened itself up in my hands, at the very page which addressed the question of the technique of

> stage movements in Italian comedy…
> Sometimes a modest-looking booklet with a portrait of Leonardo on the cover (even in childhood I liked reading about him), with the German author's surname and Christian name that had been taken from the Nibelung as a little birdie told me, brings news of the unexpected discovery of a new field which I embark upon even without an expert guide. If I say the booklet, published by *Sovremennye problemy* [Contemporary Questions], concerns 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood' and is by Sigmund Freud, then the significance of the little birdie is exactly in keeping with the description of the kite inside—which Leonardo used to dream about.
> Amazing words for a description of a dream!
> Thus my introduction to psychoanalysis (Eisenstein 1995: 354).

The birdie referred to here appears in a dream had by da Vinci that Freud analyses as proof of the artist's latent homosexuality. In the dream, a kite, which Freud renders as vulture, visits the artist in the cradle: 'he opened my mouth with his tail and struck me a few times with his tail against my lips' (Freud 2020: 22). In translating 'this phantasy from its strange language into words that are universally understood' (Freud 2020: 23), Freud notes that tail, or *coda* in the Italian, is used as slang to refer to the male member. From this Freud concludes: 'The situation contained in the phantasy […] corresponds to the idea of fellatio, a sexual act in which the member is placed in the mouth of the other person. Strangely enough this phantasy is altogether of a passive character; it resembles certain dreams and phantasies of women and of passive homosexuals who play the feminine part in sexual relations' (Freud 2020: 25).

And while Eisenstein's ironic tone in the above passage raises some doubt as to his acceptance of Freud's theory, his identification with the Italian artist certainly invites the reader to test the theory out: 'And I related how we assigned to ourselves the roles of various titans of the Renaissance. Pudovkin got his teeth into Raphael. Dovzhenko was allotted Michelangelo. And I was Leonardo …' (Eisenstein 1995: 687). Elsewhere he would describe da Vinci as 'the creator

of the montage sequence' (quoted at Bergan 1999: 43), setting him up as his artistic father. In addition, he shares the Italian artist's fascination with knots, an image that was central to Eisenstein's conceptualization of the artistic process. as Eisenstein suggests at the very end of the autobiographical essay 'The Author and His Theme':

> There is in each of us something like those complex knots that Leonardo designed for the Milan Academy and that he drew on the ceilings.
> We encounter a phenomenon.
> And the plan of this knot seems to be laid over this phenomenon.
> The features of one coincide, or otherwise.
> They coincide partially.
> Here and there.
> They do not coincide.
> They clash with one another, striving for coincidence.
> Sometimes breaking the structure and the outlines of reality, in order to satisfy the contour of individual desire.
> Sometimes violating individualities in order to 'synchronise' with the demands of what they have clashed with.
> I cannot actually remember any examples of the latter from my own personal practice, but then I could give plenty of examples illustrating the former... (Eisenstein 1995: 794-95).

Elsewhere Eisenstein describes the 'various traits and features which I carried and still carry around with me' as a 'knot of complexes' (Eisenstein 1995: 418), and earlier describes himself as a 'knot that was unable to bind the family together and keep it from breaking up' (Eisenstein 1995: 99).
The statement quoted above, at the beginning of section two, could be considered another knot: 'Had it not been for Leonardo, Marx, Freud, Lenin and the movies, I would in all probability have been another Oscar Wilde' (Seton 1978: 119). The juxtaposition of Marx and Lenin to Freud, to say nothing of the juxtaposition of the Renaissance da Vinci to the modern art of movie making, clearly challenges any straightforward interpretation. While Eisenstein attempts to draw a parallel between Freud and Marx when explaining his statement to Freeman, noting, 'Freud discovered the laws of in-

dividual conduct as Marx discovered the laws of social development' (Seton 1978: 119), Marxism and *Freidizm*, or Freudianism, were at this time in Soviet culture seen as antithetical. Marxist economic models are developmental and teleological, while many psychiatric notions, such as Freud's so-called 'family romance', are posited as ahistorical, present throughout history and across cultures. Moreover, sex and sexuality, not to mention homosexuality, play a small, rather incidental role in Marxist thought, while they are central to psychoanalysis. All this lends a paradoxical note to Eisenstein's statement, suggesting that it be read less like a confession than like a Wildean aphorism—a manifestation of the very thing those influences supposedly worked to prevent.

Homographesis or Linguistic Inversion: From *Pars pro toto* to *Pars pro parte*

Lee Edelman (Edelman 1993) theorized the phenomenon of homonymy as homographesis. His premise was that, if, as Saussure argued, natural languages are built on arbitrary differences among signifiers rather than on an essential relationship of sameness between the signifier and the signified, then homonymy exerts a troubling effect. It conceals difference under the guise of sameness, by analogy with the homosexual's ability to pass, that is, to conceal their homosexual difference under the guise of sameness. In this way, homographesis queers linguistic (and social) semiosis, resulting in an indeterminacy of meaning. An interest in the phenomenon of homographesis is evident throughout Eisenstein's memoir in his fascination with word play and with the capacity of symbols to support multiple interpretations, often connected arbitrarily by colour, graphics, or phonetics. That space of non-equivalence and interpretative abundance, the gap between reality and representation, between somatics and semantics, gives free rein to desire and the irrational.[6]

The associative, almost stream of consciousness writing that is dominant in the memoir challenges the logic of metonymy put forward in the classic formulation *pars pro toto*, in which a

[6] Eisenstein's linking of bisexuality (which was essentially his term for queerness) with wordplay, as well as 'ecstatic creativity', is discussed by Bershtein (Bershtein 2017: 84). He made an attempt to discuss this in his correspondence with Dr Magnus Hirschfeld, a leading German sexologist and an ardent proponent of the depathologization and decriminalization of homosexuality.

part stands in for the whole and which Eisenstein used to explain the technique of montage. According to the latter, the *toto* would refer to the overall theme (see Eisenstein 1995: 771). In political terms, the subservience of the parts to the whole guarantees the primacy of the ideological interpretation. In Eisenstein's memoir, however, parts are quite often associated with other parts, through graphic or phonetic rather than semantic resemblance, producing 'random' chains of signifiers that do not resolve into anything greater, enacting what Jacques Derrida would later describe with his concept of *différance* as the endless deferral of meaning in language. Consider Eisenstein's description of a striptease he witnessed while in the US: 'A bow-tie, a ribbon, the last shred of decency. The auditorium is in uproar, shouting, raving. But beneath the bow-tie—is a bow-tie. Beneath the ribbon, a ribbon. Beneath the pearl. … The spectacle vanishes into darkness' (Eisenstein 1995: 450).

This is a semiotic world built on non-equivalence, where linguistic substitutions (the same) produce difference.[7] Perhaps the most extreme manifestation of this occurs in plays on words based solely on phonic or graphic resemblance, as elaborated in the following passage:

> The high priest of bars like 'Le Chat Noir' and '[Au] Lapin Agile'.
> This second Montmartre bar was a play on words, in honour of the artist who painted the sign: *l'a peint A. Gill.*
> Just think of Hugo's 'Le pot aux roses' [French: The Pot of Roses], which became *le poteau rose* [French: the rose thorn]; or his '*Tu ora*' [Latin: 'You pray'] which became *trou aux rats* [French: 'rat-hole'], which was where Esmeralda found sanctuary when she fell into the hands of the mad old woman.
> Or again, that Catholic and reactionary, King Charles X—*le pieux monarch* [French: 'the pious monarch'] whom Travies turned into *le pieu monarch* [French: 'the block-head monarch'] (Eisenstein 1995: 625).

[7] For more on Eisenstein's views on linguistics and literary theory, which shaped the semiotic universe of his life writing, see Yampolsky 1993 and Iampolski 2017.

This idea of difference lurking behind sameness is expanded to include even repetition, which produces new interpretations: 'All the rules governing refrains dictate that there must be a new light cast on the subsequent repetition—it must be interpreted differently' (Eisenstein 1995: 769). He develops this notion further in relation to the image of the mirror in decadent art, in which the reflection takes on a life of its own, as in Hanns Heinz Ewers and Paul Wegener's art film *Student of Prague* [Der Student von Prag, 1913] and in Oscar Wilde's prose poem 'The Disciple' (1894). He notes elsewhere that Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations for Wilde's *Salome* may be subjected to a completely different interpretation – as parody – upon reading of 'the hatred the two felt for one another' (Eisenstein 1995: 530).

Such associations, generated by the materiality or corporeality of words, played a prominent role in avantgarde literary movements of the early twentieth century, which celebrated the autonomous life of words once liberated from their subservience to semantic content or meaning. The Russian avantgarde poets Aleksei Kruchenykh and Velimir Khlebnikov expressed this in their concept of 'the word as such'. Connecting language with the somatic realm through sight and sound was seen as a way to escape the rational realm of verbal semantics to gain access to the irrational or pre-rational, described by the Russian Futurists as *zaum*, or beyond reason.[8] In fact, Eisenstein openly acknowledges his intellectual and artistic debt to the Futurists and, specifically, to their approach to language, in a short chapter titled 'Names':

> Somewhere, a very long time ago, Chukovsky very wittily defended the Futurists.
>
> He found the same abstract charm in their euphonious nonsense as we find in Longfellow's enumeration of Indian tribes. For us they too are utterly devoid of any sense and their charm lies *solely* [italics – B.J.B.] in the rhythm and phonetic features (in Hiawatha: 'Came Comanches…' etc).
>
> Sometimes, when I start remembering things, I lapse into an *utterly abstract* [italics – B.J.B.]

[8] The literary use of such associations reached its apotheosis, one could say, in James Joyce's masterpiece, the novel *Ulysses,* for which Eisenstein expressed enormous admiration in the memoir.

> chain of names and surnames (Eisenstein 1995: 119).

Such seemingly random associations – the memoir is also filled with 'chance' encounters – become central to Eisenstein's approach to writing his memoir, and to his artistic method in general, as he explains in the chapter 'Three Letters about Colour': 'Another motive prompted me from behind the scenes, which was to give myself a free rein and "throw out" on to the page the whole gamut of associations which spill out uncontrollably at the least provocation and sometimes apropos nothing at all' (Eisenstein 1995: 647). Some of these 'random' associations are quite frivolous, even absurdist, as when he connects Valerian Dovgalevskii, Plenipotentiary Representative of the Soviet Union in France, the English writer Rudyard Kipling, and the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche through their distinctive moustaches (Eisenstein 1995: 198), or Marx, Tolstoi, and the Austrian politician Engelbert Dollfuss through their height (Eisenstein 1995: 569).

Other associations, however, are used to more clearly parodic ends, as in the chapter titled 'The Christmas Tree', where he appears to mock the vulgar social determinism of some Soviet critics by drawing a connection between the paper chains on a Christmas tree and the chains used on doors to keep intruders out, noting that 'Burglars are heartily disliked in middle-class families. And this dislike is instilled in the children at a very early age' (Eisenstein 1995: 59). Later in the chapter, he mentions that on that Christmas he received François Mignet's *History of the French Revolution* [Histoire de la revolution française, 1824], a book that seems in 'complete dissonance' with the festive holiday setting. At this point he returns to the image of the chain, but now uses it metaphorically to question the very social determinism he had used it to illustrate above: 'Why this complete dissonance? It would be no easy task to reconstruct the entire chain, to say what planted in my curly head the desire to have precisely that book as a Christmas present' (Eisenstein 1995: 59). (Incidentally, Mignet was considered something of a determinist, presenting the Revolution as inevitable.) We see a similar associative train of thought from the literal to the figurative in 'The Twelve Apostles': 'The actual "flight" of steps led to the planning of the scene, and its upward flight set

my direction off on a new flight of fancy' (Eisenstein 1995: 173), suggesting this movement from the literal to the figurative and back again to be a key characteristic of creative thought or of 'a law characteristic of inventiveness as a whole' (Eisenstein 1995: 762).

In his memoiristic writings, Eisenstein insists, moreover, on the impossibility of ultimately 'untangling the knot of associations' (Eisenstein 1995: 743) and putting an end to these chains by reducing the associations to a single logical interpretation: 'Zabaglione defies linguistic analysis' (Eisenstein 1995: 45). In fact, he refers to the 'logic' connecting the various elements in an associative chain as 'magic' (Eisenstein 1995: 661) and 'very frequently irrational' (Eisenstein 1995: 409), noting too that the intuition driving those associations 'is not wholly reliable' (Eisenstein 1995: 328). This is especially true in the sexual realm, as Eisenstein elaborates in relation to the phenomenon of Don Juanism, where he questions the popular interpretation of the syndrome as 'unsuccessful attempts to find the one woman who is inaccessible' (Eisenstein 1995: 719):

> The chains of associations which enable one suddenly to substitute one being for another, purely on the strength of the similarity of a microscopic feature, or on the basis of a fleeting community to replace someone with somebody else – even sometimes to change to people around because of a barely noticeable trait – are complete mysteries (Eisenstein 1995: 719).

There is no ideal woman who will finally concentrate Don Juan's libido.

As with Don Juanism, many of the associative chains in Eisenstein's memoir appear to be driven by (latent?) sexual desire. Consider the short paragraph that follows Eisenstein's description of his first encounter with Freud's biography of da Vinci: 'As regards my sorties through the fantastic jungles of psychoanalysis, which (the sorties) were imbued with the powerful spirit of the original "lebeda" (as I disrespectfully alluded to the sacred impulse of libido) I shall write of them later' (Eisenstein 1995: 354–55). Eisenstein's substitution of *lebeda*, or saltbushes, for libido, may appear to be based on a chance phonic resemblance, but it may also express an association of libido with the male member, as the

Russian word *lebed'* refers to another birdie, a swan. Indeed, the popular motif of Leda and the swan in Renaissance art, including a well-known painting by da Vinci, has made the association of the long-necked bird with the male member a commonplace. Given the agglutinative capacity of symbols, however, Eisenstein's word play may also serve as a reference to Ivan Lebedev, a Russian athlete and circus performer, whose image circulated widely in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Russia (fig. 1). In the memoirs Eisenstein describes Lebedev, who was referred to as Uncle Vanya, as 'the legendary wrestling referee, and hero of my (and many others'!) childhood' (Eisenstein 1995: 669). In addition, Lebedev was the editor of men's fitness magazines, such as *Hercules* (fig. 2), which featured images of scantily clad male athletes. Eisenstein refers to the mythological Hercules several times in the memoirs, once in reference to the Austrian director Josef von Sternberg's 'predilection for well-built males [which] brought Sternberg some compensation. In Berlin, he even stayed at the Hercules Hotel, across the Hercules Bridge, opposite the Hercules Fountain with its huge grey statue of Hercules. ...' (Eisenstein 1995: 326), and elsewhere in referencing the myth of Hercules wrestling the Hydra (Eisenstein 1995: 613), an image that was often featured on the cover of Lebedev's fitness magazine (fig. 3) and that Eisenstein associates with the ancient Greek notion of sexual attraction as the search for one's other half, allegorized by Rabelais as the 'beast with two backs' (Eisenstein 1995: 485).

One might be accused of overreading Eisenstein's playful substitution of *lebeda* for *libido*, but doesn't his campy reference to the libido as 'sacred' encourage the reader to find something profane in *lebeda*? Indeed, the idea that such 'chance' linguistic associations could mean absolutely nothing is undercut when Eisenstein references psychanalyst Isidor Sadger's work on the sexual origins of word formations (Eisenstein 1995: 355, 599), suggesting a potential libidinal motivation behind any use of language.

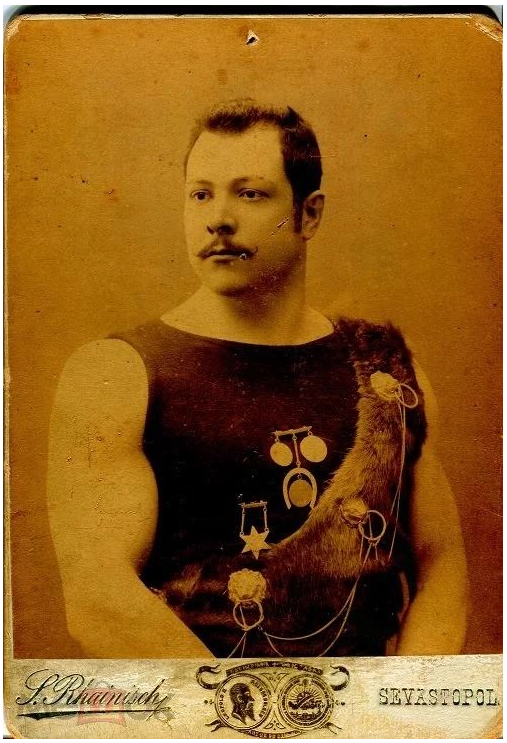

Figure I. Photograph of Ivan Lebedev.

Figure 2. Cover of a 1913 issue of Lebedev's journal *Gerkules*.

Figure 3. Image of Hercules wrestling the Hydra.

In addition to these men's fitness magazines, the illustrations in detective novels, which are built 'always and invariably [on] a double reading of the evidence' (Eisenstein 1995: 601), provided another rich source of homoerotic imagery for children of Eisenstein's generation. As Eisenstein notes, illustrations in Pinkerton detective novels often featured 'streams of sweat and torn shirts' (Eisenstein 1995: 401). It is therefore notable that Eisenstein attributes his first wet dream to a Nick Carter detective story (Eisenstein 1995: 542). In a later chapter, his interest in the 'inversion of opposites' extends to cross-dressing balls and bisexuality 'when it enters clearly

the area of ecstasy', as in the 'cast of mind of a saint' (Eisenstein 1995: 699). For Eisenstein, the state of ecstasy brings together mystical and sexual experience or allows for the substitution of the sexual for the religious and vice versa. We see a similar inversion or conflation of religion and sexuality in the figure of St Sebastian, whom Eisenstein mentions several times in the memoirs, and in his repeated juxtaposition of nuns and whores: 'But nobody should be shocked by so close an association between the holiest of maidens and women of easy virtue' (Eisenstein 1995: 211). As he notes elsewhere: 'It is worth taking the "fanaticism" out of religion: it can later be separated from the original object of worship, and be "displaced" to other passions …' (Eisenstein 1995: 73). It is interesting in this regard to consider a play on words deployed by Eisenstein as a retort to someone raising questions about his sexual orientation. Accused by Leonid Utesov of being a 'sexual mystic' [*polovoi mistik*], Eisenstein responds that it is better than being a 'shtetl waiter' [*mistichkovyi polovoi*], i.e., a waiter in a shtetl tavern, referencing Utesov's Jewish Odesa background (1995: 511). Based on the double meaning of the Russian word *polovoi* – the adjectival form of the noun *pol*, which can mean either 'floor' or 'biological sex', also functions as a substantivized adjective to mean 'waiter' – Eisenstein's pun offers an absurd diversion, a linguistic performance, in place of an admission or denial.

Eisenstein's often parodic exploration of potentially endless chains of meaning, connected by irrational phonic, graphic, or even visual resemblances, goes beyond the notion that one meaning can be substituted for another. Rather, it comes closer to the distinction made by Susan Sontag in her discussion of camp:

> The camp sensibility is one that is alive to a double sense in which some things can be taken. But this is not the familiar split-level construction of a literal meaning, on the one hand, and a symbolic meaning, on the other. It is the difference, rather, between the thing as meaning something, anything, and the thing as pure artifice (Sontag 1966: 283).

The promise of some definitive meaning dissolves in the wild performativity and artifice of Eisenstein's word play. The link

between the signifier and the signified is like the bridge over the Rio Grande River, 'that did not so much link the two banks—Mexico and America—together, as hold them apart' (Eisenstein 1995: 231).

Camp Talk, or The Art of Artifice

Artifice, or rather, the celebration of artifice, is perhaps the defining feature of a camp sensibility: 'its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration' (Sontag 1966: 277). As Susan Sontag elaborates in point number one of her 58-point essay 'Notes on "Camp"', 'Camp is a certain mode of aestheticization. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon' (Sontag 1966: 279), and later, in point 38: 'Camp is the consistently aesthetic experience of the world. It incarnates a victory of "style" over "content," "aesthetics" over "morality", of irony over tragedy' (Sontag 1966: 289).[9] One of the most pronounced elements of camp in Eisenstein's memoirs is the primacy of aesthetics over 'reality', although aesthetics here should not be understood as high art or as high art alone. Throughout the memoir, Eisenstein discusses works of elite and popular art and literature side by side, with equal sympathy and appreciation. In fact, it is that juxtaposition of high and low, of the sacred and profane, that constitutes an important aspect of Eisenstein's camp sensibility. And so, the opposition might be more generally expressed as one between the natural and the unnatural, as expressed in the opening lines of the chapter 'Encounters with Books', where Eisenstein replaces living creatures, symbols of the natural world, with books, which he anthropomorphizes:

> Birds fly to some saints: Francis of Assissi [*sic*].
> Beasts run to some legendary figures: Orpheus.
> Pigeons cluster around the old men of St. Mark's Square in Venice.
> A lion followed Androcles wherever he went.
> Books cluster around me.

[9] Sontag mentions Eisenstein in the essay, asserting that his films do not quite meet the standard of camp; she was, however, unable to consider the memoirs, which appeared in English translation only in 1995, nor the erotic drawings, which were published only in 1999. LaValley (2001: 58), on the other hand, uses the adjective 'camp' and 'campy' to describe the character of Vladimir in Eisenstein's film *Ivan the Terrible* [*Ivan groznyi*, 1944].

> They fly to me, run to me, cling to me.
> So long have I loved them: large and small, fat and slender, rare editions and cheap paperbacks, they cry out through their dustcovers, or are perhaps sunk in contemplations in a solid, leather skin, as if wearing soft slippers (Eisenstein 1995: 350).

He then describes himself as 'a latter-day St Sebastian, pierced by arrows flying from shelves' (Eisenstein 1995: 352).
Time and again Eisenstein describes moments in his life when he encountered the world through the lens of art or literature. In fact, he claims to have encountered sex first through books, specifically, through the rather risqué books he found hidden in the St Petersburg apartment of his mother, whom he describes as 'oversexed' (Eisenstein 1995: 425). Those books included the novels *Juliette* [Histoire de Juliette ou Les prospérités du vice, 1797] by the Marquis de Sade, *The Torture Garden* [Le Jardin des supplices, 1899], by Octave Mirbeau, and an illustrated edition of the novella *Venus in Furs* [Venus im Pelz, 1870], by Leopold de Sacher-Masoch. He also mentions having created an image of Mexico from books long before he visited the country (Eisenstein 1995: 11). This idea of life mediated by art is elaborated on a more theoretical level where he eschews any distinction between biographies and autobiographies per se and autobiographical fiction. In this way, Eisenstein frames his memoirs not as an unmediated and sincere outpouring of thoughts and memories, but as an aesthetic object, a self-consciously fashioned work of life writing that must find its place among other such works, that is, among the established conventions of the genre. For example, in the chapter 'A Christmas Tree', described above, he attempts to explain the innocent curly-headed boy's desire for Mignet's bloody *History of the French Revolution* by referencing literary influences, ending with an invocation of biographical conventions: 'Probably my reading Dumas, *Ange Pitou*, and *Joseph Balsamo* of course had long since enthralled this "impressionable little boy", to use a cliché from biographers' (Eisenstein 1995: 60). Indeed, many of the experiences recounted in the memoir are mediated by a discussion of linguistic norms ('The word "citadel" is now not so fashionable'), stylistic conventions ('For some reason, I converse with God in the

French style: He and I were on *vous* terms'), or by works of art or literature ('A jet of water four storeys high pumped out of the ground. It looked like a picture of a geyser in a geography book') (Eisenstein 1995: 94, 73, 84). The memoirs are thick with literary and artistic references, and even the most mundane objects are filtered through literary or artistic representation, as in the opening of the chapter 'Dvinski': 'On the subject of beds. World literature has two superlative pronouncements to make on this matter' (Eisenstein 1995: 138). In fact, many of the chapters are dedicated not to events from Eisenstein's life, but to encounters with works of art and literature, as in the chapters 'The Works of Daguerre', 'Museums at Night', 'Pages from Literature', 'Encounters with Books', 'Bookshops', 'Books on the Road', 'The History of the Close-up', '*Monsieur, madame et bébé*', and 'To the Illustrious Memory of the Marquis', the last chapter referring to the Marquis de Sade. It is in 'The History of the Close-up', however, that he overtly establishes the primacy of art over life and does so in a distinctly camp fashion. He opens the chapter with a description of a white lilac branch that 'spilled through the window into my bedroom' (Eisenstein 1995: 461). Calling it 'the first of my memories of childhood associations', he then reveals that the lilac branch was not 'real':

> So it was that my consciousness awoke beneath a spray of lilac.
> Then it began nodding off again, for very many years at a time, beneath that same branch.
> Only the branch was not real but drawn; half painted and half embroidered in silk and gold thread.
> And it was on a Japanese folding screen.
> I used to doze off looking at this branch (Eisenstein 1995: 461).

He then goes on to describe the image on the screen in luxurious detail. In doing so, he not only reveals his first impression of nature to be artifice—'Nothing in nature can be campy' (Sontag 1966: 3) or, as Wilde put it in 'The Decay of Lying', 'The more we study Art, the less we care for Nature' (Sontag 1966: 3)—he also displays a camp affinity for decorative art, 'emphasizing texture, sensuous surface and style at the expense of content' (Sontag 1966: 280). But Eisenstein then short-circuits any lofty aesthetic pretensions by noting that the screen was damaged when

someone put a chair through it, and so it was taken away. This act of deflation distinguishes Eisenstein's camp from what Sontag describes as 'naïve, or pure camp', which is characterized by an essential seriousness that fails (Sontag 1966: 285). Eisenstein manages to 'dethrone the serious' in this case not from within but from the side, in orchestrating the *mise-en-scène*.

Not surprisingly, his camp take on art as artifice is especially evident in his comments on museums, where the perception of works of art (already mediated representations of 'reality' or 'real' experience) is itself mediated. First, because we have often seen reproductions of great works in books or on postcards before we see the 'real' thing, and, second, because museum guides mediate the experience in such a way as to leave the museum visitor 'blind': 'These unattractive ladies with dried-out hearts and flat, jumper-covered chests ensure that the visitor's perception of the picture is not spontaneous but spoilt by tedious analysis and dull-witted conclusions' (Eisenstein 1995: 307). Elsewhere, he offers a humorous comparison of art galleries to whorehouses (Eisenstein 1995: 365).

Camp Talk, or the Queer Art of Citation

Sociolinguist Keith Harvey elaborates on the relationship between camp and citation, to which Sontag alludes in the statement 'Camp sees everything in quotation marks' (Sontag 1966: 281). While describing citationality as 'a general take on linguistic semiosis' that encompasses 'the very notion of an act of enunciation—and treats *this* ironically' (Harvey 2002: 1147), Harvey goes on to argue that 'a particular type of allusiveness and manipulation of "quotation"' is deployed in camp 'to bind queer interlocutors' (Harvey 2002: 1149). That binding, Sontag argues, is achieved through 'flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation; gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders' (Sontag 1966: 283). In Harvey's terms, insiders can discern a statement as a quotation, while outsiders interpret the statements straight, so to speak, without quotation marks. Harvey goes on to distinguish three types of camp citationality, all three of which can be found in Eisenstein's memoirs. They involve citations of (a) the medium, (b) cultural artefacts, and (c) femininity.

In regard to citations that draw attention to the medium itself, word play has been discussed at length above, but one could add Eisenstein's discussion of etymology, tautology, palindromes, pronunciation, and handwriting styles, his liberal use of foreign words and slang, as well as quotation marks, and his interest in intersemiotic translation. It should also be noted that Eisenstein digresses on the topic of quotations itself, acknowledging his fascination with them as a distinct form of communication:

> Quotations differ. A dogmatist may use a quotation from an authority as a shield, for him to hide his ignorance or well-being behind. Quotations may be lifeless compilations. I see quotations as outrunners on either side of a galloping shafthorse. Sometimes they go too far, but they help one's imagination bowl along two distinct paths, supported by the parallel race. [...] I have quotations. Not enough of them. I would like to make a montage of the fragments discovered by others, but for a different purpose—mine! (Eisenstein 1995: 353-54).

Regarding citations of cultural artefacts, Eisenstein makes repeated references to what by mid-century belonged to a gay subcultural canon of literary and artistic artefacts and cultural figures. For example: '... And even my meeting with Victor Basch did have something aesthetically exciting about it, such as one might experience on meeting Mary Stuart's executioner, or the heroine of Shakespeare's sonnets, or the spy whose reports denounced Christopher Marlowe' (Eisenstein 1995: 222). The use of 'aesthetically' is clearly ironic—what aesthetic value could there be in meeting Mary Stuart's executioner or Marlowe's accuser? Moreover, Oscar Wilde had suggested in 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.' that the heroine of Shakespeare's sonnets was in fact a hero, the actor Willy Hughes, something of which Eisenstein as an admirer of Wilde was very likely aware, while the English playwright Christopher Marlowe was accused by Richard Baines of being an 'Atheist' with too much love for 'Tobacco & Boies [boys]'. These queer subtexts, which Eisenstein indexes with the campy phrase aesthetic excitement, demonstrate how camp 'incarnates a victory of "style" over "content," "aesthetics" over "morality", of irony

over tragedy' (Sontag 1966: 289), as does his association of divorce and suicide as 'modish' (Eisenstein 1995: 99).

Later, in the same chapter, Eisenstein mentions a scandalous event in a French theatre during a performance of Jean Cocteau's monodrama *The Human Voice* [La Voix humaine, 1930], which involves an actress onstage having a phone conversation with someone offstage. At one point, Cocteau's avowed enemy, the Surrealist poet Paul Éluard shouted out to the actress: 'Who are you talking to? Monsieur Desbordes?' Eisenstein describes this as a two-pronged insult, again campily combining the sacred and the profane: 'First, insulting the tradition of the sacred walls of France's leading theatre. And second, a direct attack on the author—a hint at his all-too-well known proclivities; in this case his name was linked with a young Monsieur Desbordes, a rising novelist' (Eisenstein 1995: 247). Jean Desbordes was Cocteau's lover, a fact that neither did much to conceal: they lived together in the mid-1920s, Cocteau provided the preface to Desbordes's poetic essay *I Adore* [J'adore, 1928] which was a kind of love letter to Cocteau, and Desbordes was the subject of numerous drawings by the artist. And so, Éluard's insult may have been directed at Cocteau's homosexuality or at the openness with which Cocteau and Desbordes carried on their relationship.

The memoirs also contain more encrypted references to works of art and literature that had become canonical in the modern gay subcultures of western Europe and the Americas. In the visual realm, he references the sexually suggestive, often androgynous illustrations of Aubrey Beardsley and in particular his illustrations for Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, and homoerotic works of Renaissance art, such as *The Rape of Ganymede*, *Prometheus and the Eagle*, and *St Sebastian* (Eisenstein 1995: 310, 583, 352). The latter two, Eisenstein notes, were subjects of consistent interest: 'St Sebastian often crops up in drawing I do almost automatically'; 'Prometheus and the Eagle always returns to my pen' (1995: 532, 583).

The literary references that allude to an emerging queer literary canon include Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Marcel Proust. In regard to Whitman, Eisenstein references his work nursing wounded soldiers during the American Civil War, mentioning the fact that Whitman would often kiss the soldiers 'on the lips': 'The kindly, grizzled poet Walt Whitman

used to visit the wounded and dying. He would bring them comfort and tobacco. Kiss them on the lips. Sometimes more than once' (Eisenstein 1995: 319). He ends the passage by stating that he did not do the same when nursing Russian soldiers during the Civil War: 'I did not kiss anyone on the lips' (Eisenstein 1995: 319). He mentions Whitman's nursing of soldiers again in the chapter on daguerreotypes: 'These [soldiers] have been so ruthlessly and touchingly described in the pages of notes and diaries of the "great, grizzled poet", Whitman, who eased the last moments for several dozens of them in Washington hospitals…' (Eisenstein 1995: 296). Note the use of ellipses, which appear elsewhere in the memoirs to imply a sexual referent (see the passage on the chastity belt quoted below). It is also interesting that one of the only other references to kissing in the memoirs is gender neutral and specifically mentions lips: 'When I kiss a pair of lips, new, unfamiliar, for the first time, I am already thinking of how the farewell kiss will rest upon them' (Eisenstein 1955: 7), thus associating himself with Whitman or, at least, not foreclosing such an association. Moreover, such use of metonymy (in this case, having lips refer to a person) to avoid gender designations was a central feature of queer Russian poetry and perfected in the work of Aleksei Apukhtin, a poet of the late nineteenth century, often referred to as the Russian Wilde (see Baer 2017).

In regard to Melville, who is mentioned several times in the memoirs, Eisenstein references arguably the most libidinously charged homoerotic passage from *Moby Dick,* but does so elliptically: 'As Herman Melville puts it so well in *Moby Dick*… for I believe that much of a man's character will be found betokened in his backbone. I would rather feel your spine than your skull, whoever you are…" (from the chapter about the actual extraction of spermaceti from a whale's head)' (Eisenstein 1995: 504). This chapter, 'A Squeeze of the Hand' is described by Marc Démont (Démont 2018: 163) as 'particularly queer'. The shortened form of spermaceti, sperm, is used eight times in a passage where Ishmael 'discovers "an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling" for his male companions and sailors while together they squeeze lumps of sperm' (Démont 2018: 163–64, citing Melville 2002: 323). Regarding Proust, Eisenstein describes Vicomte Étienne de Baumont as Monsieur Charlus,

Proust's famous homosexual dandy (Eisenstein 1995: 229).

Harvey's third category deals with parodic citations of femininity, which occur at various moments in Eisenstein's memoirs, both in describing figures who appear themselves to be camp and in Eisenstein's own camp performance. Two notable examples of the former involve the actress Yvette Guilbert and the socialite Madame de Mandrot. About the former, Eisenstein writes: 'Madame was in despair. She had a cold. But for that, she would have sung her entire repertoire for me. [...] My visit, if not a matinée recital, was undoubtedly dramatic. An auburn wig. Self-important. Inordinately expressive. Exaggerated tread. Everything was trumpeted in a declamatory style ill-suited to conversation. *Après midi*—a continuous performance' (Eisenstein 1995: 261). About Madame de Mandrot: 'The *"belle chatelaine"*, as we always called her, was not at all indifferent to the Soviet delegation. As she said her farewells, she told us tragically: "Ah, Bolsheviks! Bolsheviks—you are the only true gentlemen!"' (Eisenstein 1995: 340).

Of course, it is difficult to neatly separate Eisenstein's own camp performance from his descriptions of these camp figures as their campiness bleeds into his writing through *style indirect libre*. In any case, Eisenstein's more autonomous citations of femininity are evident in a number of stylistic mannerisms. First, we see it in his extravagant or exaggerated expressions of emotion, which are typically addressed to authors, artists, or works of art, never to women: 'I was to worship him all my life'; 'And *Dieu sait* I adored her repertoire'; '[my] mad attraction for Lawrence' ; and 'a sixteenth-century engraving I had fallen in love with' (Eisenstein 1995: 263, 261, 360, 439). Second, it is evident in a comic or mock prudery in relation to sexual matters, indexed by such French expressions as '*un peu risqué*' or '*bouche bée*', and by coy sexual references, such as referring to de Sade's *Justine* as an 'unorthodox breviary' or a whorehouse as a 'den of iniquity' (Eisenstein 1995: 495, 360, 517, 379). We see it too in the following elliptical descriptions of a chastity belt, a codpiece and a death erection, respectively: 'This idiosyncratic saddle, an iron "wait for me", assured the ladies' inviolability while their lords spent long years on the arid sands of the Holy Land, on military expeditions... Mischievous tales from the past tell of duplicate keys...'; 'Everyone knows that in those days knights donned each iron

legging separately. Between them was another separate, small (though not always) steel shield, which stuck impudently out from under the steel opening, in the lower position of the knight's abdomen'; 'Villa, who ordered the prisoners to be hanged naked so that he and his soldiers could be entertained by the sight of their last physiological reactions, peculiar to hanged men' (Eisenstein 1995: 308, 315, 420).

Note the double use of ellipses in his description of the chastity belt, used in the first instance to suggest that the knights may have strayed while wifeless in the Holy Land, and in the second instance, to suggest that the wives may have found ways to circumvent the contraption.

Finally, Harvey notes that another particular way to index femininity in camp discourse is through a nuanced appreciation of colour, or rather, shades of colour, citing the following example from Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991):

> BELIZE [. . .] Oh cheer up, Louis. Look at that heavy sky out there. . .
> LOUIS Purple.
> BELIZE Purple? Boy, what kind of homosexual are you, anyway? That's not purple, Mary, that colour up there is (*Very grand.)* mauve (quoted in Harvey 2002: 1152).

While Eisenstein discusses colour throughout the memoirs as a basis for associative chains, there is one particularly camp use of colour that appears somewhat incongruently at the end of a lightly homoerotic description of men in chains on the cover of a Nick Carter detective novel:

> It showed an underground part full of various implements of torture. Collars were chained to the walls.
> Each collar gripped tightly the neck of a young man who was stripped to the waist.
> They all had well-groomed hair with a parting.
> And their one item of clothing—their trousers—were perfectly creased.
> The cover was pale lilac (Eisenstein 1995: 536).

Conclusion

Reading Eisenstein's diary as an elaborate work of camp offers an alternative to the reductive hermeneutic lenses of either the state censor or the closet. Eisenstein himself offers glimpses of that alternative throughout the memoirs, as in the following

passage, which he cites from Stuart Gilbert's biography of James Joyce in regard to some draft pages of *Ulysses* sent by mail to a friend:

> So curious is the language of this episode that, when it was sent by the author from Switzerland to England during the Great War, the Censor held it up, suspecting that it was written in some secret code. Two English writers (it is said) examined the work, and came to the conclusion that it was not 'code' but literature of some unknown kind (quoted in Eisenstein 1995: 665).

Eisenstein's camp sensibility, I would argue, undermines a reading of the memoir as merely 'coded'—the effect of the censor or the closet—encouraging us to see it instead as a literature of some unknown kind: a work of queer life writing that melds decadent writing and avant-garde experimentation, high and low cultural references, and campy asides next to serious theoretical reflections, ultimately queering the distinction between living and life writing and endlessly deferring any ultimate confessional truth.

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Kadence Leung

Poetic coming-out, (un)masking or 'autofictional poetry'? Valerii Pereleshin's *Ariel* and *Poem without a Subject*

Recent critical interest in queer life writing places much emphasis on prose, instead of poetry, as a medium to express one's sexual nonconformity. This is no less the case in the Russian context, as poetic life writing by queer writers remains on the margins of literary criticism. While Olga Bakich begins her biography of Valerii Pereleshin (1913-1992) by referring to the poet as a 'Russian émigré gay poet', there has been meagre attention on his queer life writing, despite growing scholarly interest in his works as a Russian émigré writer in China and Brazil.

This article explores two poetic works which are considered the poet's first self-referential expression of same-sex love in his poetry: *Ariel* (composed 1971-1975; published 1976), a collection of sonnets, which is Pereleshin's 'lyrical diary' of his fantasized love for a Soviet translator, editor, and writer in Moscow, and *Poem without a Subject* (composed 1972-1976; published 1989), an autobiographical account of the poet's life as an émigré writer, as well as his struggles as one whose sexuality is considered 'deviant' in a heteronormative society. I explore the poetics of masking and unmasking in the representation of same-sex love in *Ariel* through an examination of Pereleshin's appropriation of Shakespeare's sonnets, with which he develops his own 'autofictional' poetry, a genre that enables him to express his passions through the intertwining of factual and fictional elements. My analysis of *Poem without a Subject* focuses on Pereleshin's attempt to present his multifaceted literary and sexual life in the classical Russian tradition through the use of Pushkin's Onegin stanza. Ultimately, I call attention to the limitations of reading Pereleshin's poetic life writing as a coming-out text, and examine strategies employed by the poet, mindful of the challenges in expressing sexual otherness in Russian literature and the threat of literary censorship, to develop his own version of queer life writing.

As more and more life writing genres or subgenres challenge Philippe Lejeune's 'autobiographical pact', which assumes the unproblematic identity of the author, narrator, and protagonist in autobiography, increasing attention has been given to the way writers sought to express queerness in experimental forms of life writing. Max Saunders argues that 'auto/biografiction's masquerades include gender masquerades, making it a mode

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attractive to writers wanting to queer their picture' (Saunders 2010: 23). This 'queering' of the self-referential 'I' resonates with the call for a rereading of poetry through the lens of life writing studies (Gill et al. 2009: 5).

The delayed inclusion of poetry as a form of life writing can be attributed to the nature of lyrical poetry, which privileges and problematizes the association of the lyrical 'I' with its author: 'the lyric "I" [...] asks us to accept the *possibility* that the "I" is autobiographically referential while simultaneously insisting that it need not be. It sets a trap that we, as readers, seem to enjoy falling into' (Gill et al. 2009: 3).

Paul Hetherington compares the tactic of autobiographical and confessional poets to a ruse, first citing the definition of 'ruse' in the Oxford English Dictionary: 'a ruse is a "detour; a doubling or turning" (Little, Fowler and Coulson 1973: 1866) and if a hunted animal employs such strategies in trying to escape dogs, poets arguably employ similar strategies in order to resist or escape "the pressure of reality"' (Hetherington 2013: 20). The ambivalence of the poet/speaker/protagonist relationship in poetry allows it to be perceived as a ruse, offering space for play and masking/unmasking that straddles fiction and reality, which has particular implications for queer expression.

This article examines two poetic works by Russian émigré translator and writer Valerii Pereleshin (Valerii Frantsevich Salatko-Petrishche, 1913-1992). Born in Irkutsk, Pereleshin migrated to the Russified city of Harbin at the age of seven. He studied at the YMCA Gymnasium in Harbin, where he learned English and other subjects following a pre-revolutionary Russian curriculum, and undertook formal study of Chinese in the Oriental Department of the Faculty of Law. Pereleshin was an active member of Russian literary groups in Harbin and Shanghai and is considered one of the most prominent Russian émigré writers in China. Having lived in China for over thirty years, he settled in Brazil in 1953 after a failed attempt to migrate to America. Following a ten-year poetic silence (1958-1967), he became especially productive in the 1970s. Pereleshin translated profusely into Russian from Chinese, English, and Portuguese. His translation of English poetry includes works by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Donne, and six sonnets from *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1609). He also published

translations of classical Chinese poetry and Portuguese poetry, as well as a collection of original poetry written in Portuguese *In Old Wineskins* [Nos odres velhos, 1983].

In his early lyrical works, often perceived as autobiographical, Pereleshin maintains a cryptic and euphemistic tone on the theme of same-sex love. However, his poetic breakthrough took place with the writing of *Ariel* [Ariel', composed 1971-1975; published 1976] and *Poem without a Subject* [Poema bez predmeta, composed 1972-1976; published in full in 1989]. These are the first two works in which he openly discusses same-sex love and makes explicit references to himself as well as his 'beloved' or lovers. *Ariel* is a collection of sonnets about Pereleshin's fantasized love, which he repeatedly referred to as his 'lyrical diary' (Bakich 2015: 210; Vitkovskii 2013: 26). *Poem without a Subject* is a poetic memoir written in Onegin stanzas, which documents Pereleshin's émigré life and which is interspersed with episodes from his romantic encounters and personal thoughts on politics, literature, and sexuality.

In 1977, writing within the context of the post-Stonewall civil rights movement, Simon Karlinsky reads *Ariel* and *Poem without a Subject* as Pereleshin's 'full-fledged literary coming out' (Karlinsky 2013: 303). Characterizing Pereleshin's poetry as an act of 'coming out' associates his works with late twentieth-century coming-out novels and gay autobiography in the Western world, such as *Under the Rainbow: Growing Up Gay* (1977) by Arnie Kantrowitz and *A Boy's Own Story* (1982) by Edmund White, which often take the form of *Bildungsromane* that 'have their roots firmly in identity politics' (Saxey 2008: 6). However, a close study of Pereleshin's poetry reveals that his poetics is far removed from the developmental and teleological mode of coming-out narratives, many of which focus on the protagonist or autobiographer's discovery of sexual identity, painful experiences, and the decision to come out of the closet. Imposing a Western notion of homosexuality and American gay politics onto a Russian text, Karlinsky's comment coincides with the prevalence of 'universalizing pretensions of the US gay rights model' (Baer 2021: 14), as seen in anthologies of gay literature, including *Out of the Blue* (Pereleshin 1997), where the

English translation of Pereleshin's poems appears.[1]

Taking Lee Edelman's understanding of 'queer' as those 'stigmatized for failing to comply with heteronormative mandates' (Edelman 2004: 17), this study analyses *Ariel* and *Poem without a Subject* as Pereleshin's queer life writing with respect to his rejection and questioning of heteronormativity as well as the obligation to procreate. The following discusses *Ariel* with reference to the tradition of the sonnet form and its relationship with life writing, reading Pereleshin's work as a form of 'autofictional' poetic ruse, and examines how Aleksandr Pushkin's digressive form allows Pereleshin to include episodes of same-sex encounters in his poetic memoir. The poetic dialogue with Shakespeare and Pushkin, as well as the use of autofictional style and authorial digressions, enable Pereleshin to develop his queer poetic life writing, a personal response to heteronormativity which is vastly different from Western coming-out narratives.

Ariel – a poetic coming out?

Ariel was inspired by the correspondence between Pereleshin and Evgenii Vitkovskii, a literary editor, translator, and writer living in Moscow. The correspondence sparked the exiled poet's full-blown infatuation with the Moscow writer, resulting in the diary-like collection of sonnets, in which Pereleshin pours out his longing, passion, frustration, and jealousy, despite the fact that the two never met in person. Karlinsky contextualizes *Ariel* thus within the history of Soviet repression of homosexuality: 'Like most gay men in the Soviet Union, Vitkovsky was married [...] His family, consisting of himself, his mother, his wife, and his small son, is typical [...] of the living arrangements of gay men in the Soviet Union' (Karlinsky 2013: 304).

[1] Karlinsky played a major role in the publication of Pereleshin's homoerotic poetry in America from the seventies onwards. Pereleshin's poetry (translated into English by Karlinksy) appears in *Gay Sunshine* and other publications of Gay Sunshine Press as a result of Karlinsky's introduction of Pereleshin to the editor Winston Leyland. In 1989, at his own expense, Karlinsky published the entire *Poem without a Subject* with his detailed introduction and analysis. *Out of the Blue*, which was published by Gay Sunshine Press in 1997, contains Karlinksy's introductory essay 'Russia's Gay Literature and History' and several of Pereleshin's poetry (including selections from *Ariel*) translated into English by Karlinsky and Vitaly Chernetsky.

This positioning of *Ariel* is problematic for two reasons. First, Karlinsky's comment distorts Vitkovskii's sexual identity by conflating his real life and his role as a character in *Ariel*. Vitkovskii repeatedly stressed that he was the 'object of this almost frantic passion' (Vitkovskii 2013: 4), and the poet-persona in *Ariel* is equally aware that his infatuation is a self-deception [samoobman] (Pereleshin 1976: 10).[2]

Second, this interpellation of Pereleshin as a gay writer also requires clarification. Having spent most of his formative years among Russian émigrés in China and being acquainted with the founder of the American *Gay Sunshine Press* Winston Leyland only in 1977, Pereleshin does not refer to same-sex love in his writing with Russian slang such as light blue [goluboi] or English terminology, like 'gay' and 'queer', terms that were borrowed and popularized in Russia only from the 1990s (Baer 2018: 43, 47; Kon 2003: 14).[3] Instead, Pereleshin refers to his sexuality as 'left-handedness' [levshizna] – 'My left-handedness, of course, were understood by many in China' (letter to Vitkovskii, 21 July 1978, cited by Vitkovskii 2018: 560). In his letters to Gleb Struve, he mentions that 'left-handedness' expresses 'the essence better than all kinds of pejorative terms like the English *queer* and *gay*' (5 September 1981, cited by Bakich 2015: 215). He 'would not have objected to *homosexual* if it was equivalent to *heterosexual* [Eng.]' (3 March 1978, cited by Bakich 2015: 215). Even in the poem 'To the One Who Confessed' [Priznavshemusia, 1977], which serves as a dedication to Winston Leyland, Pereleshin refers to *Gay Sunshine* as 'Left-handed light' [Levshinskii svet], implying his preference for the term 'left-handedness' in his Russian writing. Although this figuration of his sexuality might be deemed 'essentialist', his understanding is based on one's deviation from the 'norm', which is not dissimilar to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's understanding of 'queer' as an 'open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically' (Sedgwick 1993: 8).

[2] Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

[3] According to Igor' Kon, the etymology of the use of 'blues' [golubye] to refer to homosexuals has not been fully studied, though one of the popular theories traces its usage to prison slang in the 1950s. (Kon 2003: 11).

Pereleshin's use of 'left-handedness' as an image in his poetry reveals his positioning in a heteronormative society where the 'right-handed' regulate and persecute those who are considered 'deviant'.

The representation of Pereleshin's poetry as his literary coming-out ignores the poetic ruse that he employs in *Ariel*. The title of the collection refers to Shakespeare's dainty, tricksy spirit in *The Tempest* (1623) and represents the opposition between the world of flesh and spirit. Rather than seeing *Ariel* as Pereleshin's coming-out text, I analyse his modelling of the collection after Shakespeare's sonnets, as he reformulates concepts of love, marriage, sexuality, and writing put forward in Shakespeare's 'procreation sonnets'.

The sonnet and the writing of self

To understand Pereleshin's interplay of the autobiographical and fictional in *Ariel*, one must first examine its relationship with Dante, Petrarch, and Shakespeare's sonnets. Dante's *New Life* [Vita Nuova, 1294] and Petrarch's *Song Book (Fragments in the Vernacular)* [Il Canzoniere (Rerum vulgarium fragmenta), 1470] were 'conceived in the shadow of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, as well as in the aftermath of the vast phenomenon of medieval autobiographism' (Mazzotta 1998: 183). In *New Life*, 25 sonnets and six other poems are framed within an autobiographical prose narrative of Dante's encounters and obsession with Beatrice. Similarly, the sonnets in Petrarch's *Song Book* are marked by the author's 'autoreflexive poetics' (Freccero 1975: 38). The lyrical 'I' of the sonnets – the poet-persona – builds the impression of an almost indistinguishable identity between persona and author, resulting in an inclination to perceive the sonnets as the poet's personal expression.

Shakespeare's sonnets transpose and complicate the traditional sonnet form by replacing the idealized female muse with an 'aristocratic, transgendered male version of the *donna angelica*' and a dark lady who differs significantly from the image of Beatrice and Laura (Cousins 2018: 256).[4] Moreover, in the sonnets, the

[4] By 'transgendered' Cousins refers to the reconfiguration of the 'donna angelica' motif in the *fin'amor* [courtly love] tradition by sonnet writers such as Michelangelo and Shakespeare, whose speakers express homoerotic desire.

enigma that revolves around the identities of the speaker and addressees are made complex through the dedication to 'Mr. W.H.' and Shakespeare's playful treatment of the word/name 'Will'. Peter Hühn talks about the work's 'factual-fictional ambivalence', making critics 'grapple with possible factual references in the *Sonnets* but refrain from identifying them because they are impossible to verify' (Hühn 2014: 163). I interpret this ambivalence between the autobiographical and fictional as a ruse, a game employed by the author, which provides the model for Pereleshin's queer expression in *Ariel*.

Structurally, *Ariel* evokes Shakespeare's sonnets. The collection consists of 153 sonnets plus a crown sonnet 'Link' [Zveno], which consists of 14 sonnets and a master sonnet. The number of sonnets almost reaches Shakespeare's 154, though most sonnets are written in Petrarchan form.

Pereleshin probably reads Shakespeare's *Sonnets* as the Bard's autobiographical writing, interpreting 'Mr. W.H.' to be the actor Willie Hughes, a claim popularized by Oscar Wilde's fictional text *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* (1889). In *Ariel*, Pereleshin characterizes himself as the poet-persona (Dante/Petrarch/Shakespeare) and portrays Evgenii Vitkovskii as a Beatrice/Laura/Willie Hughes figure in panegyric mode:

> The girl next door Portinari
> Dante housed in a grand paradise,
> But his insipid wife
> He left alone in the bazaar of life.
> [...]
> And here I am without a home, without a wife
> I converted persistent dreams into flesh,
> And you came into being as stellar Beatrice ('Sonet obidy', Pereleshin 1976: 141)

> Соседскую девчурку Портинари
> Дант поселил в торжественном раю,
> Зато жену бесцветную свою
> Забыл одну на жизненном базаре.
> [...]
> Вот так и я без дома, без жены
> В плоть претворил настойчивые сны,
> И ты возник надзвездным Беатричем,

> Here I am – Shakespeare of the second Elizabeth,

> And you – a different Willie Hughes who has seen the light. ('Parallely', Pereleshin 1976: 15)
>
> Вот я — Шекспир второй Елизаветы,
> А ты — другой, прозревший Вилли Хьюз.

The 'enlightened' Willie Hughes implies the role of the poet-speaker as an older 'mentor', educating the youth in literature as well as matters of love, which may also suggest a sexual awakening.

Pereleshin pays tribute to Petrarch and Shakespeare in the twentieth sonnet in *Ariel*. Though the sonnets in *Ariel* are not numbered, thematically the sonnet echoes Shakespeare's Sonnet 20, in which the poet-persona openly expresses his admiration of the feminine beauty of the male addressee, whom Nature by 'adding one thing to my purpose nothing' (Shakespeare 2014: 151) assigns to be a man. Shakespeare's 'master mistress of my passion' (Shakespeare 2014: 151) anticipates Pereleshin's Evgenii in *Ariel* – a womanly [zhenstvennym], compound male-female figure: Pereleshin's neologisms *zhenomuzh* and *muzhedeva*, which Vitaly Chernetsky translates as 'wife's husband' and 'maiden-man' (Pereleshin 1997: 191), have further translation possibilities as Pereleshin plays on the words *muzh* [husband], *deva* [maiden], *zhena* [wife], and *Zhenia* [the diminutive form of Evgenii]. The poem also plays on the contrasts between masculine and feminine forms; thus, 'Zhenia' (with a feminine ending) is preferable to the masculine 'Evgenii':

> By Evgenii of the legends and Januaries?
> No, I am bewitched by the womanly Zhenia:
> I am sick by him to the point of dizziness,
> And fits are more often and acute.
>
> I think: won't it be smarter to run from jealousy and humiliations?
> But from spasms and burning sensations will
> seven hundred lakes and seven seas hide?
>
> After all even there, excited and disturbed,
> In spite of the vultures of the customs offices,
> You will appear with strings, loving,
>
> both a wife's husband and secretly a man-maiden:

Let us be loved and let them listen to you
The Ghent of geniuses and snowy Geneva! ('Zhenia', Pereleshin 1976: 28)

Ев*ген*ием легенд и *ген*варей?
Нет, *жен*ственным я околдован *Жене*й:
Я болен им до головокру*жени*й,
И приступы все чаще и острей.

Я думаю: не будет ли хитрей
От ревности бежать и уни*жени*й?
Но спрячут ли от судорог и ж*жени*й
Семьсот озер и семьдесят морей?

Ведь даже там, взволнован и встревожен,
Наперекор стервятникам таможен,
Со струнами предстанешь ты, любя,

И *жено*муж, и втайне мужедева:
Пусть любят нас и слушают тебя
*Ген*т *ген*иев и с*неж*ная Женева! [emphases – K.L.]

The play on words that contains the syllables *gen* from 'Evgenii' and *zhen*, from Zhenia, or wife [zhena] resembles Shakespeare's punning on 'Will', as in Sonnet 135. It also recalls the fifth poem in Petrarch's *Song Book*, as the poet-persona spells out Laura's name with the repetition of LAU, RE, TA, which suggests the name Lauretta (Petrarch 1996: 6).
Petrarch's veiling of the identity of Laura and Shakespeare's playful treatment of names both depart from Dante's autobiographical *New Life*, but Pereleshin's use of personal names and dates in *Ariel* renders it an example of poetic life writing. The collection opens with an acrostic that spells out a close variant of the name 'V-I-T-K-O-V-S-K-I-I' (the last letter of the name 'й' [ĭ] is changed to 'и' [i]). The name of Evgenii's son, his first wife and a future younger son who would be named after him (Valerii the second) are also mentioned in the sonnets. Pereleshin himself imagines Evgenii as his twin brother ('Evgenii was brother to Valerii' [A bratom byl Valeriiu Evgenii], Pereleshin 1976: 12), thereby inserting his own name into the collection. Notably, the sonnets are all dated from 20 April 1971 to 29 October 1975, giving the impression that *Ariel* documents the poet's infatuation and emotional turmoil as a result of his correspondence with Evgenii Vitkovskii. These episodes of

vacillating emotions present a loose narrative that begins with the poet's desire to guide Evgenii to be his literary successor, which quickly transforms into passionate love, punctuated by scenes of longing and outbursts, as well as ruminations on literature. In the final part (sonnets 137-153), the poet-persona records his near emotional breakdown and eventual sobering up after discovering Evgenii's 'betrayal' – that he left his wife for another woman.

'Autofictional' poetry as a ruse

What is the relationship between the autobiographical and the fictional in *Ariel*? In what sense does Pereleshin's appropriation of the sonnet form demonstrate the interplay between censorship and poetic licence?

To answer these questions, it is useful to examine discussions over autofiction, a subgenre of life writing. The term autofiction, believed to be coined by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977, refers to life writing that contradicts Lejeune's 'autobiographical pact'. Jacques Lecarme defines autofiction as a narrative whose 'author, narrator and protagonist share the same nominal identity and whose generic title indicates that it is a novel' (Lecarme 1993: 227) which blurs the line between the factual and fictional. Doubrovsky and Lecarme's arguments reveal problems with the linear, confession-based autobiographical narratives, which do not apply to 'ex-centric' writers 'who either cannot or choose not to produce a coherent, teleological narrative' (Bloom 2019: 11). For these 'ex-centric' writers, including queer writers, the fictionalization of self offers a way out of the double conundrum that faces gay autobiography: the author's responsibility, which poses ethical questions over the revelation of identities of those related to the author, and a predictable, teleological reading, which follows 'a clear pattern of change: from a secretive world to a public one; from a private world to a participatory one: from a shameful world to a proud one' (Plummer 1995: 108).

Notwithstanding Doubrovsky and Lecarme's focus on prose, their discussion sheds light on a similar approach in poetry. Hetherington discusses how poets use the strategy of poetic ruse to create an 'imposture or masquerade', giving the example of Anne Sexton: 'Instead of revealing herself, Sexton speaks from behind the mask of "confessional poet", and uses this mask as a way of saying many apparently "true" things about language and reality

while distorting the literal truth of what she says in whatever ways suit her purposes' (Hetherington 2013: 27). In a similar vein, Pereleshin's poetic representation and invention of self in *Ariel* is arguably his 'autofictional poetry', which can be read as a ruse: a 'necessary artifice; as a way out of difficulties' (Hetherington 2013: 20). In 'Judgment' [Sud] the poet-persona imagines being judged by Girolamo Savonarola, the fifteenth-century Dominican friar of Florence, whose controversial laws against sodomy and 'bonfire of the vanities' made him a symbol of hostility towards same-sex relationships:

> History will end with judgment:
> From the dusky Sheol will rise
> The merciless monk Savonarola
> To judge Paris, Pompeii and Sodom.
>
> Then we, also humbled by shame,
> Will pay our debts to the last obol,
> Cluttering up the foot of the throne
> With our longing, love and labour.
>
> Then will burn, in order to smoulder forever,
> Basilicas, palaces, libraries –
> Food for the grumbling fire.
>
> How shall we answer then
> For the music, for impassioned sonnets?
> Even I won't be able to preserve your poems. ('Sud', Pereleshin 1976: 30)

> История закончится судом:
> Поднимется из тусклого шеола
> Безжалостный монах Савонарола
> Судить Париж, Помпеи и Содом.
>
> Тогда и мы, принижены стыдом,
> Свои долги заплатим до обола,
> Загромоздив подножие престола
> Своей тоской, любовью и трудом.
>
> Тогда сгорят, чтоб дотлевать вовеки,
> Базилики, дворцы, библиотеки –
> Подачками ворчливому огню.
>
> Какие мы дадим тогда ответы

За музыку, за страстные сонеты?
Твоих стихов и я не сохраню.

Though the scene depicted is purely imaginary, the fear that one's writing could possibly become the cause for persecution is clearly presented.

The poet-persona of *Ariel* oscillates between 'confession' and the rejection of such 'truth'. On the one hand, he imitates Hellenic artists who add a personal signature on *stamnos*, ancient Greek wine jars which sometimes have inscriptions on them, making it a secret (but public) love confession:

...I like to hide among sad iambs
the confession: EUGENĒS – THE BEAUTIFUL BOY. ('Priznan'e', Pereleshin 1976: 19)[5]

...Мне прятать нравится среди печальных ямбов
Признанье: EUGENES – O EPHEBOS KALOS.

On the other hand, Pereleshin warns against biographical scrutiny, especially on the part of the critic. In 'Enquiry' [Spravka], which starts with an epigraph from Fedor Tiutchev's poem 'Don't believe, don't believe the poet, maiden...' ['Ne ver', ne ver' poetu, deva...', 1839], the poet mocks the future literary critic who tries to find out the truth of the poet:

The future literary critic
Should suffer because of me:
After all I am a sly person,
a little crafty rogue,
I'm putting him on the wrong track
[...]
And by poems I bought myself a wig,
Forged a cheque, married on dowry,

Tormented a wife and squandered money...
Will he understand, in spite of deceptions,

[5] The Greek phrase 'ὅ παῖς καλός' [the beautiful boy], usually carrying erotic connotation, is a common inscription on Greek vases (Clark et al. 2002: 100). Instead of *pais* [boy] Pereleshin uses the term *ephebos*, which refers to young men from eighteen to twenty years old. The connection between 'EUGENĒS' and Evgenii Vitkovskii is apparent as the name Evgenii is derived from the Greek word *εὐγενής* [eugenēs].

That the poet was slandering his very self? ('Spravka', Pereleshin 1976: 140)[6]

Грядущему литературоведу
Помучиться придется надо мной:
Ведь я – хитрец, плутишка продувной,
По ложному его пускаю следу.
[...]
А по стихам – купил себе парик,
Подделал чек, женился на приданом,

Извел жену и деньги промотал...
Поймет ли он, наперекор обманам,
Что сам себя поэт оклеветал?

This simultaneous masking and unmasking complicate the self-referentiality of the text, resisting a simplistic, (auto)biographical interpretation despite the use of real names. It also allows a creative space for Pereleshin to express his attitudes towards same-sex love and, more importantly, to represent such love from the raw material of the Russian language.

Love and sexuality in *Ariel*

The model of love presented in *Ariel* is that of Ancient Greece, with Ariel depicted as Alcibiades, Ganymede, Charmides, and Antinous. The poet-persona takes on the role of an aged mentor, and upon receiving the poem of his literary 'apprentice', compares the correspondence with a Socratic dialogue:

Crowned with threadbare garland,
I will join the dialogue with the student [who is]
Trusting, courteous and long-awaited,

And the conversation will rumble all over the world:
Come in, in one desired face,
My Menexenus, my Lysias, my Charmides! ('Pri poluchenii "Okeana"', Pereleshin 1976: 10)

Увенчанный поношенным венком,
Я в диалог вступлю с учеником

[6] The last word in Tiutchev's original line *deva* [maiden] is removed, changing the addressee from a girl to the general audience, enabling a non-heterosexual reading.

Доверчивым, любезным, долгожданным,

И разговор по свету прогремит:
Входите же, в одном лице желанном,
Мой Менексен, мой Лисий, мой Хармид!

The mentor desires to nurture the youth into a literary successor:

Oh, I want such an heir
To find in you, so that you the sparkle of word
Serve, like me, with the highest level of strength. ('Akrostikh', Pereleshin 1976: 9)

О, я хочу преемника такого
В тебе найти, чтоб ты сверканью слова
Служил, как я – по высшей мере сил.

Although there are fantasized erotic episodes in *Ariel*, the Platonic ideal is upheld. The contrast of flesh and spirit not only reflects the poet-persona's internal struggle, but also contributes to the depiction of a chaste love that is superior to the carnal relationship between men and women. Confronting a youth who is surrounded by 'maidenly warmth', the poet-persona directs him to Diotima's teaching about love, recounted by Socrates in *The Symposium* (c. 385–370 BC):

[...] And again talk about 'The Feast'
We will have: about triplicities in the world,
About the happiness to become a cool stream

And [to] quench the desire of a sworn brother [which is]
Primal, the most understandable – in what
Diotima instructed Socrates! ('Ne pervii raz', Pereleshin 1976: 157)

[...] И снова речь о «Пире»
Пойдет у нас: о тройственности в міре,
О родости прохладным стать ручьем

И утолить желанье побратима
Первичное, понятнейшее – в чем
Наставила Сократа Диотима!

Diotima's speech highlights the importance of procreation in Plato's conceptualization of love, which both Shakespeare and

Pereleshin draw upon: 'the object of love is not beauty [...] It is birth and procreation in a beautiful medium' (Plato 1998: 49).

Suggesting that procreation in the form of childbirth reflects the human desire for immortality, Diotima argues that there are relationships that lead to other forms of procreation and immortality:

> the offspring of this relationship are particularly attractive and are closer to immortality than ordinary children [...] and we cast envious glances at good poets like Homer and Hesiod because the kind of children they leave behind are those which earn their parents renown and 'fame immortal', since the children themselves are immortal (Plato 1998: 52-53).

The first 17 sonnets in *Shakespeare's Sonnets* – commonly referred to as 'procreation sonnets' – can be read as a transposition of this Platonic ideal. The poet-persona repeatedly urges a fair youth to be married, so that he can leave behind his imprint for eternity:

> She [Nature] carved thee for her seal, and meant thereby
> Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die ('Sonnet 11', Shakespeare 2014: 133).

> And nothing 'gainst time's scythe can make defence
> Save breed to brave him, when he takes thee hence ('Sonnet 12', Shakespeare 2014: 135).

The turning point of the sequence is when the poet realizes an alternative way to immortalize the youth's beauty – through his sonnets:

> And all in war with time for love of you
> As he takes from you, I engraft you new ('Sonnet 15', Shakespeare 2014: 141).

The word 'engraft' combines horticultural imagery, which symbolizes a medieval understanding of marriage and procreation, with the imagery of writing ('engraft' recalls the Greek word *graphein*, to write). The theme of writing as an alternative method of procreation continues, despite doubts over his 'pupil pen' and 'barren rhyme' ('Sonnet 16', 143), and transforms into a confidence

in the poet's ability to conquer Time:

> Yet do thy worst, old Time, despite thy wrong,
> My love shall in my verse ever live young ('Sonnet 19', Shakespeare 2014: 149).

While *Ariel* is in many aspects a response to Shakespeare's appropriation of Plato's imagery of procreation, Pereleshin places a greater emphasis on Diotima's figuration of beauty as a medium for birth. The first sonnet in Pereleshin's *Ariel* concludes with a similar idea of procreation:

> Who will reproach my spirit for treachery?
> Have I not previously asked the chosen one –
> With him and *in him* I produce progeny! [italics – K.L.] ('Akrostikh', Pereleshin 1976: 9)
>
> Кто упрекнет мой дух за вероломство?
> Избранника и прежде я просил —
> с ним, и *в нем* произвожу потомство! [italics – K.L.]

This resonates with Plato's conceptualization of non-physical birth:

> his giving birth to beautiful discourses and virtue and his gaining of immortality, can logically be accomplished only in partnership with another person: one gives birth, in effect, to an enlightened way of life *in* the person of the (younger) partner, and it is through him that the lover gains a kind of vicarious immortality (Leitao 2014: 37).

In Pereleshin's version the beloved – whom he is mentoring to be a poet – becomes a medium (*with him, in him*) in a more spiritual form of procreation, which materializes in Pereleshin's poetry. The figure of *Ariel* thus represents a higher realm of existence and creativity:

> Two windy, amorous Ariels
> Are given to create in innocent height,
> And below – we: we burn and with them share
> The magical gift of conception in beauty. ('My', Pereleshin 1976: 11)
>
> Двум ветровым, влюбленным Ариэлям
>
> Дано творить в безгрешной высоте,
> А ниже – мы: горим и с ними делим

Чудесный дар зачатья в красоте.

Pereleshin also makes use of this conflicting understanding of procreation to formulate his view towards the sexual politics that opposes the 'procreators' and 'degenerates':

And is it necessary for fertilization,
That a couple writhes from lust? ('My', Pereleshin 1976: 11)

А нужно ли для оплодотворенья,
Чтоб корчилась от похоти чета?

Pereleshin directs his frustration towards the institution of marriage, particularly in its modern, Soviet form. In 'The Speech of Aristophanes' [Slovo Aristofana] he appropriates Aristophanes' myth of the three sexes in *The Symposium* to mock those who fill up the civil registration offices (ZAGS)[7]. Apart from the double 'he' and double 'she', the third sex was the 'lascivious "he-she"' [bludlivyi 'on-ona']:

That breed was quite strong:
Round and somewhat funny,
It lived, not remembering gods,
And for that was cut into two!

Since that time Ajax weeps about Ajax,
Sappho sings about the Mytilene maids,
And the third sex throngs every ZAGS,

Anticipating the lure of infidelity:
It takes sex partners by force,
Rears children and boasts of themselves. ('Slovo Aristofana', Pereleshin 1976: 20)

Порода та была весьма сильна:
Округлая и несколько смешная,
Она жила, богов не вспоминая,
И надвое за то рассечена!

С тех пор Аякс рыдает об Аяксе,
Поет Сафо о девах Митилен,
А третий пол толпится в каждом ЗАГСе,

[7] ZAGS, the Soviet equivalent of a registry office, stands for *Organy zapisi aktov grazhdanskogo sostoianiia*, the body for 'the registration of acts of civic status'.

Предведая заманчивость измен:
Сожителей захватывает с бою,
Детей растит и хвалится собою.

The depiction of the third sex as lascivious, unfaithful couples crowding up at civil registration offices offers a critique of how society legitimizes heterosexual unions and procreation, highlighting the problem of heteronormativity, where heterosexuality prevails over all other (outlawed) forms of relationships, union and sexualities.

For Pereleshin, the symbolic opposition between procreators and degenerates not only represents different perspectives over sexuality, but also one's attitude to life and art. Throughout the sonnet collection, the procreators are portrayed as Soviet workers toiling for material sustenance, incomparable to the poet-persona, who creates poetry and reaches immortality and fame. This is a reversal of the Soviet conceptualisation of poet as a worker, as illustrated by Maiakovskii's 'Poet worker' [Poet rabochii, 1918]:

We grind minds with the rasp of language.
Who is greater – a poet
or a foreman,
who
leads people towards material gain?
Both.
Hearts are the same as motors.
The soul is the same as the cunning engine. ('Poet rabochii', Maiakovskii 1956: 19)

Мозги шлифуем рашпилем языка.
Кто выше — поэт
или техник,
который
ведет людей к вещественной выгоде?
Оба.
Сердца — такие ж моторы.
Душа — такой же хитрый двигатель.

In Pereleshin's formulation, the prosaic (authority, monotonous life) stands opposite to poetry (art, immortality), mapping the distinction between *byt* (everyday life) and *bytie* (being) onto the procreators-degenerates polemic:

Prosaists in heaven had my life
Conceived: career of a lawyer,

Dignitary (and, perhaps, a diplomat,
Though I do not recognize such ranks).

They introduced a wife and family into the programme,
So that I follow the way of my father and grandfather,
But from a young age, being an eccentric and restless person,
I am not attracted to everyday life, but to existence. ('Nedosmotr', Pereleshin 1976: 87)

Прозаики на небе жизнь мою
Задумали: карьеру правоведа,
Сановника (и, может-быть, полпреда,
Хоть я таких чинов не признаю).

Внесли жену в программу и семью,
Чтоб я пошел путем отца и деда,
Но с юных лет, чудак и непоседа,
Не к быту я тянусь, а к бытию.

The fate of male – a fertile wife
And sons, and daughters, and grandsons,
To cram As and Bs in their face,
To snort, puff, and to be confused about tenses.

But will start seeding
A man of prayer, an ascetic, a man of science
Or a poet, whose secret pain is converted
By a poem into pauses and sounds? ('Bessmertie', Pereleshin 1976: 42)

Удел самца — плодливая жена
И сыновья, и дочери, и внуки,
Чтоб в их лице зубрить азы и буки,
Сопеть, пыхтеть и путать времена.

Но станет ли пускаться в семена
Молитвенник, подвижник, муж науки
Или поэт, чья в паузы и звуки
Боль тайная стихом обращена?

Relieved from sexual procreation are those who reach immortality – Mikhail Lermontov, Christopher Marlowe, and Paul Verlaine – a far cry from the Soviet translator, a factory worker whose 'rhyming' amounts to drudgery or 'hard labour':

> [...] For dull translation,
>
> Grumbling, you proceed – for tedious hassle.
> And the factory will produce until the night,
> Rhyming backbreakingly: have to catch that deadline! ('Krapivnitsa', Pereleshin 1976: 35)
>
> [...] За тусклый перевод,
>
> Ворча, ты примешься — за нудную мороку.
> И будет дó ночи производить завод,
> Рифмуя каторжно: поспеть-то надо к сроку!

In the face of his beloved's family life, where the production of translation evokes the sexual act of procreation, even the phallic symbol of the poet-persona – the proboscis of small tortoiseshell (*krapivnitsa*, a kind of butterfly) which represents his letter – becomes impotent:

> The letter will flop: my proboscis is powerless.
> It doesn't sway, not 'brazilized' at all ('Krapivnitsa', Pereleshin 1976: 35)
>
> Письмо завалится: мой хоботок бессилен.
> Не поколеблется, ничуть не побразилен

'Brazilized' [pobrazilen] is a neologism with a root that resembles the word 'Brazil' [Braziliia]. Although Pereleshin never discussed his use of the term, in his letter to Iurii Ivask he mentions 'the Brazilian psychology' (19 July 1974, cited by Li et al. 2005), which is associated with the free expression of same-sex love in poetry.

When Vitkovskii leaves his first wife for another woman, not only does Pereleshin condemn him for succumbing to physical desire, calling him a womaniser [babnik] with another acrostic which spells 'ARIELILIBABNIK', meaning 'Ariel or womaniser' (Pereleshin 1976: 154), but he also belittles him as a conformist:

> After all Menexenus, Bosie, and Charmides are
> Outside the tribe, and every one of them is famous.
> But you are a father: the sedition is overcome! ('Zhenatomu drugu', Pereleshin 1976: 136)
>
> Ведь Менексен, и Вози, и Хармид —
> Вне племени, и каждый знаменит.

Но ты — отец: осилена крамола!

In a sense, Pereleshin's writing could be understood as a literary compensation for his unattainable desire, as the dejected lover fantasizes an alternative form of union with his beloved:

Now you have become a monogamous male
[...]
But, loving vindictively and sacrificially,
I sucked a drop of blood from you –-
Just one, but the liveliest one.

It is in me, and you, half monk,
In it are frivolous. Now I'm rejoicing,
And together we fornicate in my poems. ('Krovinka', Pereleshin 1976: 104)

Теперь ты стал самцом единобрачным,
[...]
Но, мстительно и жертвенно любя,
Я высосал кровинку из тебя –
Всего одну, но самую живую.

Она во мне, и ты, полумонах,
В ней – ветрогон. Теперь я торжествую,
И вместе мы блудим в моих стихах.

Even in this poem, the concept of love for Pereleshin presented throughout *Ariel* is inseparable from his overarching concern with literary creation. Pereleshin's fantasized love with a phantom symbolically represents his desire for a literary connection with his native country and his wish to have his poetry published in Russia. For Pereleshin, Vitkovskii is the *medium* – not only as a muse, but also as the chosen one who introduces his poetry to his homeland.

By exploring *Ariel* within the context of the sonnet tradition and its formation of a poet-persona, which establishes the voice of the poet through poetic encomium, it is possible to read the fantasized love in *Ariel* as Pereleshin's expression of his emotional truth and an act of self-creation. Pereleshin's infatuation with a ghost serves as a medium for art – the ultimate goal being 'the avalanche of sonnets' [sonetnaia lavina] (Pereleshin 1976: 43). By a playful manipulation of fact and fiction, Pereleshin manages to create in Russian poetry a queer poetic voice, countering the Soviet regulation

of sexuality and sexual relationships.

Poem without a Subject – a queer voice embedded in narrative digression

Compared with *Ariel*, Pereleshin's *Poem without a Subject* appears a drastically different example of life writing. Written in Onegin stanzas, the poetic memoir traces the émigré poet's life from his birth to his first few years in Brazil, with a narrative that is frequently interrupted by the humorous, and at times self-deprecating, ruminations of the poet-narrator. While the memoir has been read as a document that gives a factual account of émigré life (Zabiiako 2016: 150), the autobiographical pact is problematized with fictional elements such as the fictional character Bogdan Strel'tsov, who serves as the poet-narrator's alter-ego or a mask for him to voice his political or literary criticism.

Poem without a Subject demonstrates a historical and literary responsibility to record the names, anecdotes, caricatures, and tragic fates of Pereleshin's acquaintances and historical figures: the staff and students of the Law Faculty in Harbin, the literary groups Churaevka (Harbin) and Friday (Shanghai), those persecuted during the Japanese occupation and repatriation to the USSR, etc. As such, episodes of romantic encounters only take up a small part of the memoir.

However, it is worth examining how *Poem without a Subject* treats the question of sexuality, as it is now expressed in an 'unmasked' autobiographical format. I will focus on the narration of two love relationships and Pereleshin's thoughts on 'left-handedness', which is enabled to a large extent by the digressive style of the narrative.[8]

Pereleshin narrates what is understood to be his first experience of love in Song 3, when he met a young patient named Vasilii Nesterenko in Kazem-bek Memorial Monastery Hospital, upon contracting dysentery in 1937. The narration of his tender attachment begins in Song 3.21:

[8] For a discussion of the digressive nature of the Onegin stanza and the various ways it was appropriated by Lermontov, Voloshin, Viacheslav Ivanov and Pereleshin, see Michael Wachtel's *The Development of Russian Verse*. A comparison of the form and style in *Poem without a Subject* and Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* can be found in the article by E. Kapinos (Kapinos 2020) and Vadim Wittkowsky (Wittkowsky 2020).

[…] to a sick youth
I became attached – it was all the more gentle,
that my tortured Vasenka
was meeker than a child
and accepted [his] tuberculosis
without lamentations or tears,
but, only as I got up to say goodbye,
to cornflower blue eyes
tears ran up, and the teardrop –
there was nowhere for it to roll down –
called me to love, to not forget (Pereleshin 1989: 131)

[…] к юноше больному
я привязался – тем нежней,
что мой замученный Васёнка
был безответнее ребенка
и принимал туберкулез
без сетований или слез,
но, только я вставал проститься,
на васильковые глаза
взбегали слезы, и слеза –
ей было некуда скатиться –
звала любить, не забывать

In the preface of *Poem without a Subject*, Karlinsky identifies a similar sentiment to that presented in Gogol''s 'Nights at the Villa' [Nochi na ville, 1839], in which Gogol' recalls how the brief episode in his youth with Iosif Viel'gorskii, who was dying of consumption, brought about a return to his youth:

> when a youthful soul seeks fraternal friendship, full of sweet, almost infantile trifles and mutual show of tokens of *tender attachment*; the time when it is sweet to gaze into each other's eyes, when your entire being is ready to offer sacrifices [italics – K.L.] (Gogol' 1997: 41)

In Pereleshin's account, the youth's attachment creates a complex feeling in the poet: 'Love? Entreaty? Lash??' [Liubov'? Mol'ba? Uprekremen'??] (Pereleshin 1989: 132). The episode was devastating to Pereleshin, as the poet himself fell sick and was unable to accompany Vasilii during his last hours. The narration, however, breaks off and only returns to the time before Vasilii's death as the poet made a 'a business proposition' [delovoe predlozhen'e] (Pereleshin 1989: 136) with God that he will sacrifice his own life for Vasilii's, ending with Pereleshin's decision to become a monk. This ambivalent

experience of love is not presented as an awakening to one's sexual orientation, nor narrated in a linear manner, but serves as the narrative transition towards the poet-narrator's life as a monk.

The poet-narrator's emphasis on his guilt becomes the narrative focus in the second account of love, which includes the most explicit line suggesting his physical intimacy with a man in the memoir:

> Liu Xin, but for me – Lucien.
> We fell in love easily and immediately:
> the heated stove invited [us] to strip naked and lie down,
> and he lay down without refusal,
> and in the morning, having repeated the rite,
> hurried back to the bookshelves. (Pereleshin 1989: 279)
>
> Лю Син, а для меня – Люсьен.
> Слюбились мы легко и сразу:
> звала натопленная печь
> раздеться догола и лечь,
> и он ложился без отказу,
> а утром, повторив обряд,
> спешил вернуться в книжный ряд.

This account of love affair with the Chinese bookseller Liu Tiansheng departs from the lyrical style in *Ariel* through the inclusion of multiple voices. For instance, immediately after the depiction of the couple's happiness follows an imagined speech from God:

> You're drunk with happiness, Valerii,
> but you'd better not joke with God:
> with an equal loss
> you'll pay for intoxication! (Pereleshin 1989: 279)
>
> Ты счастьем опьянен, Валерий,
> но лучше с Богом не шути:
> равновеликою потерей
> за упоенье заплати!

The projected admonition is followed by the poet's internal conflict, in particular between passion and religious devotion. After a long digression, the tale returns to an extended and dramatic narration of Liu Tiansheng's arrest and release by the Nationalists in 1947, followed by a dialogue in Song 7 between Pereleshin and Liu Xin about his experience in the re-education camp. More

factual than sentimental, this account contributes to Pereleshin's depiction of individual suffering during political turmoil, which is discussed repeatedly in the memoir, rather than simply being an account of a love relationship.

These romantic encounters and internal struggles are presented as episodes in Pereleshin's life, but they are not placed at the centre of the narrative. Unlike *Ariel*, in which the poet-persona's fantasy and passion take a central role, *Poem* comprises a series of digressions, where no single subject is identified as the major theme. The inclusion of homoerotic episodes in the memoir suggests an acceptance of his sexuality, without turning the narrative into one of sexual awakening and 'coming out'. Instead, the digressive form allows Pereleshin to express a worldview based on the opposition of procreators and 'degenerates', revealing Pereleshin's ultimate concern to be one of censorship and the writing of 'left-handedness':

> almost half a century we have not got along:
> the breeders – and I.
> Those who do not make babies
> eke out under the name of degenerates
> their vain life. (Pereleshin 1989: 226)
>
> почти полвека мы не ладим:
> производители – и я.
> Те, кто не делает младенцев,
> влачит под кличкой выродженцев
> жизнь бесполезную свою.

Depicting the homophobic writer Grigorii Klimov (pseudonym of the Russian émigré writer Igor' Kalmykov) as a representative of procreators who persecutes degenerates (vyrozhdentsy), Pereleshin returns to Aristophanes' myth:

> though wise Klimov had Ajax
> harassed – and persecuted to the Registry Office:
> so as not to become degenerates,
> [that] he chooses a 'good part',
> and, so that now his babies do not conceive the idea to roll down,
> he carries some money to Uchpedgiz
> for edifying books,

where the homeland and party membership card are,
and about Ajax there is no word.[9] (Pereleshin 1989: 227)

хоть мудрый Климов и Аякса
травил – и дотравил до ЗАГСа:
чтоб в выродженцы не попасть,
избрал и он “благую часть”,
и, чтоб теперь его детишки
не вздумали скатиться вниз,
деньжонки носит в Учпедгиз
за назидательные книжки,
где родина и партбилет,
и об Аяксах речи нет.

The emphasis here is on publishing: ‘Ajax’s babies’ refers to literary works, the offspring of love, which have no chance of being published. Instead, edifying books [nazidatel'nye knizhki] are commissioned. A more direct discussion of ‘norms’ and ‘left-handedness’ can be found in the last song (8.47-52). Questioning the validity of ‘the norm’, Pereleshin expresses the inherent injustice of this division:

A lefthander understandably is a transgressor,
but is a daltonic better than him?
A normal youth is *different*:[10] (Pereleshin 1989: 388)

Левша, понятно, беззаконник,
но лучше ли его дальтоник?
Нормальный юноша *другой*:

then – with a normal right hand –
he writes page after page:
forehead and nose in ink stains,
but such a denunciation is ready,
that coxcomb McGowan himself
will take his word for it,
and will put someone in jail,
accused of being not right-handed:
the left-handed, lame people and hunchbacks

[9] ‘Uchpedgiz’ stands for *Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdatel'stvo*, the State Publishing House of Scholastic and Pedagogical Literature.

[10] A daltonic is a person with colour-blindness.

are not needed among normal people! (Pereleshin 1989: 389)

потом – нормальною десницей
страницу пишет за страницей:
в чернильных пятнах лоб и нос,
зато готов такой донос,
что сам МакГоуэн хлыщеватый
поверит нá слово ему,
и сядет кто-нибудь в тюрьму,
в неправоручьи виноватый:
левши, хромцы да горбуны
среди нормальных не нужны!

For Pereleshin, the 'right' is no different from the 'left', yet the right-handed procreators denounced the left-handed, condemned them as diseased, and sent them to prison. Here the tirade relates to the personal reality of the poet, whose fate was caught up in Cold War political polarization and McCarthyist homophobia: McGowan was the US 'interrogator' John H. McGowan, an officer of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, after whose questioning in 1950 Pereleshin was detained and deported. Among the testimonies against him as a Soviet sympathizer was the claim that 'the subject may have been a homosexual' (cited by Bakich 2015: 125).

Pereleshin's interweaving of biographical information and personal views in the authorial digressions of *Poem without a Subject* is not just an imitation of Pushkin's poet-narrator. In the memoir, the playful tone and the polyphonic nature of the text are pivotal in creating the voice of the Other. On one level, Bogdan Strel'tsov – a pseudonym used by Pereleshin as he wrote poems with political themes – serves as the memoirist's alter-ego, to mask his criticism of Soviet politics in the Brezhnev period. However, in the digressions, Pereleshin (as the narrator of the poetic memoir) constantly caricaturises Bogdan and other Soviet writers, with the former resembling Eugene Onegin as a subject of the poet-narrator's ridicule. Like Pushkin's poet-narrator, these digressions allow Pereleshin's narrator to assert himself as a literary connoisseur, and further enable him to establish the identity of a poet struggling for free expression in a homophobic society.

Distinguishing the digressions in *Eugene Onegin* [Evgenii Onegin,

1833] from biographical confessions in Romantic poetry, Sona Hoisington argues that they 'draw attention to the narrator, to make us feel that the story we are reading "emanates" from him' (Hoisington 1975: 147) with the result of fashioning the image of 'Pushkin the poet': 'The narrator is portrayed as poet-creator, whose rich spiritual life is revealed in beautiful lyrical digressions' (Hoisington 1975: 151). Similar views are put forward by Anna Dvigubski: the digressions combine as a jagged, contradictory superstructure to create a multidimensional portrait of another character, Author, who supersedes his heroes' (Dvigubski 2013: 14).Pereleshin's poet-narrator, through his meta-poetic reflections, comments, and diatribes, as well as painstaking demonstration of his poetic virtuosity, fashions himself as a multi-dimensional poet who does not abandon his literary pursuit in the face of war, exile, persecution and censorship.

In the last song, having removed the character (and his alter-ego) Bogdan, Pereleshin, in his own voice as a poet-memoirist, comments on his ultimate struggle against right-handed censors:

> So that this arduous feat
> will make it until Sunday,
> I make the poem latent,
> unreachable for stings,
> unattainable for the watchdogs
> [...]
> Nobody will be responsible,
> and the stamp for resolution
> a police bailiff will affix
> (Pereleshin 1989: 398)
>
> Чтоб этот подвиг многотрудный
> до воскресенья долежал,
> поэму делаю подспудной,
> недосягаемой для жал,
> недостижимой для барбосов.
> [...]
> Никто не станет отвечать,
> и к резолюции печать
> приложит полицейский пристав

Writing in old age and thinking that his life may end soon, the poet consoles himself towards the end of his memoir:

> To the dead is not dangerous at all
> the curses of the right-handed: (Pereleshin 1989: 399)
>
> Нисколько мертвым не опасны

проклятья праворуких масс:

According to Vitaly Chernetsky, 'Pereleshin elaborated a paradigm of augmentation and subversion of Russian national form through openly embracing the potential of cultural hybridity and challengingly suffusing his texts with a queer problematic' (Chernetsky 2003: 67). Pereleshin appropriates Pushkin's Onegin stanzas and interposes his memoir with views on sexual 'norm' and deviation, as well as his personal struggle in writing about same-sex desire.

Conclusion

> Under the blows of the Judeo-Christian 'morality,' Plato's ideal of loving a young man has become something 'unspoken.' But people *speak*. That same Shakespeare spoke about it with greatness in his sonnets; in Russia, Mikhail Kuzmin spoke brilliantly. Now it is my turn to speak, and the advantage is that at the end of the twentieth century there is no need to hide in the shadows and camouflage it as 'an accidental deviation from the norm.' (Pereleshin, Letter to Vadim Leonard,17 February 1976, cited by Bakich 2015: 215-216)

Ariel and *Poem without a Subject* demonstrate Pereleshin's literary manoeuvres to counter the silencing of the 'deviant other' in Russian literature. Reading Pereleshin's poetic life writing simply as his 'literary coming-out' ignores the subtleties and intertextuality of the texts, which are neither an 'exposure' of one's sexual identity, nor a depiction of his romantic life.

Pereleshin's appeal to literary classics and use of autofictional devices can be interpreted as strategies in view of the threat of censorship:

> in medieval grammar
> the muddle-headed party censor
> not finding obvious prohibitions,
> will rush home – until rain,
> and hastily, in order to be left alone
> and not be late for dinner,
> will write "Accepted for printing" (Pereleshin 1989: 39)

> в грамматике средневековой
> партийный цензор бестолковый
> запретов явных не найдя,

домой помчится – до дождя,
и наскоро, чтоб отвязаться
и к ужину не опоздать,
напишет "Принято в печать"

However, they also constitute Pereleshin's creation of a unique poetic voice, in the same way as Dante, Petrarch, Shakespeare, and Pushkin establish the unique voice of the poet via their poet-personae and poet-narrators. If Petrarch's *Song Book* is 'a poetry whose real subject matter is its own act and whose creation is its own author' (Freccero 1975: 34), Shakespeare's 'procreation sonnets' introduce a poet-persona who awakens to the power of artistic creation, and Pushkin creates the image of the Author in his verse novel, *Ariel* and *Poem without a Subject* constitute Pereleshin's self-fashioning as a queer poet, as he explores new ways of presenting the self in his poetry.

Looking beyond Pereleshin's queer life writing as coming-out texts, or as a poetic ruse to voice the 'unnameable', one witnesses the author's play with poetic licence, as he explores the possibilities of self-expression through the intermingling of fact and fiction, as well as the use of authorial digressions. Pereleshin's self-creation in his poetic life writing contributes to his poetic transformation, as he reaches a new perception of his poetic self and produces increasingly intimate and open depiction of same-sex love in Russian and Portuguese.

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Masha Beketova

Ol'ga Zhuk's *Strogaia Devushka*: An Uncomfortable Narrative of the Queer post-Soviet Diaspora

This article analyses Ol'ga Zhuk's 2013 novel *Strogaia devushka* from the perspective of queer feminist diaspora studies. The novel stands out as an example of life-writing depicting a woman who migrated from the post-Soviet region to Germany in non-heterosexual relationships. This article analyses its intersectional thematic scope, its complex non-linear migration narrative, its critique of the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia, as well as Western feminism. The novel depicts a relationship between a Jewish woman of Russian origin with a Dutch woman residing in Germany, exploring topics of violence, drug use, poverty, mental health and art. The article seeks to understand why *Strogaia devushka* has not become a 'cult novel' in its multiple contexts and why it resists classification as a queer feminist diaspora text, even though it fits each of these categories separately. I conclude by suggesting that Zhuk's *Strogaia devushka* is best understood as an uncomfortable narrative of queer post-Soviet diaspora, and suggest ways, in which this 'discomfort' might contribute to self-reflection for multiply positioned readers.

Introduction: In search of queer-feminist post-Soviet diasporic voices.

During my current research for my PhD thesis on queer post-Soviet diaspora in Germany, I encountered the writings of Ol'ga Zhuk, an author who at first sight appeared to be an ideal fit for my research question.[1] Zhuk, born 1960 in Leningrad, is a lesbian activist and author who migrated from Russia to Germany. She is author of the novel *Severe Maiden: A Journey from St Petersburg to Berlin* [Strogaia devushka. Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Berlin, 2013], discussed at length in this article. Zhuk also authored *Russian Amazons: A History of Russia's Lesbian Subculture in the Twentieth Century* [Russkie amazonki. Istoriia

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lesbiiskoi subkult'uri v Rossii, XX vek, 1998] and several short stories and articles.[2] She was editor-in-chief of the journal *Gei, slaviane!* and co-founder of the Tchaikovskii-Fund (Essig 1999: 61). Zhuk can be considered one of the most important early feminist lesbian activists in Russia (Essig 1999; Kon 1998). In my research for my PhD project, I was especially pleased to find a writer who represented the queer post-Soviet diasporic literature and (sub)culture of the 1990s. Indeed, there exist very few (self-)documents of post-Soviet queer diaspora in Germany despite the presence of a substantial queer diasporic community and rich subculture.

My research of the media representations of queer migrants in the German mainstream and LGBTQIA+ media and literature revealed that the narratives of what I tried to subsume under the common denominator of the 'queer post-Soviet diaspora', were dominated by cis-male voices.[3] Researchers of queer diaspora and queer asylum have highlighted that gay, cis male perspectives dominate the discourse of queer asylum and migration, while there is a lack of other marginalized voices (Kashafutdinova 2021, Shevtsova 2019). Gender inequalities, (cis)sexism and lesbophobia are also affecting LGBTQIA+ communities and their self-representations. In my research I was led by the necessity to highlight the voices of lesbian, bisexual, queer women and trans and nonbinary migrants from Eastern European and Central Asian countries to Germany.

It was the brochure *Russian lesbians in Europe* [Saadat et al. 2004], published by a Berlin organization 'Lesbenberatung/LesMigraS', to which Zhuk is a contributor, that led me to her 2013 novel *Severe Maiden*. The novel was apparently written (mostly) out of the diasporic/(e)migrant context in Germany, as Zhuk herself has been living abroad since the 1990s (Essig 1999). After reading

[2] All translations are my own unless specified.

[3] Richard Mole (Mole 2018) uses 'Russian-speaking' when referring to the diaspora. My use of 'queer post-Soviet diaspora' is intended to decentre the Russian language and be inclusive, as not every post-Soviet migrant identifies with the Russian language, even if many can speak it (Panagiotidis 2021). I recognize that the term post-Soviet is a contested and problematized one, but for the German context it is important to have both these terms in mind while speaking of diaspora and use them rather as a heuristic device indicating the Eastern European and Central Asian countries of origin and the specifical (post-)colonial situation of this region (Klingenberg 2022).

the first chapters, I felt sure that I had encountered a 'hidden gem', a very *intersectional*, probably *queer-feminist* novel, which was at the same time *post-Soviet* and *diasporic*. *Severe Maiden* depicts not only migration, but also transnational relations between non-heteronormative persons in post-Soviet Russia and in Germany and beyond. Zhuk belongs to the same generation as Masha Gessen and Ol'ga Krauze, the LGBT leaders who emerged in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet period. It seemed unbelievably valuable to have found an autobiographical novel by an early post-Soviet lesbian activist, which could reveal so much about the struggles and resistances of queer diaspora from a self-reflective activist standpoint. The positionality of the author (and the narrator) is not only that of a Russian, migrating to Germany, but also of a (secular) Jewish woman: she is a non-heteronormative (lesbian or bisexual) woman who migrated in the 1990s from Russia to Germany. Many of the other characters are also non-heteronormative women and men, and the novel also includes trans or gender-nonconforming characters.
This combination of topics seemed to be promising, and I started to analyse the novel for my PhD thesis. However, my close reading of the novel soon confronted me with several challenges, which prevented me from making a straightforward claim that this was a queer feminist work, or to praise it as a (forgotten) prime example of post-Soviet queer diasporic literature, which is how I initially wanted to see the novel.

Severe Maiden: a forgotten novel?

Severe Maiden was first published in 2013 in a small run of 500 copies. Parts of the novel also appear on the publicly open blog of the author (zhuki06 n.d.), and in the form of short stories in compilations of lesbian and queer prose prior to the publication of the novel (Zhuk 2008; Zhuk 2010). There are only two online reviews of the book (Kontury 2013 and Rezunkov 2013), and very little information about its reception is available. The novel seems to have been almost ignored by literary criticism. There is little evidence of distribution apart from a few documented readings: three in Berlin and one in St

Petersburg.[4] My archival and internet research showed that there were no academic reviews of the novel and it did not get shortlisted for any literary prizes. I set out to discover why was *Severe Maiden* by Ol'ga Zhuk not a widely celebrated novel, unlike Oksana Vasiakina's *The Wound* [Rana, 2021], which received the literary prize 'NOS' (Gor'kii 2021) and which has been called the first lesbian novel in Russian, although it came seven years after *Severe Maiden* (xgay.ru 2022)? And why was Zhuk's novel not co-opted by the German literary market, which seems to be hungry for 'exotic' combinations of queerness and migration? At least two other German writers with post-Soviet migration experiences, Ol'ga Grjasnowa and Sasha Marianna Salzmann, have received widespread recognition among queer German-speaking subculture, including literary prizes (Suhrkamp 2022). What distinguished Zhuk's *Severe Maiden* from Grjasnowa's well-known *The Legal Haziness of a Marriage* [Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe, 2014], which dealt with similar topics? Where were the Instagram posts celebrating Zhuk as an *intersectional icon*? Why did Russian, post-Soviet and diasporic queers, so much in need of a 'queer history', not seek to find it in Zhuk's novel? Why was such a unique literary text avoided by German, and post-Soviet or Russian mainstream literary and queer activist contexts?

It is always difficult to explain why certain literary texts gain widespread attention while others remain forgotten. It would be too simplistic to assume an absolute correlation between the quality of a text and its reception. It is not the goal of this article to determine whether *Severe Maiden* should be considered a 'literary' text at all or discuss whether it qualifies as 'good literature'. *Severe Maiden* is declared by its author and the two prefaces to be a novel. However, the work's thematic scope, as well as the narrative and moral decisions in the novel itself, as well as around it, may offer us the key to the question as to why different cultural and subcultural fields have avoided this text. Moreover, this omission can reveal much about cultural and subcultural

[4] The readings in Berlin were held at Moabit (Presentation n.d.), 48 Stunden Neukölln (Ol'ga Zhuk n.d.), and Nimmersatt (Prezentatsiia knigi n.d.). The reading in St Petersburg was at the Bukvoed bookshop (Bukvoed n.d.).

norms and discourses in the context of queer diasporic writing.
This article is an attempt to understand why *Severe Maiden* by Ol'ga Zhuk has not gained wide popularity. In what follows, I explore this question with reference to different sets of actors, whom I have categorized in five different groups. Such a division inevitably involves a simplification of what is the broad field of literary perception, but it can help us understand the subversive character of the novel, which seems not to fit in the expectations of any of the groups and reveal their limitations. It is important to recognize the significance of language borders and national borders in the context of queer literature, and not to interpret a queer Russophone text with the same scale and optics as, for example, a German or French queer novel. The post-Soviet context adds another dimension to the analysis with several specific facets.

The five different groups are:

A) The mainstream/official literary scene in Russia: publishers, book prize committees and literary scholars in Russia;
B) Assimilationist LGBT Russophone activist contexts;
C) Queer-feminist Russophone activist contexts;
D) The mainstream literary scene in Germany;
E) Queer diaspora literature.

Zhuk's *Severe Maiden* challenges societal norms and expectations at multiple levels. At the same time, this novel situates itself within and criticizes the very subcultures and groups that are challenging those norms in the broader cultural contexts. The novel crosses and subverts multiple discourses, including migration discourse, lesbian, and feminist subcultures, drug users' subculture and the literary-artistic milieu. In all of them, the narrator is both 'at home' and an 'outsider' at the same time. This in-betweenness could be interpreted as an *uncomfortable narrative* of queer post-Soviet diaspora. The novel did not fit the 'mainstream' assimilationist LGBT narratives, where lesbians and gays sought full acceptance in society, displaying a willingness to marry and procreate. Yet nor did it fit the queer-feminist narratives, which aimed to criticize all violence and power relations. The novel eluded unambiguous interpretations and challenged my own methodology. I realized that my difficulties and confusions with the novel

might prove vehicles for the analysis, and help me understand why others might have preferred to avoid this text.

Severe Maiden: The novel's thematic scope and narrative structure

Severe Maiden can be understood as a meta-novel and as a piece of autofiction. In Aleksandr Vinogradov's foreword, he describes the novel as 'in many aspects autobiographical and not overloaded with fiction' (Vinogradov, in Zhuk 2013: 3). The author herself characterizes the text as a 'roman à clef, a text of fiction with documentary basis' (Kontury 2013). This article considers the novel as an example of autofiction, where the narrator Ol'ga is not identical with the author Ol'ga Zhuk. Even given some matching facts about Zhuk as an activist, from Igor' Kon's and Laurie Essig's research, which are echoed in the novel, it remains necessary to respect the novel as a work of fiction. The present article does not aim to investigate the boundary between autobiography and fiction in the novel and did not involve interviewing the author.

The titular word 'strogaia' [severe, stern] is thematized in multiple ways in the novel. The narrator tries to explain exactly which facet of the term 'strictness' is important to her: is it the connotation of being a 'dominant', or an euphemism for a lesbian, or the literal meaning of the word ('strict') in the meaning of being strict in the lifestyle and communication? This last sense can also be understood ironically, as the novel depicts excess and debauchery on multiple levels. 'I was at that time strict and earnest, a real severe maiden' (Zhuk 2013: 11).

There is also a significant intertextual reference to *A Severe Young Man* [Strogii iunosha, 1935], a film directed by Abram Room. The film caught Zhuk's attention: she described it as a 'daring, bold, and innovative' film (Zhuk 2012: 136). This admiration, as well as the mimicking name, where a strict young man 'undergoes a gender transition', shows that Zhuk is trying not only to find a title with a complex meaning, but also referring to the reception story of *Strogii iunosha*, which has been perceived as a movie with homoerotic symbolism.

The second part of Zhuk's title, *Puteshestvie is Peterburga v Berlin,* can be translated as 'Journey from St Petersburg to Berlin'. Here is a clear intertextual reference to Aleksandr Radishchev's *Journey from St Petersburg to Moscow* [Puteshestvie iz

Peterburga v Moskvu, 1790]. With this allusion, Zhuk ironically and daringly puts herself in a certain Russian literary tradition of system criticism and travelogue.

Zhuk's novel has three narrative layers. The main narrative unfolds in contemporary Berlin, where the narrator is living at the time of writing, but there are two other distinct layers: (1) the narrator in late Soviet Leningrad / early post-Soviet St Petersburg; (2) a love story and a narrative of the narrator's migration from Petersburg to Berlin. Furthermore, beyond the narrator Ol'ga's own storyline, she introduces us to a multiplicity of secondary characters (e.g. Zhuk 2013: 10, 11, 24, 25). Their short stories are often unconnected to each other and play little substantive role in the main storyline, but rather can be considered as memory flashbacks. In places, the narrator's memoirs come to resemble a series of necrologies, describing multiple incidents and encounters with the narrators' friends and acquaintances. These stories are connected by the topics of art, the dissident mindset, drug use and chemical addiction. The primary *siuzhet* of *Severe Maiden* takes place in the 1990s: this includes the love story and migration story of the narrator to Berlin, including a difficult emigration process that requires multiple steps. This main plotline is interspersed by several side-stories, where Ol'ga recalls her youth and growing up in Leningrad's underground scene. Both these narrative layers are described from the temporality of 'the present' (probably the 2010s). This threefold frame allows Zhuk to contrast different understandings of marginalization in three different time-spaces (Leningrad in the 1970s and 1980s, St. Petersburg in the 1990s and Berlin in the 2000s and 2010s) and to connect them through her sarcastic narrator. This complex narrative device does not distract from the smoothness of narration, which seems partially simplistic, parodying socialist realism, especially on the level of language, despite the novel's strong anti-Soviet stance.

The narrator, Ol'ga, grows up among the Leningrad intelligentsia and becomes involved in the Leningrad underground art scene in her early teens. She is introduced as a 'lesbian, junkie and bastard' [lesbiianka, narkomanka i svoloch'] (Zhuk 2013: 8.) Ol'ga is called so by her own mother, and she reclaims these terms, originally intended as insults. Such reappropriation recalls the transformation of the term 'queer' in the US-American context, which originally had pejorative

connotations. Subsequently the term was re-claimed by queer movements as a positive political self-identification, as in the 1990 Queer Nation Manifesto (Queer Nation n.d.).[5] Significantly, Zhuk chooses not to use the word 'квир' (kvir) in Russian, although around 2013 it was already in use among activists, artists, and some scholars in Russia and in other post-Soviet countries and would likely have been known to Zhuk, who was already based in Germany.

In short, descriptive chapters that are rich in sarcasm, the narrator offers flashback-like memory sequences, recalling dissident conversations and relationships. These sequences often allude to the tragic fates of the those involved in Leningrad's underground scene. For example, the narrator remarks, 'While we were walking with Maik [...] I was recalling other victims of the scary potion' (Zhuk 2013: 25). The narrator's involvement in the Leningrad's artistic dissident community seems to constitute an important part of her identity. Parallel to this, the reader becomes familiar with the chronological story of a complicated, passionate, and violent relationship between the narrator and her girlfriend, a Dutch woman, Maik, described by the narrator as an 'obsession' and 'delusion' (Zhuk 2013: 13). This relationship initiates the narrator's multi-stage process of moving from Russia to Germany, firstly as an artist and researcher. Later, after the separation from Maik, she returns to St Petersburg, but then comes back to Germany again, this time as a Jewish so-called 'quota refugee'.

The topic of sexual and romantic relationships between two women: the narrator, Ol'ga and her fierce girlfriend, Maik, is told through their cultural differences, conflicts, and their surroundings such as feminist groups and the sex-worker milieu in Berlin in the 1990s. Secondary female characters, such as Barbara, the best friend of Maik, Magida and others are often homosexual as well, and often involved in commercial sex. The narrator's sexual and social identity is described as follows:

> I simply loved, and have not asked myself questions, do I love a lesbian or not. I did not ask myself, if I was a lesbian. I loved and was loved. But, of course, lesbian friends, same as

[5] The Queer Nation Manifesto was originally distributed by ACT UP marchers in the New York Gay Pride Parade, 1990 (Queer Nation n.d.)

> me, with the same aesthetical and sexual preferences, were lacking, as they are lacking now in Berlin among the Russophone community. I was always open and have spoken without any shyness, that loved Olya H-va, for example, or someone else (Zhuk 2013: 147).

Yet at the same time, however, the narrator does not construct lesbian sexuality as something innate: 'I thought I was bisexual and felt afraid of lesbians' (Zhuk 2013: 147).

Gender and sexuality are thematized continuously in the novel. Issues include the negotiation of identity, self-identification, identifying others, community building and exclusion. There is a significant intersection between non-normative sexuality and the late Soviet/post-Soviet gender regime. During the first meeting between between Ol'ga and her soon-to-be girlfriend Maik, Maik says that Ol'ga's behaviour reminds her of the 'Soviet perestroika party ruler popular in the West, Gorby [Mikhail Gorbachev]' (Zhuk 2013: 11). This unusually gendered 'compliment' can be considered as a soft and jocular (de-)construction of gender. The narrator seems to enjoy being compared to a male politician: 'I lead the gathering like a real partapparatchik, other role-models of societal leaders we did not know' (Zhuk 2013: 11).

As the novel continues, there are many depictions of intersections, often involving multiple marginalisations simultaneously. There are detailed descriptions of drug use, including intravenous injections, and chemical addiction. Given that Zhuk, the author, was herself involved in the anti-prohibitionist movement, it seems important not to pathologize her characters' drug use and consider it as a part of free choice made by adults. Indeed, this is how the narrator frames the experiments with psychoactive substances in the novel. An anonymous online review includes a quotation from Zhuk describing the novel as 'certainly anti-prohibitionist' (Kontury 2013). So what did the author intend to achieve by including highly detailed insights into everyday lives and feelings, daily practices, health difficulties and societal stigma of drug users? This novel by no means sanitizes the detrimental health effects of the use or abuse of psychoactive substances, especially those of low quality. Instead, the narrator offers naturalistic and unembellished depictions of the stigma that drug users experience in various societies, including self-stigma. Yet Zhuk's drug-

using protagonists are self-determined subjects, not subhumans. The descriptions of drug-taking, and the depiction of the bodily changes associated with drugs, and their emotional and intellectual effects are likely to elicit the attention of readers who have no experience of drugs, and to provoke, shock, and challenge them. The ambivalent narrative constantly alternates. On the one hand, the narrator provides self-legitimizing ironic assurances that she is 'normal' and highly educated, making with condescending remarks about other characters' lack of education (Zhuk 2013: 17, 24, 37, 120). On the other hand, the narrative frequently breaks taboos and challenges the very categories of normalcy. At certain points of the novel, both the narrator and her girlfriend become involved in commercial sex, and these scenes are described in a similar way to the drug excesses in a confident, self-assured tone. The reader is entrusted with the intimate details of the lives of those on the societal margins: sex workers, homeless persons, and drug users. At the same time, the assumption that poverty is linked to low education is challenged in the novel: artists and thinkers are homeless, addicted and involved in sex work, and precarity can target anyone. The social and cultural capital in the Soviet Union enjoyed by dissidents does not translate into the German context. In the USSR, artists could look down on 'proletarians' (Zhuk 2013: 212), even if the artist is a 'junkie', as the narrator describes herself. The narrator herself is elitist and judgmental, but she finds that her Soviet dissident credentials carry little weight in Germany, where poverty is typically accompanied by low social status and perhaps anti-migrant attitudes.

Zhuk thematizes intimate-partner violence in a lesbian relationship, which remains a tabooed and understudied topic, while gender violence is still often thought through a heteronormative and gender binary frame (Ohms 2020). The intimate-partner violence in the novel is depicted firstly from the victim perspective. Ol'ga is repeatedly beaten, humiliated, and harmed by her partner Maik, from whom she is emotionally, and partly socially (as a non-Western migrant) dependent. The reader is placed in the painful position of a bystander. The reader who approaches the novel from a queer feminist perspective will find it painful to read lengthy vindications of intimate-partner violence as manifestations of a great love and a unique passion, which is how the narrator often depicts

them. Elsewhere, the narrator portrays this violence as an element of sado-masochistic games that have no rules. The author introduces other characters, including the narrator's friends and psychologists, who deem the relationship unhealthy, but Ol'ga seems unaware, at least initially, and continues to insist that humiliation and beating are signs of an extraordinary love. However, toward the last third of the novel, power relations are overturned. Ol'ga turns out to be a stalker, who violates the privacy of her former partner, and eventually perpetrates physical violence, not only beating her ex-girlfriend Maik, but also stabbing her with a knife. Ol'ga is reported by the police and stands trial for this episode, but she avoids punishment due to her psychiatric diagnosis. The majority of her friends and contacts in the German feminist-lesbian community turn against her after these actions. Ol'ga fails to admit responsibility for her actions, and, until the last pages, tries to justify herself and to explain the implicit and hidden power hierarchies and inequalities as well as hypocrisy of the Berlin feminist lesbian scene.

Moreover, the novel includes various representations of poverty, unemployment, and precarity. There are representations of Soviet and post-Soviet life stories that are non-linear: a university degree or good informal education do not necessarily lead to financial security. The human body provides a common denominator that unites all these issues. Zhuk's novel is particularly alive to biopolitics and body politics, the ways in which state powers, borders, policies and societal norms regulate human bodies.

Severe Maiden can be considered as an auto-ethnographical writing, which alternates highly personal, naturalistic passages with analytical distant sequences, which reveal the author's academic training, or at least reveal the intention to treat the issues on a meta level. The novel's language is remarkable for its combination of 'high culture' and 'underground culture' with slurs and slang. The frivolity and vulgarity of the language in *Severe Maiden* corresponds with the content of the work, which depicts the often violent reality of marginalized milieus. Zhuk's other works reveal her ability to write in literary Russian (e.g. Zhuk 1998), so her use of colloquial, offensive language, *mat*, and subcultural slang must be understood as a rhetorical device and as a conscious narrative choice. Such mixture of linguistic registers, narrative layers and thematic facets creates an ambivalent

impression: who did Zhuk seek to address, provoke, and thrill in *Severe Maiden*? The next sections examine the novel's possible readership.

Too lesbian for a Russophone text?

As already mentioned, *Severe Maiden* was published in a small run by an unknown publisher and has not been reprinted. The novel has received only a handful of reviews, mostly amateur, and has received little attention in the literary world. An exception is Viktor Rezunkov's short review in *Russkii zhurnal*, in which he claims that the novel will be certainly forbidden in Russia because it breaks too many propaganda laws (Rezunkov 2013). Here, Rezunkov alludes not only to the laws regulating the dissemination of information about non-normative sexualities in the presence of minors (the so-called 'anti-gay laws') but also the law against the 'propaganda of drugs'. At least until 2022, there were ways to get round the 'anti-gay' laws, and texts were published depicting LGBTQIA+ characters, even by Russian publishers, or by the queer authors themselves in print or online. Zhuk's *Severe Maiden*, despite its unapologetic confessional narratives of lesbian love and sex and excessive drug use, was published in 500 copies by a small St Petersburg publisher and online on Google Books. However, as far as my research showed, it was never published again.

The novel challenges typical constructions of femininity in the Russian intelligentsia in multiple ways, as well as familiar narratives about post-Soviet (e)migration. Emigration or travelling to Western Europe constitutes a key topos of the Russophone literary canon. Adjusting to or negotiating Western modernity and conflicting self-narration in search of an own place between Westernisers and Slavophiles, between admiration and homesickness of all kinds is a key motif in the corpus of Soviet and post-Soviet literature. However, the voices of non-heteronormative women are remaining mostly silenced and excluded from the literature. Those who have challenged the phallocentric Russian canon have been met by anti-LGBTQIA+ and anti-feminist attacks.

Zhuk's *Severe Maiden* does not conform to mainstream ideologies of gender and sexuality either. The paratext reveals a lot about how the novel transgresses gender norms. The book's illustrations by A. Neliubina depict an androgynous figure with wide shoulders and long hair. This

figure is most probably Ol'ga, a non-heteronormative woman. Ol'ga's lesbianism is couched not in apologetic terms of a 'closet' or 'coming-out' narrative, but as a natural, liveable story. A post-Soviet woman who is telling her broken story, which transcends the normative expectations of femininity among the artistic intelligentsia, seems extraordinary on both the levels of form and content. The narrator uses a variety of terms such as 'butch' (Zhuk 2013: 150) in transliteration, 'kobel' (Zhuk 2013: 148 et al.) and 'kobelikha' (Zhuk 2013: 148 et al.), both terms for a masculine or active lesbian, roughly equivalent to 'butch', and 'goluboi', literally 'blue' but used in slang as 'gay' (Zhuk 2013: 209 et al.). These terms were used by non-heteronormative subculture in Russian at that time. Such reflections on language are especially valuable for researchers seeking to document the non-Western queer slang that existed in the Russian language prior to the internet era.

At the same time, the narrator expresses also opinions that could be read from a trans*feminist point of view as trans-discriminatory, or at least operating within the rigid gender binary: 'I was afraid of *koblov* [butch lesbians]. And am afraid until now, even in their Western variant – butches!!! I do love women who look like women, not like men. At the same time, I love that they have something strict and androgynous in them, narrow hips, waistline, and beautiful breasts' (Zhuk 2013: 150). This term, 'kobel', stems from Russia's prison subculture and includes a variety of meanings from 'masculine woman' to 'active lesbian' (Vikislovar' 2021). Ol'ga is also herself a variant of it: 'toy soft baby *kobel'* (Zhuk 2013: 212), according to her girlfriend Maik. Here, it can be seen how certain kinds of gender transgressions are presented as loveable and acceptable, while others are constructed as going 'too far' and even arousing fear in a lesbian character.

The passage where Berlin is described as inhabited by 'gays, lesbians and further transsexuals' (Zhuk 2013: 10) may be read in different ways: as a trans-inclusive statement that includes trans people within gay and lesbian movements and subcultures, or as a trans-discriminatory silencing, or even as mocking-repeating the outer narrative, which does not differentiate between different identities that transcend cis-heteronormativity. Long descriptions of passion, difficulties of living together, sexual practices between Ol'ga and her girlfriend Maik, and their dramatic breakup give the

readership an insight into a life of a lesbian couple, which is not really contrasted to heteronormative surroundings, or meant to be representative, but just given. The narrator writes: 'After the first separation, which looked like "forever", we decided to be more clever, precisely more reasonable, telling each other about our dissatisfactions, articulating, or – as it has become fashionable to say in Russia – to "voice" the pain and bitterness' (Zhuk 2013: 29). Many of the women around the narrator are non-heteronormative. 'I realized that all of them, Barbara and those like her, are such radical feminists, open lesbians and sex workers only because they are far away from their parents. If their parents lived in Berlin, would they be talking on TV, giving interviews in magazines and newspapers, and behaving so openly? Fuck no!' (Zhuk 2013: 35).

The novel's linguistic and thematical snapshot of non-heteronormative underground subculture in Russian seems unique not only for 2013, but also in our own time. Moreover, the list of the multiple friends of the narrator, who died, or whose destinies were heavily impacted by AIDS, drugs and legal persecution resembles a kind of queer obituary, an attempt to commemorate the multiplicity of Leningrad's underground *tusovka* of the 1980s in a queer archive. Although it is difficult to tell which characters are fictional and which drawn directly from real life, such a queer necrology leaves a strong impression of a marginalized milieu, shaped by systemic oppressions, and evokes the idea that such remembrance goes far beyond the narrator's own circle of personal friends. Arguably, the necrology offers an alternative queer archive of those individuals who are unlikely to be remembered in the mainstream discourses. In that sense, *Severe Maiden* can be considered a queer novel not only in its depictions of lesbians and lesbian sex, but also other societal marginalizations. The novel may be considered politically queer as well as sexually queer, questioning multiple systems of oppression.

Given the truly intersectional combination of all the topics mentioned above, it can be argued that *Severe Maiden* is a 'queer Russophone text', because this novel can be described as a refusal to conform to normalcy. Here I quote the Belarusian queer activist and writer Toni Lashden: 'Queer is a refusal to join any group, it is about unwillingness to participate in an initially unfair process, it is about separation and exit from the

system' (Lashden 2021). The sparse reception and discussion of this text reveal how powerful heteronormativity in combination with sexism continue to affect the Russophone literary discourses. At least since the 1990s, there has been queer literature in Russian, including authors like Slava Mogutin, Nikolai Koliada, Dmitrii Kuz'min and others. However, only a few female queer voices have emerged, including the poet and novelist Liia Kirgetova, the musician Ol'ga Krauze, and of course, Ol'ga Zhuk. The dominance of cis-male authors can be traced as a manifestation of structural sexism and lesbophobia, inherent even in the realm of Russophone 'queer literature'.

Too addicted and too criminal for the 'mainstream' Russophone LGBT discourses?

Severe Maiden was never published in full in Germany, although one chapter did appear in German translation by Andreas Strohfeldt and was presented at a literary reading at 48 Stunden Neukölln (Ol'ga Zhuk n.d.). There are no traces of broad public discussion, even though readings were held in Berlin, probably in Russian.

Zhuk herself has highlighted how an anonymous LGBT person accused her of worsening the image of LGBT people: 'I woke up and discovered that I had sullied the image of a Soviet and post-Soviet lesbian. [...] [A]nd post-Soviet lesbians cannot wash themselves clean. [...] I created a prison aura for the lesbian through my research.' (Zhuk n.d.) Here, Zhuk is criticizing an anonymous contributor to a lesbian internet forum who accused her of being 'too open' and too provocative, which can be interpreted as too rebellious. 'You are not working in a plant or in an office or in state-sponsored business. [...] Many employers agree to tolerate LGBT-employees until they "don't stick out". You don't have children, as far as I know' (Quoted in Zhuk n.d.). The anonymous contributor points out that, for some LGBT people in Russia, discretion and adjustment were important strategies of survival. In the same post, Zhuk highlights that this detractor also criticized her for her descriptions of drug use. Interestingly, Zhuk compares her detractor's logic to 'GULAG' and 'cop' thinking in her post. According to Zhuk, the anonymous detractor has internalized the logics of power, which Zhuk is trying to challenge. This episode is likely illustrative of the broader reception of Zhuk's novel in the LGBT subcultures.

The violent, drug-addicted, cursing narrator of *Severe Maiden* is anything but 'nice' and 'hard-working', defying the stereotypes against which 'assimilationist' Russophone LGB(T) communities and activists were fighting. Ol'ga is not the kind of lesbian who simply wants the same rights to marriage and raise kids as heterosexual women enjoy, and she hardly claims that she is no different from any other women. Ol'ga hates the police, takes various illegal drugs, engages in sex work, indulges in sadomasochism and appears to be proud of it. Such a figure is hardly comfortable or representative for those Russophone activists or non-activist LGBT persons seeking acceptance and 'tolerance' from the mainstream society. The narrator uses many slang words such as the anglicism 'junkie' (Zhuk 2013: 8, 13, 24, among others) for drug users, and introduces the reader to the precise description of drug use and subcultural codes, as well as the names of substances and their effects, as if it is the most common and 'normal' thing: 'Heroin' (Zhuk 2013: 22); 'Koknar' (Zhuk 2013: 22); 'And we vomited in a night pot, which I had set out in anticipation before bed, so as not to wake up the mother and the dog, Nicodemus, who was sleeping in a separate room near the toilet' (Zhuk 2013: 22).

The opposition between 'clean' and 'neat' queer people, on the other hand, and their promiscuous, 'perverse' and provocative counterparts, on the other, has been discussed a lot in Western (mostly US-centred) literature, especially in the context of 'homonormativity' (Duggan 2003; Connell 2014). However, in post-Soviet discourses, where gender regimes operate differently, with different forms and levels of oppression and daily structural violence, the distinction between 'assimilationist' and 'anti-assimilationist' activists has not been so clear-cut, at least until 2013, nor has it been documented so well. In this light, Zhuk's writing enters an important debate that has been avoided by broad part of LGBTQIA+ communities, or proved discursively impossible for them to join. Galina Zelenina concludes her article on lesbian subculture in the Russia of early 2000s with definition of this subculture as a 'discreet', 'mimicking' and 'escapist' one, organized around certain musicians or artists (Zelenina 2007). *Severe Maiden* challenges the respectability narrative of the LGBTQIA+ community and does not fit in the playful self-narrations of being a lesbian.

The presence of violence in the text is at odds with the urge to decriminalize homosexuality in Russia, which has again become criminalized following 2013. Ol'ga attacks her ex-girlfriend Maik, and Maik has been repeatedly physically abusing her. One can imagine that quite a few activists or non-activist LGBTQIA+ Russophone persons did not want to see themselves in the company of 'kings and queens and criminal queers' portrayed by Zhuk.[6]

The narrator Ol'ga stands out with her ironical, edgy tone of narration, which inclines at times towards expressions of superiority over others. She relates to her encounters in a cynical, embittered way. Indeed, her tone even creates the impression that the reader is unwelcome in the world of *Severe Maiden*. The novel does not seek to educate, avoids leading the reader pedagogically towards a position of greater tolerance, and refuses any role of teaching the reader about who gays and lesbians 'really are'. Instead, the text evokes an insider-impression of a diary, or intimate letter, a confessional prose, where the experience of marginalization is the only possible reality. One can say that the narrator provides no explanations or justifications for her behaviour and has no pretensions to reveal herself as a 'good citizen' in the eyes of the reader. Rather, Zhuk has created a work in which the target audience appears to be herself, or perhaps a subset of close friends who are familiar with the subcultural slang, and who would not be shocked by the naturalistic descriptions, which are contrary to the liberal agenda of many contemporary assimilationist Russophone gay rights advocates.

It is precisely this ambiguity that makes *Severe Maiden* an exception in comparison to those queer literary texts with a clear, palatable identity politics that appear to target a much more obvious normative reader and to educate and correct readers. *Severe Maiden* appears, on the contrary, to be quite disinterested in educating the straight reader from a position of ignorance or discrimination into one of 'tolerance'.

Too immoral and violent to become a queer feminist icon?

[6] This quotation is from the band CocoRosie and Anohni, and their song 'Beautiful boys' (Nafoute 2014).

It would be wrong to assume that the whole bright spectre of non-heteronormative positionalities in post-Soviet Russia was represented by 2013 only by 'closeted' discreet or assimilationist LGBT subjects and all activism was represented only by cis-gay led Gay Prides. At the same time, queer feminist, intersectional and radical LGBTQIA+ movements were evolving in Russia and other post-Soviet contexts. Why, then, did *Severe Maiden* not become a queer feminist icon for activists fighting against the violence of sexism, homo- and trans-discrimination, antisemitism, racism, and capitalism? Can Zhuk's *Severe Maiden* be considered a *post-Soviet queer feminist* text? By 'queer feminism', I refer here not only to non-heteronormative sexualities and/or expressions of gender, but being 'politically queer': consciously challenging societies' expectations, and forging solidarity between various discriminated subjects. Perhaps the specific language of Zhuk's novel and its handling of violence can offer an answer.

Severe Maiden cannot be considered a typical feminist piece of literature by the lights of, say, the French *écriture féminine* tradition (Cixous, Kristeva, Irigaray) that centres emotional or bodily experiences in the way that, for example, Vasiakina's *The Wound* does. Indeed, the language of Zhuk's novel is arguably closer to the phallocentric Soviet Russian language, which can be found in writings of canonical male Soviet authors or, for example, Eduard Limonov, who offered an unorthodox gay male perspective in his *It's Me, Eddie!* [Eto ia, Edichka, 1979]. This seeming contradiction can lead a curious reader to the specificity of the Soviet- and post-Soviet coloniality of language and gender (Tlostanova 2015). *Severe Maiden* reveals how even a very resistant counter-narrative can perpetuate the structure of the Soviet Russian patriarchal language, for example through the linguistic violence of *mat*. Consider, for example, how Ol'ga uses the terms *pizda* [cunt]:

> In English, 'vagina', like all inanimate objects, is neuter, an 'it' [ono]. But in Russian, it is 'she' [ona]. Maik really liked this distinction. And of course, *pizda* is a she. *PIZDA* is an animate object. Maik breathed life into the lifeless, Anglophone cunt, just as God did to the first man (Zhuk 2013: 41).

On the one hand, appropriating *mat* and offensive slurs in this way might be considered a

linguistic means of self-empowerment and/or transgressing gender binaries. On the other hand, it arguably creates a partially objectifying 'lesbian gaze', mimicking the 'male gaze' in bodily descriptions of binary female bodies. For example:

> She was built like an eighteenth-year old maiden: long body; long legs with well-developed calves, like in a Greek sculpture, but in moderation; a long neck; a waist; a tummy without a single wrinkle, even when she was sitting down. Maik was built remarkably, her figure has not changed since she had been sixteen or eighteen until now, when she had reached the age of sixty. Girls are not born nowadays with such bodies (Zhuk 2013: 17).

Severe Maiden fails to deconstruct gender to that utopian extent that queer-feminist activists often expect. Instead, the novel operates in the Soviet gender regime, while being without doubt a lesbian and a feminist novel at the same time.

Exploring the topic of violence can help shed more light on the text's ambivalent relationship to queer feminism. How does Zhuk deal with violence and what do her representations of violence reveal about post-Soviet queerness? Her feminist and non-heteronormative female characters act violently in their relationships and friendships, and even toward themselves. Their violence is described with ethnographic precision and a strange indifference. It seems surprising that Zhuk, a famous early Soviet lesbian activist, could write this way, knowing that her narrative could feed anti-feminism and lesbophobia. What does this say about Zhuk? Can a novel that downplays or normalizes violence still be read a queer feminist text?

The blurred line between non-normative sexual practices such as sadomasochism, on the one hand, and physical and psychological violence in a relationship, on the other, is a recurring issue in the novel. Written a few years prior to the broad #metoo movement, this text raises the taboo topic of intimate-partner violence in a lesbian relationship not only from a perspective of a victim, but within the frame of a mutual violent relationship, and even from a perspective of a perpetrator within the same text. This moment puts the reader in a kind of moral dilemma. Do we believe the narrator that her own violence was an act of 'violent resistance' (Johnson 2008, cited in

Meshkova 2020) after years of being violated, or do we question the whole narration and do not know who to believe? Is Ol'ga an 'unreliable narrator' who justifies her own violent behaviour and leaves the reader with the intellectual work of asking where to attribute blame? Or is *Severe Maiden* a novel that advocates physical violence as a form of vengeance? The peculiar way in which Ol'ga explains her violent actions – e.g. the knife attack on Maik – pose a challenge to queer feminist readers, who stand against any kind of violence. Ol'ga does not take responsibility for the physical harm done to her ex-partner; indeed, her regrets seem more focused on the fact that the relationship has ended. This constellation places the reader in a role of a 'rescuer' in terms of Karpman's drama triangle, charged with finding out who is the 'victim' and who the 'persecutor'. At the same time, the ambiguous narration style makes it difficult to form clear narrative conclusions about what exactly happened to the unreliable narrator and her girlfriend. Such reading might be quite unpleasant and disturbing, if a reader is expecting a novel that takes a clear moral stance against violence. The text's narrative structure is unusual in that it alternates between an omnipresent and omniscient third-person narrator and Ol'ga as a first-person narrator, even within a single passage. Ol'ga can be considered a fictionalized unreliable narrator, whose confessional stems partly from an experience of a mental health crisis, partly as a result of drug-induced 'psychosis' (Zhuk's own wording: see Zhuk 2013: 255 and 258), and then again from a very distant ethnographical analytical point of view.[7]

A peer reviewer of this manuscript suggested that the connection between drug use and violence constitutes the main theme of the novel. While it does play a major role, it is important to note that the risky use of psychoactive substances in the novel can be interpreted in various ways: as an escape from the multiple structural layers of state violence, as a free choice or a spiritual search

[7] My intention in this article is to avoid pathologizing psychiatric diagnoses. Rather than engage in simplifying discourse on mental health, I aim to discuss it in a multifactorial bio-socio-psychological model, and to use the terms used in the novel as they are self-descriptions of the characters. In *Severe Maiden*, the psychological state of Ol'ga is described as 'an illness, severe depression' (Zhuk 2013: 241), as drug-induced 'madness' (Zhuk 2013: 133), and as a 'manic-depressive' psychosis (Zhuk 2013: 255 and 258), an outdated term for 'bipolar disorder'.

(how the narrator frames it, Zhuk 2013: 139), or indeed as a manifestation of self-harm and 'disease'. All of these interpretations grant a degree of agency to Ol'ga, who engages in activities that risk harming both others and herself. Ultimately, *Severe Maiden* cannot be considered a queer feminist novel because it does not take a queer feminist moral stance. Key components of queer feminism are missing: praising community and solidarity; advocating the rights of those who are multiply marginalized; drawing attention to structural inequalities. Instead, Ol'ga places the blame on her fellow feminists and destroys herself without taking responsibility for her violent behaviour. The reader is left with a challenging confessional narrative that questions their own understanding of 'good' and 'evil' but offers no clear answers. You cannot tell whether Ol'ga (or Maik) is a 'good' or 'bad' character. This ambiguity poses a challenge for queer feminists seeking a moral compass in literary texts. At least one strand of recent queer feminist literary texts is seeking this kind of didacticism. Despite offering a very judgmental and critical narrative, *Severe Maiden* refuses to adopt a pedagogical stance, and rather mirrors life's misery instead of offering a utopia or a manifesto for a queer feminist future.

Incomprehensible to German publishers? Discredited in the eyes of German feminists?

Zhuk's status as a writer in the Post-Soviet/Russophone diaspora in Berlin means that we can approach her work not only through a Post-Soviet/Russophone or diaspora lens, but also investigate her reception in the German context. According to one source, one chapter of *Severe Maiden* was translated into German, and has been discussed in a local bilingual literary club (Presentation n.d.).

While the mainstream literary world remains heteronormative, literature by and about LGBTQIA+ persons does sometimes reach the mass market, and can even gather a considerable following. Some publishers and bookshops in Germany are consciously responding to this need. In the context of queer feminist diasporic literature, we can identify two sectors: empowerment texts and (self-)exoticizing texts. By 'empowerment texts', I refer to politically engaged literature that aims to highlight certain aspects of experience and to empower, sometimes also by presenting an embellished picture of marginalized communities. The

typical traits of these texts include revolutionary pathos, exaltation of collectivism, praise of community and clear political identity categories. Positive representations of the community are encouraged (the more literary representation there is, the better social position of a certain marginalized group would be). The '(self-)exoticizing texts' in the context of queer migration might be those perpetuating the rigid 'East-West' dichotomies, framing Western Europe as 'tolerant' and contrasting it with discrimination and violence toward non-cis-heteronormative subjects in their countries of origin.

Two reasons could explain the lack of interest in *Severe Maiden* among the German literary scene. First, it is not empowering enough, and second, it is not sufficiently self-exoticizing. In terms of empowerment, Zhuk's novel does thematize multiple collectives and communities, but does not portray them as communities of solidarity and change and mutual support. Rather, they are often communities united solemnly by common misery or need. The communication in those underground intelligentsia drug users' communities in Leningrad/St. Petersburg and lesbian feminist and art scenes in Berlin is characterized by betrayal, mistrust, concurrence, and a great sense of loneliness that underlies the narrator's sarcasm and irony. Ol'ga cannot trust no one, and her caustic laughter highlights their limitations. This is certainly not the attitude or atmosphere of a 'queer-migrant utopia' or political self-consciousness that can be found in some other German literary texts, such as *Beside Myself* [Außer sich, 2017] by Sasha Marianna Salzmann.

Severe Maiden is also unusual in that it does not offer a story of queer migration with a clear improvement of the narrator's life due to migration to the West. Zhuk's novel also portrays the decrease of the social capital that a lot of post-Soviet migrants experienced after arrival in Germany (compare Panagiotidis 2021, Klingenberg 2022). Here it is instructive to compare *Severe Maiden* to Grjasnowa's *The Legal Haziness of a Marriage*, published in Germany only a year later, in 2014. *Severe Maiden* destroys completely the myth of queer migration from a 'homophobic East' to 'tolerant and accepting West', an idea that is somewhat perpetuated in Grjasnowa, where the characters escape Russian homophobia to Berlin. Instead, Zhuk depicts the self-determined migration of a highly educated lesbian woman, who follows her love. The novel

makes a striking critique of German feminist circles, and her narrator takes an ironic stance towards Western Europe, which she describes with an epigraph from Georgii Ivanov as an 'obscure European hole' (Zhuk 2013: 7). Thus, *Severe Maiden* offers a quite unusual counter-discourse to the mainstream discourse on queer migration, where Western Europe is constructed as a tolerant safe haven for non-Western queers. Instead, Zhuk portrays a rich queer life in late Soviet Union during the so-called 'stagnation' era and does not associate her narrator's migration with particular anti-gay discrimination in her homeland. It is a story of individual choice and agency in migrating because of love.

'I will always remain for the autochthonous inhabitants of this land a *schaisse Ausländerin* [shitty foreigner]' proclaims Zhuk's narrator (Zhuk 2013: 110). In another episode she describes migrants as 'strong, passionate people' (Zhuk 2013: 115). This self-narration reminds one on the critical anti-racist literature of migrants from the Global South or migrants of colour in Europe, such as Fatma Aydemir's novel *The Elbow* [Ellbogen, 2017] or the recent collection *Your Homeland is Our Nightmare* [Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum, 2019] edited by Aydemir and Hengameh Yaghoobifarah (Aydemir et al 2019). It is a departure from the 'thankful' media narratives that can be traced in quite a few self-narrations of post-Soviet queers discussed elsewhere in my research.

The specific Russia-centeredness of the novel probably prevented it for being celebrated as a Jewish text in Germany. Although Zhuk is also Jewish, there is little content on this part of her identity in the novel, instead the narrator highlights her Russian origins especially contrasting with her Western girlfriends' and other figures in Berlin. Also Zhuk's blog is titled 'The Journal of an Amazon', with the subtitle 'A Russian Amazon' (zhuki06 n.d.). Such self-description and highlighting the 'Russianness' seems remarkable in the post-Soviet (post-)imperialistic context and in the context of (e)migration and needs further analysis that is beyond the scope of the article.

Finally, it should be pointed out that a text's success in the cultural sphere depends on the author's access to social capital and networks. If the novel's depiction of Ol'ga's exclusion from Berlin's lesbian feminist scene is biographical, then it is possible that the biographical Zhuk lost access to translators, literary agents and publishers in Berlin following her exclusion after the dramatic

separation from 'Maik' and Zhuk's violent outburst. Probably there was nobody to provide Zhuk with the kind of support that, for example, Jean Cocteau had offered Jean Genet.
But then for whom was this novel written? For the communities themselves? For the author and her close friends? Aleksandr Vinogradov's preface to the novel informs the reader that he had shared lots of adventures of Ol'ga in Leningrad/St. Petersburg. Or perhaps the novel was never intended to be liked and admired, but instead should be understood as the confessional diary that it purports to be?

Queer diaspora literature

I have argued that *Severe Maiden* by Zhuk should be considered an 'uncomfortable narrative' of queer diaspora. I discovered Zhuk's writing as part of a search for emancipatory and empowering queer-feminist self-narrations of queer post-Soviet diaspora. By comparing the rise of emancipatory writing by (queer) (post-)migrants from the Global South and people of Colour, I was trying to understand the place of post-Soviet queer diasporic literature, which seemed to take different political and rhetorical strategies.
I realized that the novel not only indeed offered rich insights into queer/lesbian lives of characters, but also was organized around the topic of violence. As a queer diasporic reader, it was hardly possible to identify with the characters or the narrator of this violent text.
Severe Maiden defied my methodological frame and prompted me to reflect on the complexities of the intersectional live realities, and the wish to advocate 'good' literary representations of the diasporic post-Soviet queers. In this novel, written by a non-heterosexual woman, there was a confusing mixture of problematic narratives, such as internalized sexism and trans-discrimination, narrative traces of elitism and classism. There appeared to be a vindication of violence, at least on first reading, as well as other challenging elements that made it impossible for me to praise the novel as an example of a marginalized voice of the queer post-Soviet diaspora in a simple, optimistic way. A queer migrant reader myself, I found myself repulsed, disappointed and shocked by the novel. I had been searching for a sympathetic 'queer ancestor', a Lesley Feinberg or Audre Lorde, and discovered a contradicting and complex figure, who did not fit the romantic narrative of a multiply

oppressed figure, and therefore deemed sympathetic and worthy of attention.[8] Ol'ga was far from the kind of figure with whom I could identify, or whom I would like to represent queer diasporic communities. In the context of my dissertation Zhuk's *Severe Maiden* seemed to fall out of the warm narrative of queer diasporic solidarity and intimacy, which I realized I was looking for. Indeed, this text in many points represents rather the attitude of 'Not Gay as in Happy, but Queer as in Fuck You', as the Swedish feminist researcher Ulrika Dahl puts it (Dahl 2014), destroying the expectation of the reader that the novel shows 'nice' lesbian migrants. This 'uncomfortable narrative' of queer diaspora can easily play into the hands of multiple problematic discourses, including anti-LGBTQIA+ discrimination, or anti-migrant, antisemitic or racist discourses. But it can also offer a self-critical platform for idealistic queer-feminists and LGBTQIA+ migrants to reflect on their own understandings of solidarity, intersectionality, and activism.

Conclusion

Severe Maiden resists any unambiguous interpretation. The novel's polysemy makes it difficult to define an intended audience. The text oscillates between different possibilities of reading, frequently making a proclamation in one breath and then negating the very same opinion later, and offering thus a variety of ambiguous and contradicting pictures on gender, migration, drug use, poverty, sexuality, and various other topics.

At first sight, Zhuk's *Severe Maiden* appeared as a candidate for the missing queer-feminist post-Soviet author from the diasporic context in the 1990s. However, a closer gaze into Zhuk's work has provided a possible answer as to why the novel has not a 'cult' status but is still worthy of analysis.

The circumstances of queer migrants' precarity, their societal marginalization and the need to escape unbearable reality through hard drugs have changed the narrator's moral frame and led her to the decisions she has made. The novel highlights how a victim can also be a perpetrator at the same

[8] Lesley Feinberg (1949–2014) was a Jewish US-American writer who wrote on topics of multiple discriminations, gender identity, solidarity, and political resistance. Her most famous works include *Stone Butch Blues* (1996) and *Drag King Dreams* (2006). Audre Lorde (1934–1992) was an African-American author and activist who has recently been translated into Russian (Lord 2021).

time, a point that emerges particularly strongly in an intersectional reading that considers discrimination and privilege simultaneously. Thus, *Severe Maiden* offers us not only a complicated and complex protagonist, but also provides food for thought on how societal oppression can result in self-destruction and interpersonal violence.

Severe Maiden may not provide the idealism and empowerment for those multiply marginalized subjects and their advocates who seek positive representations and strive after utopian visions. However, the novel operates in a complex cultural context, and it is not easy to imagine what emancipation might look like amid the cluster of intersectional entanglements at the heart of the novel. If the novel has liberatory potential, perhaps that lies in an admission that there exist contexts in which no idealistic emancipation is possible, or that emancipation for some may come at the cost of the marginalization of others. Perhaps Zhuk uses her novel to call into question the existence of any context that would allow for 'an idealistic emancipation'. Such a pessimistic, almost nihilistic trajectory might be contrary to the recent queer and queer-diasporic projects, which aim in one or another way for a better life and increased acceptance of individuals and communities experiencing multiple marginalization. Of course, it is hard to admit that contexts of suffering and marginalization exist where it is difficult, or impossible, to imagine any such transformation. Arguably, Zhuk realized all too well that the multiple forms of marginalization and violence in her country of origin would not be resolved by migration but even intensified? In *Severe Maiden*, Zhuk creates an imaginary space that allows for the representation of such broken figures as the narrator and her friends, and this might be a necessary step for the critique of the existing societies. Moreover, continuous self-reflection is desperately needed for political and cultural movements and subcultures seeking emancipation, including migrant, lesbian and feminist groups. Read thus, the unsettling novel can offer a platform for queer grieving. And arguably, this process of queer grieving does not receive enough space in the constant rush of activism and survival.

Severe Maiden does not fit into in the optimistic progress-oriented identity politics project, which finds its place in the selective inclusions in the mainstream literary processes and assimilationist LGBTQIA+ activisms. Nor does not the novel fit easily among

those queer feminist narratives that strive for positive representations and consider multiple oppression categories together. Zhuk has produced a form of narrative subversion so profound in *Severe Maiden* that even the supposedly subversive audience who might normally embrace such a novel, refuse to do so, since they feel it risks pathologizing their communities, and hence they overlook the novel in self-defence.

Instead, this book offers a condensed literary representation for a set of existing problems, such as discrimination and violence within multiply marginalized communities. Those problems are difficult to discuss even for actors within these communities, exactly because of the high pressure of the heteronormative and anti-migrant discourse, which deny any agency or possibility of positive self-constructions for LGBTQIA+ people, migrant women, drug users, sex workers, those living with mental health issues, or otherwise othered individuals by criminalizing, pathologizing and individualizing their experiences.

Severe Maiden shamelessly unpacks the heavy and uncomfortable complexities of lives on the societal margins, which can be read in direct connection to the epistemic violence and systemic oppressions. In this respect, the novel does achieve something unique, while displaying broken and unappealing characters in all their misery and opening a discursive possibility to queerly grieve about their destinies. Perhaps such grieving may be fully experienced probably only by those whose own experiences reflect the characters'. The bitterness and sarcastic tone of the narrator can be understood as a part of such collective queer grief. I would not equate Zhuk's nihilism to the antisocial thesis in queer theory, although it might remind the reader of it, but would rather highlight that this queer grieving reflects its origins in the specific post-Soviet context and all the transgenerational traumatizing aspects inherent to this positionality.

Severe Maiden, authored by an early lesbian activist and researcher from Russia, is a valuable contribution to the non-universalist historization of non-normative sexualities, even if it narrates from a completely different point of view, as can be found in US-American queer classics such as Feinberg. Feinberg also portrays those living on society's margins, but never loses the emphasis on solidarity nor departs from the clear stance against violence. One might polemically put it thus: the

Anglophone queers have had Lesley Feinberg, and Russophone queers Zhuk's writings. However, such a juxtaposition reveals the quite important contextualization of Russophone 'queer writing' in the field of influence of a specific 'post-Soviet condition' (Tlostanova 2015: 46), which has been shaped by the Soviet modernity. In this situation possibilities of resistance were limited, and many had become disenchanted with utopianism, following the Soviet experiment. This specific cultural context offers few possibilities to decolonize oneself, to strip oneself of the internalized violence associated with the state. In this context, it must be considered that the usurpation of the emancipative leftist project by totalitarianism produced exactly such disillusioned subjects as the characters in *Severe Maiden*.

The ambivalent and provocative writing style and wording contribute to the uniqueness of *Severe Maiden*. The novel does not seek to educate the reader, and operates in a provocative frame, probably addressing the author's own friends, as well as those who might share the combination of marginalizing experiences depicted therein. Exactly this kind of a queer text can provide inspiration to reflect on the nature and the omnipresence of interpersonal, systemic, and epistemic violence and complicate the understanding of queer writing away from the straightforward homosexual identity politics towards the intersectional queer text. However, such an interpretation presupposes an active meaning-making by the reader in an act of reading queerly and questioning own prejudices and narrative pitfalls. The same text can be also harshly criticized not only by a conservative reader, who might be shocked by the text, but also by some LGBTQIA+ rights activists, who might see in too many stereotypes of their community reproduced in the novel. Despite the unique thematical scope and narrative decisions, different cultural and subcultural fields may have avoided this novel because it offers an uncomfortable narrative of post-Soviet diasporic lesbianism, or queerness more broadly. This omission is telling for how powerful the cultural norms of sexuality, ethnicity, migration, and mental health are, if even the subcultural discourses cannot allow themselves to discuss such an 'uncomfortable narrative' of queer post-Soviet diaspora.

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Rowan Dowling

Russian Trans* Stories: Collective Transgender Autobiography as Activism

This article explores contemporary transgender collective autobiography published by Vykhod (Coming Out), an LGBTQ+ activist initiative in Russia. It contributes to the growing literature on trans* issues in Russian Studies by bringing a range of trans* voices to the forefront of discussion, situating them within the Russian context, and bridging literary analysis with trans* life writing theory.

At the centre of this analysis are three collections featuring 'trans* stories': *We're Here: Collected Trans*Stories* [My zdes': Sbornik trans*istorii, 2017], *Who I Am: From Sex and Roles to Queer* [Kto ia est': Ot pola i roli k kvir, 2018], and *Everyone Has a Body* [Telo est' u vsekh, 2018]. These collections defy easy categorisation, combining autobiographical essays, poetry, diary extracts, art, and comic strips. The unifying factor is the first-person perspective, with authors drawing on their lived experiences as either trans* individuals or their loved ones.

The article determines the distinctive features of this 'trans* story' genre and demonstrates how Vykhod has mobilised autobiography in their trans* activism. It argues that rather than seeking to establish political visibility, activists are crowdsourcing trans* stories in attempts to create a sense of solidarity and community, achieve better trans* representation in LGBTQ+ projects, and provide a source of advice and self-help for Russian trans* readers facing similar issues.

Although the collections aim to generate the impression of 'unity' in these respects, the article equally illustrates that trans* stories are intended to showcase the diversity of trans* people and experiences. Narratives were intentionally curated to unsettle normative trans* life writing structures and work against the limitations placed on trans* bodies, sexualities, and gender expressions by the medical establishment. Specifically, Vykhod's trans* stories spotlight a remarkable spectrum of gender and sexual identities and are particularly concerned with how trans* and queer (*transkvir*) experiences can intersect. Tracing these *transkvir* themes and aesthetics, this article shows how Russian trans* life writers are employing innovative linguistic and stylistic strategies to address the failures of the identity paradigm, the Russian language, and normative discourses to articulate trans* subjectivity or gender ambiguity.

This article explores 'trans* stories' published by the LGBTQ+ initiative Vykhod [Coming Out] in Saint Petersburg, Russia. 'Trans*' operates as an umbrella term indicating a range of suf-

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fixes that may follow (*-gender*, *-feminine, -masculine* etc.) while remaining inclusive of other non-normative gender identities such as non-binary, agender, bigender, demigender, genderqueer, and so on. Throughout, I use *they/them* pronouns to refer to non-binary speakers as it is uncertain which pronouns the subjects would self-identify with in English.

In the Russian Federation, President Vladimir Putin has mockingly called trans* people 'transformers' (Voronov et al. 2021: 7) and stated that teaching about gender fluidity is 'on the verge of a crime against humanity' (Sperling et al. 2022). State rhetoric, moreover, presents being LGBTQ+ as incompatible with Russianness (Essig et al. 2019). Gender studies research centres have been classed as 'foreign agents' (Rossman 2021) along with Russian LGBTQ+ activist groups including Vykhod. Furthermore, since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, state rhetoric has crystalised anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-West sentiment by positioning Russia as defending 'traditional values' under assault. Trans* rights specifically have been derided in Russia's justifications for the war in Ukraine and its attempts to legitimise the crackdown on its own citizens. Putin has claimed, for example, that Russian citizens who seek 'gender freedoms' are part of an anti-Russian 'fifth column' (Sperling et al. 2022).

Research into Russian trans* subjectivities is therefore increasingly urgent, yet calls for papers on queer topics rarely produce trans* proposals (Healey et al. 2021: 238–239). In fact, the initial call for this special issue resulted primarily in proposals about gay men, requiring the editor to seek additional contributions from scholars working on lesbian, bisexual, and trans* topics. As such, the existing pool of literature explicitly dealing with trans* people, history and representation in Russia is small and is only now emerging as a distinct field of study. Yana Kirey-Sitnikova is spearheading the effort, publishing a range of articles on Russian trans* feminism, trans* activisms, and linguistic strategies for gender neutralisation (Kirey-Sitnikova 2016, 2020, and 2021). Studies of trans* figures in other historical periods are materialising too, such as the article by Margarita Vaysman in this issue, and trans* readings of Medieval and Early Modern hagiography (Mayhew forthcoming). However, much research remains to be conducted and prior studies would benefit from being re-

examined with an eye to trans* subjectivity (Healey et al. 2021: 239).

The present article contributes to this growing body of research by surveying the 'trans* stories' published by Vykhod and amplifying trans* voices. The article has the following structure. First, I introduce my three primary sources and draw out distinctions between their content and style. I then offer a definition of 'trans* stories' in relation to auto/biography theory (Smith et al. 2010; Poletti 2020), trans* life writing studies (Drabinski 2014; Halberstam 2005; Jacques 2017; Prosser 1998; Rondot 2016; Vipond 2018), and the editorial framing of the publications themselves. Specifically, I argue that trans* stories can be described as a form of collective autobiography consisting of crowdsourced life narratives across a range of media. Crucially, the stories are produced by trans* people, for trans* people (or an otherwise queer audience). I show that this type of cultural activism does not aim for political visibility. Rather, I argue that mobilising trans* autobiography is intended to provide a source of self-help and achieve two competing aims: fostering a sense of solidarity and community, and highlighting the idiosyncratic nature of trans* experiences. Finally, I demonstrate how this intention to showcase unity and diversity plays out across the collated trans* stories through analysis of how trans* stories represent the complex intersections between trans* and queer (*transkvir*) experiences in three respects: identity labels, the failures of gendered language, and sex and the body.

A Trans* Archive

Three sources published by the LGBTQ+ initiative Vykhod, founded in Saint Petersburg in 2008, form the foundation of my analysis. PDFs of these books are made freely available through the website (Vykhod n.d.a.). The publications have also been distributed in print, such as at the annual QueerFest event run by Vykhod since 2009. The initiative's Trans*Mission, launched in 2015, runs peer counselling sessions, arranges legal consultations, provides training on trans* inclusivity, and publishes materials on trans* topics (Vykhod 2018; Vykhod n.d.b).

The first publication is *We're Here: A Collection of Trans*Stories* (Dzhibladze et al. 2017). The 200-page book, as the title suggests, is entirely focused on lived trans* experience and

contains almost 50 contributions with a first-person perspective, including poetry, art, diary extracts, essays, and comic strips. Most contributors do not disclose their location, but those who do indicate significant geographical diversity, writing not only from Saint Petersburg and Moscow, but Rostov-on-Don, Omsk, Kyrgyzstan, the US, and Ukraine. As *We're Here* is the largest collection and is solely focused on trans* lives, I draw most extensively from this publication in the article.

The other two collections I examine do not include trans* content exclusively, but rather capture a spectrum of LGBTQ+ life writing about gender and sexual identities. In this article, however, I refer only to the stories written by self-identifying trans* subjects. *Everyone Has a Body* (Cherchenko et al. 2018), is a 46-page illustrated zine containing often experimental life writing centred around LGBTQ+ people's self-perception of embodied experiences such as menstruation, sex lives, BDSM culture, body weight, and performance art. Three stories explore experiences specifically connected to having a trans* body. *Who I Am: From Sex and Roles to Queer* (Sabunaeva 2018), is a 32-page zine which introduces a queer-theoretical framework alongside seven short autobiographical stories, four of which articulate trans* subjectivities. The editor, Maria Sabunaeva, explains that the purpose of the zine is to explore the categories with which we define ourselves and others define us. Contributors, who each have differently intersecting sexual and gender identities, were asked to write stories about how they identify, what the label(s) they use mean to them, and how they came to identify this way.

Despite the range of identities featured across these collections, Vykhod's autobiographical archive falls somewhat short in one respect. Transwomen and transfeminine people are very underrepresented. Most non-binary contributors across the texts were also assigned female at birth (AFAB). Given the feeling of being threatened—or the examples of real violence committed against them—related by the trans* women who decided to contribute, it seems that the lack of subjects assigned male at birth (AMAB) likely results from the pervasive climate of homophobic violence in Russia. Trans* people may additionally be read as gay or lesbian due to a widespread belief in the 'gender inversion' of homosexuals (Baer 2013: 40). This violence especially targets AMAB people

whose gender expression is seen as transgressing hegemonic masculinity.

Indeed, in *We're Here,* the picture painted in stories by transwomen and their loved ones is relatively bleak. Iana Sitnikova explains that she no longer believes being attacked will draw media attention or public sympathy—and the constant threat has led her to become somewhat disillusioned with trans* activism and the idea of a bright future. A post-script reveals her concern about contributing to the collection, 'knowing that someone somewhere will use this text against me' (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 131). Zhanna echoes such fears, feeling she lives 'as if in an enemy camp' and needs to self-censor her behaviour, appearance, and thoughts because she cannot safely come out to anyone (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 192). She doubts anyone would be ready 'to carry the weight of this responsibility' if she did come out because it would be 'easier to betray the man and enjoy the spectacle of his execution' (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 193). Unfortunately, these threats are real. Inessa Gashinskaia's story is written in memory of trans* friend Anzhela Likina, who was tragically murdered in Ufa by the boyfriend of her ex-wife after a leaked traffic police dashcam video of Anzhela's documents being inspected went viral (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 147). Together, the threats these writers relate suggest that even in an anonymised forum, the potential repercussions are perhaps too much to risk for many AMAB trans* people.

This level of hostility makes the work initiatives such as Vykhod are conducting by sharing trans* stories all the more important. Indeed, Vykhod's mission reflects a broader trend among Russian LGBTQ+ initiatives. T-Deistvie [T-Action] ran a 'TransStory' project online (T-Deistvie 2021), although their social media accounts have sadly been made private following the expansion of the anti-"gay propaganda" law in November 2022. The Arkhangel'sk LGBTQ+ community centre Rakurs published a book in which trans* individuals used their life experiences to answer frequently asked questions from other trans* people (Ford et al. 2020). *Kvir' Sibir'* (2020), which includes trans* life narratives, was published by a Siberian queer feminist collective. T-Deistvie also published *Good Questions* (Grin 2019), developed from a series of workshops to promote the practice of autobiographical writing as therapeutic self-help.

Evidently, there is a widespread interest among Russian activists in ensuring trans* (and queer) people are given a platform for self-expression and self-exploration. As Dzhonni Dzhibladze, one of the four trans* editors of *We're Here,* explains: 'Doctors write about us (and more often not about us, but our 'pathology'). [...] Journalists [...] Lawyers [...] They write about us in the third person. I think it's time for us to write our own story – to write it in the first person' (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 7).

Defining 'Trans* Stories'

The term 'trans* stories' is taken from the subtitle of *We're Here*. I adopt the term here in a specific sense, to refer to a form of collective autobiography consisting of short, crowdsourced life narratives, created across a range of media by trans* people, for trans* people. First, these stories are crowdsourced in that they are submitted by trans* people (and their loved ones) in response to a private or open call by an LGBTQ+ activist group (e.g. Vykhod 2021; T-Deistvie 2021). Second, the multimedia approach expands autobiographical acts beyond the written word and makes 'life narratives' a more apt term (Smith et al. 2010: 4). Third, trans* stories are consistently very short regardless of the choice of media. Comic strips include only a few frames, poetry rarely runs longer than a page, self-portraits are single images, and the longest written texts average at less than ten pages. Therefore, instead of focusing strictly on the 'I'—a singular person and their experience—trans* stories, like crowdsourced autobiography more generally, spotlight collective experience among like-minded strangers (Poletti 2020: 84). This kind of collective autobiography invites readers to relate what they read to their own experience, thus directly contributing to the activist goal of further expanding and reinforcing community ties through literary peer support, as I outline below.

Mark Kandol'skii, another editor of *We're Here*, held competing aims for his work on the collection:

> I would also like to mention what I call the 'trans-narrative' [trans-narrativom]. It is a generic narrative [povestvovanie] transgender people typically tell about themselves. [...] As the editor of the collection I wanted to

> widen this story and show a variety of situations. Alongside this, I wanted all [the trans*stories] to flow into a single utterance, so that not only the individual voice of each author but the collective words of the Russophone trans*community could be heard as well (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 7-8).

While Kandol'skii's two aims of unifying and diversifying trans* voices may at first appear incompatible, readers are consistently reminded of the idiosyncrasies of trans* lives. Trans* authors in *We're Here* (and the other two collections) bring new, various perspectives, determined by specific factors such as geographical location, age, and gender and sexual identity. However, common themes connect many stories, such as a rejection of simplistic identity labels, an explicit discussion of (queer) sexuality, and a desire to queer language to combat the gendered 'I'. Moreover, the term 'trans* stories' itself, in addition to the titles of two of Vykhod's collections, suggest a united voice: *We're Here* and *Everyone Has a Body* [emphasis mine].

The curated voices therefore each highlight the individualised nature of trans* experiences while working together to challenge the dominant tropes of the 'trans-narrative'. With this term, Kandol'skii designates a well-documented narrative structure that trans* people have been compelled to use by cisgender gatekeepers. This narrative arc centres around a binary transition either from female-to-male (FTM) or, more often, male-to-female (MTF), in a three-act trajectory: a gender-dysphoric childhood; a transformation in the big city; and the aftermath of the 'sex change' (Rondot 2016: 531–532, citing Ames 2005). Trans* life writers following this formula employed normative terms and rhetorical devices, such as the idea of being 'born in the wrong body', which would be intelligible to medical professionals (Drabinski 2014: 309; Vipond 2019: 19–20). Deviation from this model could prevent the person from accessing therapy and surgery, and would act as a barrier to publication in spaces run by cisgender editors (Jacques 2017: 360, 366–367).

While this summary of the trans-narrative derives from Western trans* life writing theory and transition memoirs, similar trends can be observed in Russia. Contemporary Russian medical theories of 'transsexualism' have developed in conversation with English-language clini-

cal literature since the late Soviet period (Kirey-Sitnikova 2020). Russian psychiatry still classifies 'transsexualism' as a mental illness, overlapping with 'disorders of sexual preference' including sadomasochism, paedophilia, and exhibitionism (Weaver 2020: 115). When these collections were written, in order to be prescribed hormone treatment, trans* people in Russia were first required to receive a diagnosis, a certificate recommending medical intervention, and a referral for examination (Wonderzine 2019). This process typically required observation in a psychiatric ward for at least one month. To change legal gender, a committee composed of a sexologist, psychiatrist and a psychologist first needed to issue a Certificate of Sex Reassignment (Wonderzine 2019).

Trans* people in Russia who were able to undergo a medical transition before the legislative changes therefore experienced pressure to recount a normative autobiography to clinicians similar to that which led to the emergence of the dominant narrative model in the West. By contrast, Vykhod's publications are edited by trans* and queer activists who expressly sought trans* stories diverging from this mould.

Mobilising Autobiography

In this section, I argue that sharing trans* stories was becoming increasingly instrumental to the work of trans* activists in Russia. Given that trans* and queer voices are effectively silenced in the public sphere under Russia's infamous 'gay propaganda' laws of 2013 and 2022, the act of representation may be considered activism in and of itself (Andreevskikh 2018: 14). By tying representations to real (though often anonymised) LGBTQ+ Russian speakers, Vykhod's practice of sharing trans* (and queer) autobiography opposes state-sponsored discourses which position Russia as a defender of 'traditional values' against a Western threat of sexual and gender transgression (Essig et al. 2019; Sperling et al. 2022). Self-representation thus becomes a powerful tool for documenting the existence (and creativity) of people otherwise erased from the media and society.

Such projects may be classed as a type of Russian trans* cultural activism, which has been characterised as influenced by the Western LGBTQ+ activist goals of emphasising 'diversity' and 'community' (Kirey-Sitnikova 2020). While the goals ex-

pressed above reflect this influence, I contend that Vykhod's trans* stories are significant in the landscape of Russian publishing because they provide a platform for discussing the specific issues trans* people face in Russia. These issues include the impact of state-sponsored homophobia and transphobia, the pathologizing structure of the Russian medical establishment, and difficulty articulating trans* subjectivity in the Russian language.

For instance, some trans* stories demonstrate that due to the homophobic climate, authors come under increased pressure when making decisions about surgery and 'passing'. A pessimistic mood pervades these texts. A recent report by Vykhod demonstrated the dangers of being outed, blackmailed, or otherwise subjected to abuse on the grounds of gender and sexual identity, with trans* people in the most vulnerable position due to these compounding factors (Voronov et al. 2021: 51). Anastasia, for instance, dreads how medical staff will react to her body if she is suddenly hospitalised and is considering having vaginoplasty solely for that reason (Cherchenko et al. 2018: 43). Other writers suggest 'passing' is not necessarily desirable because it may increase the risk of violence. Maks Nebel had been living 'stealth'—meaning he had cut all past ties in order to live without anyone knowing he had transitioned—but after the implementation of the 'gay propaganda' law in 2013, he reconsidered his position: 'Life started winking at me from all sides: 'You're stealth ['Ty v stellze']? That won't save you.' I came to the conclusion that the deeper stealth is, the higher the risk of being outed, the more painful it will be, and the more vulnerable I myself will be' (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 48–49).

Another key point of departure from Western activist goals is that Vykhod's autobiographical strategy does not necessarily aim for public visibility and recognition. Rather, its primary aim appears to be establishing a semi-anonymised literary support network for trans* (and queer) Russian speakers who may see themselves reflected in the autobiographies of others. The argument I make here draws on research demonstrating that Russian LGBTQ+ community-building and spaces appropriation are usually overlooked by Western media and academic literature due to the dominance of the Western visibility paradigm (Buyantueva and Shevtsova 2020: 9). The applicability of this paradigm is questionable

in post-Soviet contexts (Baer 2013: 38–39; Healey and Stella 2021: 233). Many Russian trans* people believe that increased visibility will result in more hatred and violence (Kirey-Sitnikova 2020). Essentially, '[t]o the Western public and allies, visibility for LGBTQ+ Russians is the political visibility juxtaposed against the Russian government. However, that is not necessarily the visibility that local LGBTQ+ people desire for themselves' (Buyantueva and Shevtsova 2020: 9).

The kind of 'visibility' that trans* stories projects seek to achieve, then, is concentrated within the trans* and LGBTQ+ community itself. Vykhod uses collections of autobiographical work to spotlight trans* experiences for trans* readers (and queer allies), with the primary objective being to provide a means for self-help (cf. Prosser 1998: 125). As Di, who at the time of writing identified as queer/gender-questioning, explains:

> The people around us are an inexhaustible source of ideas, inspiration, and thoughts. [...] At first, the idea that you are important, that your feelings are important, that you don't have to suffer and surmount it all, can seem strange. But if you properly think about it and reflect, it will eventually take root and get easier. Honestly. I promise (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 112).

Adopting the second person here to directly address the imagined reader, Di links the act of listening to other people's experiences to self-reflection. Their 'promise' that these two interrelated practices will benefit your mental health and sense of self-worth, of course, implies the belief that their own story can improve the life of another trans* person.

While Russian trans* cultural activism has been criticised for producing overly abstract and theoretical texts informed by Western ideas without consideration for local conditions (Kirey-Sitnikova 2020), these life writing projects appear to have been well received. Three years after the publication of *We're Here,* Vykhod reported it was still sent personal messages attesting to how meaningful the collection had been to trans* readers and was planning another publication as a result (Vykhod 2021).

Transkvir Voices

Trans* bodies are sites forgotten in the construction of human sexuality because sexual categories are limited to body configurations: the underlying principle that body-equals-sex-equals-gender establishes the heterosexual/homosexual binary and leaves out the dynamics of trans* subjectivity (Cromwell 2006: 509). For instance, non-binary people (and their partners) struggle to negotiate the language around sexual behaviour and romantic relationships because sexual categories emerged from binary understandings of the gendered body towards which desire is directed (Cordoba 2020; Stryker 2017: 33). In this section, I illustrate how trans* stories reify a diverse spectrum of queer sexualities overlapping with a spectral understanding of trans* experience.

First, I note that the prominence of the *transkvir* [transqueer] throughout the collections is a relatively striking feature, though is also, of course, not entirely unique in the landscape of trans* life writing worldwide (see for example, Drabinski 2014: 325; Jacques 2017: 360). Clinical literature ascribed a very limited form of heterosexuality to trans* subjects, reporting that trans* people were cut off from genital contact and would reject homosexuality because announcing a preference for same-sexed bodies would threaten their body image (Cromwell 2006: 516). Some trans* people denied their sexuality when presenting themselves to practitioners, intentionally fulfilling expected stereotypes to ensure access to the services (Cromwell 2006: 511). This obfuscation of queer trans* subjectivities was perhaps a tactic to normalise transness through realigning it with heterosexuality, but one which led to transness and queerness remaining incompatible in the public imaginary (Vipond 2019: 30).

The array of sexualities represented across the trans* stories I have studied can be partly attributed to the fact that Vykhod focuses broadly on LGBTQ+ issues, so even those subjects who responded specifically to the call for *We're Here*, a trans*-focused project, were perhaps still more likely to be queer in addition to trans*. The intention to distribute the books at QueerFest may also have affected the selection of submitted materials. The fact the editors were a team of trans* people will also have impacted the ability to self-represent a *transkvir* subjectivity: 'So long as medico-psychological practitioners control the discourses about transsubjectivity, and as

long as transsexuals remain complicit, the binaries remain seemingly intact. Once transpeople begin articulating their own transsubjectivities, however, new discourse, and thus the expansion of binaries, can begin' (Cromwell 2006: 519).

Transkvir subjects in these collections counter these discourses by showing that sexual and gender identity is fluid and varies in significance to an individual over their lifetime. For instance, Kris in *Who I Am* questions the identity paradigm:

> And who am I now? Bisexual? Lesbian? Pansexual? A woman? Queer? Agender? Bigender? Well, at the very least, I know for a fact that I'm a feminist. If only that were enough. But I think the search for an identity can last forever, simply because the way a person is constructed is more complicated than their attempts to explain themselves (Sabunaeva 2018: 30).

Of course, Kris's repetition of the question mark after each term shows that none fits. Labels are too simplistic because they freeze the subject in a moment and do not reflect the perpetual search for identity over the life course.

Identity, I argue, is therefore itself shown to be in a perpetual state of transition by *transkvir* subjects. Sasha Dvanova, another contributor to *Who I Am*, likewise fluctuates between different labels throughout their text. However, they make their identifications undergo an additional, translingual transformation (Sabunaeva 2018: 23–24). Sasha first claims the label 'demi-female person' in English. The label then evolves into 'demi-femme' (in English), '"half"-woman' ["polu"-zhenshchina], 'half-faced' [polovinchatyi], 'non-binary' [nebinarnost'], and 'demi-feminine' [demi-feminnyi], where 'demi' is written in English and 'feminine' in Cyrillic. Sasha thus translates labels into and out of Russian, combining the languages in the final case to situate their identity on the border between binary modes (Russian or English). In addition to highlighting fluctuating identifications, these translingual terms signal a lack of native Russian expressions for gender fluidity. Indeed, Russian has no native term for 'gender' (the word *gender* is loaned from English) and instead uses *pol* (sex)—other trans* terminology is similarly borrowed (Kirey-Sitnikova 2020,

2021). Trans* Russian speakers are therefore incentivised to creatively queer their language to articulate their subjectivity, as I investigate further in the next sections.

In *We're Here,* 41-year-old Egor Gor recounts the changing identifications he had over his lifetime in detail. It is from his story that I adopt the term *transkvir*: 'I am a transgender man, but I prefer to call myself 'transqueer' [transkvir] because I have no desire to fit into the social model of a 'real man' that is being worked out everywhere all the time' (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 178). Here, Egor uses the term *transkvir* in opposition to hegemonic masculinity. Yet the term additionally makes explicit the links between his trans* subjectivity, fluid sexuality, and his specific experiences navigating lesbian and gay communities.

Egor continually de/re/constructs his identity throughout his narrative. The terms he uses—'transgender man', 'transqueer', 'gay', 'girl', 'lesbian', 'transsexual', 'guy', 'bisexual'—are transient, but he shows that the ways in which trans* and queer experiences have informed his sense of self are inseparable. For instance, he was driven toward the lesbian community because others applied this label to him and although he had heard of being 'transgender', an article he read when he was sixteen had scared him by stating that 'transsexualism' was an illness and taking hormones would lead to death within three years. Therefore, although he identifies as a lesbian for three years, he does not do so 'thoroughly and firmly' but because it is 'convenient and comfortable' (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 180–181).

Following decades failing to find 'firm' language to convey his trans* identity, and after a break-up that, he explains, led to clinical depression, Egor locates another means of self-expression:

> My first step towards recovery was unusual: I decided that because my 'male side' was so sore on the inside, I needed to externalize it—pull it out into a visual field. So I pulled it out—I ran a blog on LiveJournal, which at that point was enjoying considerable popularity. I ran the blog as a guy under the name Egor and wrote short, pithy phrases. Honest ones. Reflecting myself. I posted pictures, poetry… Imagined that Egor lived in Amsterdam (I'd always dreamed of going there).

> That he was bisexual. Basically, I took Egor and pulled him out from inside myself. And I have to say that I still like that Egor a hell of a lot, even though he isn't totally like who I am today (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 181).

By creating a bisexual male online persona, Egor addresses the deficit of language and depicts a more 'honest' version of himself. He thus writes himself into existence not through a medico-discursive narrative (cf. Prosser 1998: 9), but through an alternate fictional framework of his own making. Of course, it is important to note that the repeated verb 'pull out' [vytashchit'] to describe the externalisation of the truer self—'Egor', who is described as sorely trapped inside the body—follows the 'trans-narrative' to some extent. However, in that model, medical intervention liberates the self from its confines. Here, by contrast, the act of writing a blog enables Egor to project a *transkvir* self into the digital space. This digital self may be conceptualised as at once embodied and mediated (Hartblay and Klepikova 2021: 1), in this case also through a fictional frame. Furthermore, by explicitly tying his autofictional writing process to 'recovery', Egor's story indicates that autobiographical acts, when not inhibited by cisgender gatekeeping, exhibit self-help potential (as Di likewise suggested above). Indeed, many trans* stories recall how beneficial it was to reimagine (and re-write) fictional characters through their own trans* subjectivity. Similarly to Egor, Alek Kit created fictional digital personas to express a seemingly truer mediated self. Their narrative traces the history of their identity through their past nicknames and online usernames, inspired by *Harry Potter, Star Trek,* dragons and anime (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 140–141). Even when characters were not intentionally written as trans*, interpreting them as trans* felt empowering. Dasha Che describes themself as part Cheburashka, a popular Soviet children's television character and animal unknown to science, part Little Prince, the young alien protagonist of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's much-loved children's book, and an undefined 'creature' written in English (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 174). Diana laments that trans* people are not represented in 'ordinary' media and only shown in 'special' narratives about transition and discrimination, but emphasises that the X-Men

helped her be proud of standing out rather than 'getting lost in the crowd' (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 119–120). Kapitan Sliva likewise structures their story entirely around characters that helped them work through their non-binary identity (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 116–118).

Together, these writers express the belief that finding yourself reflected in literature can improve your life, mental health, and self-understanding. Yet they are also predicated on the idea that through creativity and the blending of another assumed binary—fiction and reality—trans* and queer mediated selves may take shape. This use of international fiction ultimately speaks, once again, to the insufficiencies of (often loaned) rigid identity terms. Where labels fall short, identifying instead with fictional characters—including fictional personas—overcomes linguistic limitations.

The Gendered 'I'

Trans* writers also express frustration at the fact that languages such as Russian fail to account for trans* subjectivity because first-person speech is grammatically gendered. This necessitates that trans* speakers take a stance on how to gender their 'I'. The decision about which grammatical agreements to adopt consequently impacts the safety of trans* subjects—speaking in a way others do not expect might out oneself as trans*. As Mira Tai explains in *Everyone Has a Body*, 'my "I" sounds like "he" to them. Yet really, they want to hear "she"' (Cherchenko et al. 2018: 5).

While many non-binary authors in these texts simply opt for either masculine or feminine endings, others experiment with innovative means of gender-neutral self-narration. For instance, Zhe Ostrov, who confides they would usually just use the masculine in day-to-day speech, implements the strategy of gender gaps in their writing and remarks they did not feel any 'internal contradictions' doing so (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 146). Gender-gapping in Russian involves placing an underscore between the longest possible substring shared by the masculine and feminine modes and the verb's feminine ending (Kirey-Sitnikova 2021: 149). This gap is intended to highlight the insufficiency of the language to capture gender ambiguity or non-binary subjectivity.

> I'm a trans* person, now 23 years old. [...] For a long time, I defined myself

> ['opredelial_a sebia'] as a trans* man, considering my trans*genderness a terrible curse that would never allow me to live life. With time, with experience of activist work (which I by no means came to ['prish_la'] straight away), and by delving into gender theory, my identity transformed. [...] gradually becoming free, I left gender behind ['ia vysh_la iz gendernosti']. Now I feel there's no space for gender or gender identity inside me (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 144).

Zhe's use of gender gaps literally and visually underscores a possibility in-between the verb's masculine/feminine binary modes. They thus break open the verb to forge a space for the ungendered, bigendered, gender fluid etc. Yet Zhe does not position themself in this gap per se—rather, they use it to gesture beyond the system altogether, claiming they feel no space for gender anymore.

Other trans* writers circumvent restrictive grammar and queer the Russian language through different methods. Agender Natasha avoids referring to themself in the past tense throughout their text (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 18). Dasha Che, writing from California, pointedly alternates between feminine, masculine, and neuter endings, missing the ambiguity afforded by *they/them* pronouns in English: 'I regularly disappeared [ischezla] from my body'; 'I got seriously involved [ia ser'ezno zanialsia] with dance and theatre'; 'into which I grew [vyroslo] and transformed [prevratilos']' (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 173–177). Zhenia writes the majority of their sentences in gender-neutral passive constructions with 'me' as the object, or with another noun phrase like 'my body' or 'my experience' as the subject (Sabunaeva 2018: 31). The two exceptions are when they recall a time they believed they were a man and accordingly use a masculine ending [schital] (Sabunaeva 2018: 31), and another instance where they write in the future and alternate between masculine and feminine adjectival agreements [chutkim; otkrytoi i iskrennei] (Sabunaeva 2018: 32).

Prevailing transphobic and homophobic societal attitudes compel trans* people and their loved ones to use language with caution—firm belief in the gender inversion of gay men and lesbian women leads trans* subjects to receive homophobic abuse regardless of their sexuali-

ty. Anastasia, for instance, was subjected to homophobic slurs and needed to self-censor her appearance to keep safe:

> As soon as school stopped, I stopped holding myself back. I grew out my hair, tried hairstyles I liked. [...] I had long nails, a fringe and the thin eyebrows fashionable back then. I obviously didn't fit in. Some took it to mean one thing and simply said: 'You're a fag!' Can you expect anything else from them? // I had to find compromises on clothing. I couldn't allow myself much, I didn't want to encounter aggression, but it really weighed me down (Cherchenko et al. 2018: 39–40).

Inversely, some people may be generally accepting of homo-/bisexuality, but not of transgender identities, requiring *transkvir* individuals to manage aspects of their identity differently across various social channels (Voronov et al. 2021: 13–14). Lena, for example, has learnt to 'convey practically any information and express my thoughts through gender-neutral formulations' when discussing her genderqueer partner to protect herself and them from aggression and invasive questions (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 23).

Such trans* experiences of homophobia are satirised in a comic by Hagra (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 63). In the first of the two contrasting encounters he presents, Hagra is misgendered by a cashier wishing him a good day. This suddenly deflates his mood and sends him into a spiral of suicidal ideation. The second scene depicts him walking down the street, linking arms with his boyfriend. Their romantic stroll is disturbed by someone shouting 'fags!' [pediki!] from the window of a nearby block of flats. In response, the protagonist blushes, grins, and brings his arms close to his body in an excited pose: he 'passed' as male. His partner, meanwhile, is unamused. Obviously, the joke here is predicated on the unintended consequences of strangers' actions. The cashier wished him well but was insensitive to his gender expression, while the man insulting him inadvertently affirmed his gender identity. The implication is that the public are ignorant of trans* issues to the point that all *transkvirs* can do is laugh about it and try to take homophobia in stride.

Some approaches to suppressing gendered language described above may at first seem to lose

the agency of self-narration, such as by limiting the active voice. Yet this rejection of grammar requires creativity and autonomy, shaping otherwise exclusive language to reflect self-identification. It is important to note that this linguistic phenomenon is not unique to these texts but is rather a strategy being adopted by the wider Russian-speaking trans* community, and indeed in other gendered languages (Kirey-Sitnikova 2021). Although it may seem restrictive to self-expression, creatively circumventing these grammatical restraints constitutes a deliberate act of resistance and exposure which can be interpreted as a position of strength rather than victimhood—a position of 'queer vulnerability' (Utkin 2021: 78). Trans* speakers are (re)claiming Russian grammar on their own terms.

Sex and the Body

Medicalised discourses have denied trans* people physical sexuality by asserting that trans* people are devoid of sexual pleasure due to deep disgust of their sex organs (Cromwell 2006: 510). Trans* autobiographers have likewise often avoided discussing sexual encounters, especially the specifics of those before gender-affirming surgery (Cromwell 2006: 515). In addition to fulfilling the expectation of dysphoria needed to access treatments, evading sexual details in self-narratives has a protective purpose. Speaking explicitly about sex would 'require talking extensively about [the] body' and genitalia, 'running the risk of [...] undermining the identity carefully set up in [the] text, and in [...] life' (Jacques 2017: 368). Some trans* life writers circumvent the issue by resisting locating sexual attraction in 'gendered aspects of the body' and pinpointing it elsewhere in the body instead (Drabinski 2014: 323).

In Vykhod's trans* stories, many authors reclaim the physical sexuality and bodily ambiguity which has been denied them by clinical literature, practitioners, and the ubiquitous 'trans-narrative'. Such continued impact of the medical establishment on trans* people's sexual self-expression is evidenced, for instance, when Tangarr from Ukraine states he needed to mask the fact that 'I even really love vaginal sex' from doctors who assumed he would hate his body because he is trans* (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 157).

One trans* story which depicts sexuality in explicit detail is an-

other hand-drawn comic by Hagra in which he represents himself giving anal sex to his boyfriend (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 62). At first, he is enthusiastic and does so orally until his partner is ready for him to insert something. In the next panel, Hagra excitedly holds up a dildo, his glee punctuated by a classic comic book graphic of a pointy yellow explosion. However, Hagra suddenly pauses and begins to cry due to dysphoria ('I DON'T HAVE A DICKKK!'). In the final frame, his partner holds and comforts him ('Sh, shh… Everything will be okay! You're good even without a dick!') while in the background, Hagra's post-script in turn reassures the reader: 'P.S. It doesn't always happen like this. More often, I fuck normally and don't start weeping halfway through'.

In the comic, then, Hagra highlights that while dysphoria can sometimes affect his sex life, it does not prohibit him from enjoying sex or having sex 'normally' most of the time. Moreover, by drawing attention to the use of a sex toy, as well as by opting to depict himself shirtless with his breasts visible, Hagra does not omit gendered aspects of the body for fear of being unambiguously read as female (cf. Jacques 2017: 368). Rather, the message he conveys is that being a man is not predicated on having certain genitalia or surgery, that you can still be in a 'same-sex' relationship before or without medically transitioning, and that the support of an understanding partner is invaluable.

Indeed, ambiguity and ambivalence have too often been denied in dominant visual depictions of trans* subjects who are 'rendered transsexual in the flesh' by their biographers (Halberstam 2005: 50–51, 97). In self-depictions, however, trans* subjects may acknowledge the ambiguities of trans* embodiment and resist the demands to separate their lives and bodies pre- and post-transition. They may instead elect to 'narrate continuous subjects' (Rondot 2016: 527) or otherwise confuse the 'direction' of transition and its associated gender performance. Some trans* stories writers achieve this type of narration by refusing to disconnect their current identity from their past body and previous gendered socialisation. As Sasha Dvanova explains, 'female experience – emotional, physical, social – is the foundation of my "I" […] despite the realisation of my non-binaryness, under no circumstances would I want to divide my life into a "before" and an "after", drawing up a border' (Sabunaeva 2018: 23–24).

One instance where a trans* subject claims ambiguity is the striking self-portrait of Karl Martin (known by the username 'umba/умба') (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 61). In the image, he confidently occupies a space in-between apparently binary opposites: gender attributes (masculine and feminine), sensations (serenity and pain), colours (black and white), and roles (subject and spectator). First, Martin incorporates a mix of gendered characteristics into his image, circumventing the pressure to conform to hegemonic masculinity. He frames his face with long flowing hair and a crown of old-fashioned syringes, where the rings at the top resemble the female sign. His beard flows in an imagined breeze along with his hair. His nails are painted black, and he wears a large teardrop-shaped earring. Second, there are signs he is simultaneously experiencing a moment of both pain and calm. His nipples are bleeding—perhaps suggestive of top surgery, but without specific scarring—and the dripping blood guides the viewer's gaze toward the cloth falling from his hips. His muscled arms are held in a stretch close to his curving body, as if he just woke up. That contradictory state of embodied feelings, a relaxed (even seductive) pose but the implication of pain, perhaps reflects how painful procedures in gender-affirming surgery can bring peace (a theme Martin returns to, along with his changing relationship to masculinity, in comics he also contributed (Dzhibladze et al. 2017: 123–126)). Meanwhile, his naked body divides the background into two halves, one black and one white. Situated between the block colours, Martin depicts himself staring back at the imagined viewer. He thus compresses the relative positions of the artist, subject, and spectator and shows himself fulfilling all these roles at once. The overall result is a figure refusing to allow himself or his body to be confined by the expected behaviours of the binary frameworks which organise the world.

Conclusions

This article has shown that trans* stories were expressly curated to counter the 'trans-narrative', a normative narrative structure for trans* autobiography which partially emerged from, and was still built into, official medical transition processes. Not all subversion of the trans-narrative is positive or affirming, but in this case, rather

points to barriers accessing treatments, documentation, or a continued sense of danger after medical transition and 'passing'. That being said, it is the collective nature of the publications which first and foremost subverts the monolithic trans-narrative (Jacques 2017: 360). Crowdsourcing serves to highlight a diversity of experiences, proving there is not one way to be trans*, while simultaneously giving a voice to the trans* community as a whole (Poletti 2020). Common (*transkvir*) themes, linguistic strategies, and cultural reference points tie the stories together. Meanwhile, the specificities of the perspectives offered recall the individuality of the authors: Russophone voices from different locations and with different trans* (non-binary, gender fluid, FTM, MTF, agender, bigender) and queer (lesbian, gay, bisexual, kvir) subjectivities are included. The multimedia formats of the collections reinforce this sense of diversity.

Indeed, the convergence of queer and trans* experiences is one of the most prominent features of the trans* stories. This exploration of the *transkvir* not only works against the limitations placed on trans* people's sexuality, but also against the identity paradigm more broadly. Moreover, the inability of labels to capture the self—and of the Russian language to capture the *transkvir* self—recurs throughout many narratives. *Transkvir* individuals move through a series of labels, sometimes across multiple languages, presenting a sense of shifting self-definitions over time. Non-binary trans* writers creatively twist grammatical conventions to avoid gendering their 'I' (Kirey-Sitnikova 2021), while trans* people with a masculine or feminine gender identity must consider the political climate they are speaking in when taking a stance on gendering their 'I' for their personal safety. And finally, trans* Russian speakers show that even when language and labels continue to fall short, fiction may provide recourse and permit more authentic self-articulation.

The wealth of innovative trans* stories in Vykhod's publications merit further study. This short article could not fully address all recurrent themes across the three collections, such as mental health, coming out, familial relationships, dysphoria, experiences of surgery, monstrosity, uses of the internet, depictions of trans* life as war, and various means of reclaiming ownership of one's own body (e.g. through tattoos and dance). Future stud-

ies, and comparison to other trans* collective autobiography projects (such as those mentioned above), will gain further insight into experiences of trans* people in Russia and across the Russian-speaking diaspora, and highlight other styles, language, and tropes which trans* speakers use to represent themselves.

Indeed, a greater focus on trans* lived experiences and cultural production will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of gender and sexuality in contemporary Russia. As Egor Gor and Karl Martin's narratives illustrate, trans* masculine people provide a different perspective on how Russians may negotiate the hegemonic masculinity emboldened by Putin's 'macho politics' (Sperling et al. 2022). The specific factors which make some queer Russian trans* people less likely to talk openly about their gender identity than their sexuality have also not been researched (Voronov et al. 2021). Moreover, trans* people's experiences of Russian LGBTQ+ spaces and activism, and the extent to which they may reject LGBTQ+ activism out of desire to simply be 'normal' (cf. Kirey-Sitnikova 2016: 172–173; Weaver 2020), have not been investigated. These are just some nuances future research could uncover. Trans* voices deserve our attention.

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Olga Andreevskikh

Confessional narratives in digital self- and life-writing of bisexual activists in Russia: A case study of bisexual identity building

This article focuses on digital self- and life-writing as a tool of online activism. Drawing on case studies of social media activism for bisexual rights in contemporary Russia, the article explores the ways in which the media genre of confessional narrative is employed by activists for constructing a shared bisexual identity in the process of self-mediation through social media platforms. Applying digital ethnography and interpretive content analysis methods, the paper presents a content analysis of video, textual and visual texts created by bisexual rights activists based in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, Perm' and Vladivostok, and published on social media platforms (YouTube, Telegram, Facebook) in 2020 and 2021.

Bisexual rights activism in Russia after 2013

In scholarship and discussions on LGBTQ-rights activism in Russia, the notorious 2013 law which bans 'the promotion of non-traditional sexual relations among minors' has come to be viewed as a watershed in Russian discourses on sex, sexuality and gender. The discursive impact of the Russian LGBTQ-legislation is not dissimilar to that of the UK's Section 28 which was introduced by the Conservative government in 1988 as a backlash against the growing visibility and acceptance of gays and lesbians (Fish et al. 2018). In the UK, the introduction of Section 28 banning discussions about homosexuality in schools which would portray same-sex relationships as valid, led, on the one hand, to the infringement of LGBTQ people's rights (Greenland et al. 2008), but on the other hand, to the strengthening of the LGBTQ-rights activist movement (Fish et al. 2018; Farmer 2020).

The Russian anti-LGBTQ law, in some ways replicating the UK Section 28 discourse of protecting minors from 'harmful' information, brought about not only a new wave of oppression of LGBTQ people (e.g., Persson 2015), but also a consolidation of LGBTQ-rights groups and initiatives and their allies and supporters across Russia (e.g. Buyantueva 2020). This process of strengthening and

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consolidation benefited all stigmatized social groups united under the LGBTQ abbreviation, in particular bisexual[1] people, as it is after 2013 that the activist movement for bisexual rights first came into existence when the first bisexual rights initiative *LuBI* was created in St Petersburg.[2]

Since the introduction of the anti-LGBTQ legislation in Russia in 2013 and up to February 2022 when Russia unleashed a full-fledged war in Ukraine, there was a consistent growth, diversification, and evolution of media discourses on and around LGBTQ-related themes, particularly in what relates to mediated portrayals of non-heteronormative people (Andreevskikh 2020: 173). Parallel to that, there was a steady growth in the number of LGBTQ-rights initiatives in various regions and in the number of diverse and prolific media channels used by LGBTQ people to promote the LGBTQ agenda. Online activism for bisexual rights was also part of these developments.

In December 2017, when I was doing the fieldwork for my previous study of online activism for bisexual and transgender rights (Andreevskikh 2018), I interviewed the leader of the bisexual rights initiative *LuBI* M., who at that time was one of a handful of publicly open bisexual Russians involved in online activism on social media platforms. Back then, M. admitted that the issues and topics related to bisexuality were not very popular in virtual communities of LGBTQ people on social media, and she also confessed that the few bisexual rights activists, including herself, frequently faced backlashes or lack of support on the part of other members of LGBTQ communities. The activist explained

[1] Among Russian activists for bisexual rights, several terms are currently used to refer to the sexual orientation which involves sexual attraction to more than one gender: bisexual (*biseksual'nyi/biseksual*); non-monosexual or non-mono (*nemonoseksual'nyi/nemono*), a term introduced by activist E. to oppose bi- and pansexual orientations to the monosexual ones, that is – homosexuality and heterosexuality; bi*sexual, the term used by the founders of the initiative *Byt' Bi** (Being Bi*), where the asterisk highlights that this term includes the whole spectre of non-monosexual orientations. When I use the term 'bisexual' I refer to all these three terms simultaneously and use it as an umbrella term for the sexual orientation entailing an attraction to the opposite as well as other genders.

[2] The organization's name is based on a pun: it is a portmanteau of the imperative form of the verb 'to love' (*liubi*) and the Russian pronunciation of the morpheme 'bi' in *'biseksual'nyi'* (bisexual) – [bee].

that, although at times it was difficult to run the social media pages of the *LuBI* group practically single-handedly, she saw it as important and valuable work aimed at fighting biphobia and monosexism (exclusion and/or discrimination of people whose sexual orientation is neither heterosexual nor homosexual).

M.'s account confirmed the observations by various scholars that online activism on social media can be vital for bisexual people, a minority within a minority (Brown et al. 2017; Egan 2005; Hagen et al. 2017; Ingram et al. 2017; Serano 2013; Shapiro 2004). The minority-within-minority status of bisexual people is to some extent caused by the fact that they tend to be viewed as a threat to the binary monosexual dichotomy of heterosexuality and homosexuality, which is one of the foundations of gay and lesbian rights movements, as well as of the conservative discourses on 'traditional values'. Bisexual people, as a result, tend to be discriminated and ostracized both by heterosexual society and by homosexual members of LGBTQ communities (Cashore et al. 2009; Garelick et al. 2017; Nutter-Pridgen 2015; Roberts et al. 2015). In the view of the above, important aspects of bisexual rights activism consist in working towards visibility as a bisexual individual, in educating others on what it means to be bisexual, as well as in exchanging shared experiences of biphobia and bisexual erasure with other non-monosexual people. All these aspects contribute to the process of identity-building, which in the context of double stigmatisation on the part of LGBTQ communities and heterosexual majority, tends to be viewed as positive, which is demonstrated further in this paper through a media content analysis. For this reason, in the current study the bisexual identity is understood not only through the prism of Foucauldian categories of power, domination and control, and not just as a 'quest for authenticity' (Weir 2009: 537), but also, if not primarily, as a 'resistant identity' which allows 'alternative interpretations' (Weir 2009: 539) of existing binary categories of sexuality.

Social media platforms become 'the locus of coordination and action' (Kurylo et al. 2016: 134) for fighting this double stigma. The strategies and techniques used by bisexual rights activists can serve as a means of transgressing the binary monosexist concept of sexuality, as a way of utilising the activist's emotional capital (Andreevskikh 2018), as well as a method of creating and sustaining emotional communities

aimed at strengthening and solidifying the activist movement in the country (Andreevskikh forthcoming). Transgressing the hegemonic Russian LGBTQ-activist discourse of normalcy and equality that has been focusing primarily on gay men's and lesbian women's issues and rights, online activism of bisexual people aims at deconstructing the binary concept of sexuality as hetero- vs. homosexuality.

By 2022, the time when the current study was completed, the situation with the bisexual rights activism in Russia had changed dramatically from what it was in 2017. Several regional community centres had started holding regular events catered specifically for bisexual people;[3] mainstream and LGBTQ-catering media outlets had started publishing more materials about bisexuality;[4] new initiative and activist groups had been organised. For example, in 2019, an initiative for bisexual people was started in Moscow, under the name *Being Bi** [Byt' Bi*]. Apart from holding online and offline events, as well as photo exhibitions devoted to bisexuality and bisexual people, the initiative also launched the first website in the Russian language devoted solely to bi- and pansexuality and catered for Russian-speaking bi- and pansexual people living in Russia and beyond. The media resource *BiPanRussia*[5] was launched on 23 September 2021, to mark the global Bisexual Visibility Day.

The new online resource is comprised of a variety of sections: 'About Us', 'News', 'Events', 'Articles published in the media', 'Education', 'Initiatives in Russia'. Of a particular interest is the interactive map of current initiatives in Russia which cater for bisexual people. The 'Articles' section contains an archive of media texts devoted to the topics connected with bi- and pansexuality. The 'Education' section consists of definitions of terms and

[3] For example, the St Petersburg-based LGBTQ community centre *Action* [Deistvie], together with the activists from the bisexual rights initiative *LuBI*, has been running support groups for bisexual people since 2018. The *Resursnyi Tsentr Dlia LGBT* (LGBT Resource Centre), an Ekaterinburg-based community centre, regularly holds events for bisexual people, including a 'Non-monomonth' in September, in honour of the Bisexual Visibility Day which is celebrated on 23 September. With the support of the Moscow-based LGBTQ initative *Resource* [Resurs], *Being Bi** has been running support groups for bisexual people, both offline and online.

[4] An archive of media texts on bisexuality published over the last ten years can be found on the website of the *Being Bi** initiative (Byt' Bi 2021b).

[5] The website can be accessed here: https://bipanrussia.com/ (Byt' Bi 2021a).

concepts related to sexual and gender identity, as well as a 'Library' subsection – lists of social media channels, books, films, and series featuring bisexual characters.

While the list of social media resources is related to Russian or Russian speaking LGBTQ activists, the article archive and the lists of books, films and series contain, perhaps not surprisingly, a high number of foreign sources, such as, for example, a translation of the bisexual manifesto published in 1990 by Bay Area Bisexual Network. Indeed, Russian activists follow closely the development of bisexual rights movements outside of Russia, and bi-activists themselves admit that they rely to a great extent on resources in English and other foreign languages.[6] Being and feeling interconnected with the global agenda of bisexual rights activists, social media content produced by activists in Russia also tackles topics and issues widely discussed in western, Anglophone virtual community and media channels, e.g., the problems of bisexual erasure and monosexism (Corey 2017) and the importance of bi-visibility in media (Capulet 2000, Yescavage et al. 2000). The formats in which this activist social media content is presented are also similar to those utilized by activists outside of Russia. One such format, powerful and therefore popular among activists, is the confessional narrative, which I explore more fully in the next section. Confessional narratives, when used by activists on social media platforms, serve as discursive tools for digital self-writing and life-writing. Using these two types of digital self-mediation, two axes of analysis, and the concept of confessional narrative as a framework for this study, I set and address the following research questions:

- How do Russian activists for bisexual rights use confessions in their mediated personal narratives?
- What is the role of mediated confessional narratives in the process of self-

[6] Here I rely on the account of the bisexual rights activists F. (*Being'Bi**), B. (*Action*) and E., who during the online discussion *Awkward Questions to Bisexual People* (*Neudobnye voprosy biseksaul'nym liudiam*), organized by *Being Bi** and livestreamed on 26 September 2021, admitted that a lot of information and research on bisexuality they use in their activist work is done abroad and is accessed via translation. The videorecording is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_ShfmHI3f4 (BiPanRussia 2021).

identification as a bisexual person and activist?

Through addressing these research questions, I aspire to bridge the gap in the current scholarship on bisexuality, which lacks empirical analyses of media strategies applied by non-Western activists for bisexual rights. I also venture to add an extra dimension to the prolific scholarship on Russian LGBTQ communities, which rarely focuses on bisexual activists in particular.

Confessional narratives as a media case study framework

Following scholarship on narratology, I approach narratives as 'a virtual sphere, emerging in communication, containing events that are temporally related to each other in a meaningful way'; in other words, a narrative is comprised of 'represented events that are temporally interrelated in a meaningful way' (Elleström 2019: 37). Thus, in this paper a narrative stands for a verbally expressed account of events, presented in an oral or written form, where the events are connected with a plotline, a common idea, or a thematic thread.

Confessional narratives are understood as such accounts of events which are aimed at revealing to the audience what the narrator has done or accomplished, as well as what the narrator feels, thinks, or believes, in particular with regard to something the narrator might be or have been ashamed of or embarrassed about, wishes to apologize for, or which, in the narrator's opinion, might turn the audience against them.[7]

Confessions belong to discourses of self-writing (Foucault 1981), where self-writing can be viewed as a form of self-care which manifests itself in a collection of notes and observations on various topics and which, in case of confessions made on social media, are shared with a wide or narrow, trusted audience. In media discourses confessions can come in the format of verbally expressed texts, selfies, or vlogs (Hall 2016), the content of which can range from an unhappy employee's complaint (Krishnaa et al. 2015: 404–410) to a coming-out narrative of a LGBTQ person. It is a powerful strategy of 'me-centred communication' that, in the context of contemporary DIY media cultures, allows individuals not only to express their

[7] Here I combine the various meanings of the word 'confession' as listed in the online Collins COBUILD Advanced English Dictionary (Collins n.d.).

intimate thoughts or experiences but also to socialize with others (Talvitie-Lamberg 2014). For that reason, social media confessions become an empowering tool of online activist campaigns conducted by discriminated social groups. One such example where confessions shared online led to dramatic social changes is the #*MeToo* movement against sexual harassment (e.g., Gill et al. 2018; Pelegrini 2018).

Although such narratives have become particularly popular recently, confessional media posts by celebrities and common social media users being one of the sources of new stories for media coverage, confessions as such are far from being a new cultural phenomenon (Friesen 2017; Gammel 1999): confessions are at the heart of various literary genres, from autobiographies to *Bildungsroman* (Barcan 1997). What unites all confession-based genres, both traditional literary and newer mediated textual genres, is the interconnection between the confessional mode of narration and the identity of the person who is performing a confession: 'Confessions, as moments of textualization, foreground the performativity of identity and are therefore highly charged events. They are resounding moments, since they activate identity in both its fluid and congealing aspects simultaneously' (Barcan 1997: 84).

For the purpose of the current case study, not everything shared by activists on social media is approached as a 'confession'. Here I follow Foucault who identified an important (and also popular on social media) type of self-writing narrative – the self-writing genre which Foucault defined as *hupomnēmata* – notes which serve as 'memory aids':

> One wrote down quotes in them, extracts from books, examples, and actions that one had witnessed or read about, reflections or reasonings that one had heard or that had come to mind. They constituted a material record of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering them up as a kind of accumulated treasure for subsequent rereading and meditation. They also formed a raw material for the drafting of more systematic treatises, in which one presented arguments and means for struggling against some weakness (such as anger, envy, gossip, flattery) or for overcoming some difficult circumstance (a grief, an exile, ruin, disgrace) (Foucault 1981: 209–210).

Foucault underlined that, although such notes do convey personal opinions, thoughts, and impressions, discursively they are not to be confused with the intimate accounts of spiritual experiences which constitute the nature of confession, as they do not possess a purificatory value inherent to an oral or written confession (Foucault 1981: 210).

Throughout the existence of confessional genres, their popularity among marginalized social groups of any minoritarian characteristic (from gender to age to race to sexuality) has been growing steadily despite the risks of repercussions or backlashes that could potentially follow the confession (Grobe 2017: 38–40). The backlash can potentially be particularly strong when a non-heterosexual person makes a confession related to their non-heteronormative sexuality in the context of a conservative anti-LGBTQ climate. 'Unlike other interdictions, sexual interdictions are constantly connected with the obligation to tell the truth about oneself' (Foucault 1981: 223); therefore, the choice of the confessional narrative framework for a media case study of bisexual rights activism in the context of Russia's state-sustained anti-LGBTQ discourses seems topical and relevant.

In contemporary LGBTQ discourses, for a LGBTQ person an 'obligation to tell the truth about oneself' can come from the external pressure (outing) or from the internal desire to be open about their non-heteronormative sexuality to a trusted audience in benevolent circumstances (Kislitsyna 2021), with mediated coming-out narratives on YouTube and other social media platforms being an important part of LGBTQ-rights activism in Russia (see, for example, Glenn 2021). In the new, evolving reality where self-mediation has become an integral part of the mediatized lives of individuals acting as mediated selves (Ratilainen et al. 2018; Talvitie-Lamberg 2014), coming-out narratives and other subgenres of confessional narratives can be viewed as manifestations of what Foucault defined as 'technologies of the self, which permit individuals [...] a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immorality' (Foucault 1981: 225). Thus, the process of digital self-writing becomes interwoven with the process of building a non-heteronormative (e.g., a bisexual) sexual identity, where self-mediated

digital selves act as bodyminds, which means that 'one's self is never separate from one's body or from one's mind', where 'one's mind and body always already are one' (Hartblay et al 2021: 5).

Apart from the task of self-writing, confessional narratives can also be used as a material for digital life-writing, the latter understood as a 'range of writings about lives or parts of lives, or which provide materials out of which lives or parts of lives are composed' (Leader 2015: 1). Often traced to one of the world's most prominent bisexual authors, Virginia Woolf, who in her creative work revolutionized the genre of literary biography, in the context of social media platforms the term 'life-writing' can be applied to various digital forms of texts: blogs, tweets, and Facebook entries (Leader 2015: 1). The media data which the current study is based on tackles a variety of topics related to different spheres of activists' lives: their involvement in bisexual rights and civil rights activism; their participation in protest actions; their experiences of interacting with the police; their personal histories of coming to terms with their sexual identity; the support or lack thereof on the part of their families, friends and other significant social circles; the struggles and challenges related specifically to the consequence of the double stigmatisation of bisexual people among LGBTQ communities and by heterosexual people; their experiences of navigating media spaces as mediated digital selves, etc. With regard to the interpretive data analysis of confessional narratives which comprises the current case study, the thematic diversity of the content calls for the perspective of digital life-writing, in addition to that of self-writing.

Applying digital ethnography and interpretive content analysis methods, I further present an analysis of media content created by bisexual rights activists based in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, Perm' and Vladivostok, and published on social media platforms (YouTube, Telegram, Facebook) in 2020 and 2021. The selection of the media cases for analysis was based on the results of monitoring Russian social media accounts and virtual communities for bisexual people from 2017 to 2020, which allowed me to identify the most prominent personae in Russian bi-rights activism and to establish which social media channels or personal blogs produce media content popular among bisexual people in Russia.

The process of media data collection consisted of two stages. In the first stage, through the

'digitally native' (Georgakopoulou 2016: 303) ethnographic methods, such as observing various activities conducted on social media platforms by activists who openly identify as bisexual, I defined the key personae in the current bisexual rights movement in Russia. After that, based on the media representations of the selected activists and their self-mediation practices, I selected the media texts (YouTube videos) and social media sources (a Facebook blog and a Telegram channel) for subsequent interpretive content analysis. Identifying myself as a bisexual rights activist too, this process also entailed to a certain extent the use of the method of 'auto-phenomenology' as 'the researcher's reflexivity about her own position, stakes, and interests in the field of social media engagement' (Georgakopoulou2016: 303). In the next section I present the results of the content analysis of YouTube videos and Facebook and Telegram posts featuring confessional narratives of bisexual rights activists.

Awkward questions and personal stories: Confessional narratives as a means of real-life interactions with audiences

Both in the capacity of a media scholar specialising on LGBTQ discourses and as a bisexual rights activist, I consistently follow developments in Russian LGBTQ-rights activism, paying special attention to the latest media content and new media sources related to bisexuality. Throughout the year of 2021, while monitoring Russian social media communities for bisexual people, I identified two online media texts of a significant value in terms of promoting bisexual rights agenda through a confessional narrative framework.

Both these texts are YouTube video recordings of livestreamed conversations between bisexual activists and audiences. The first video is a recording of an online livestreamed discussion *Awkward Questions for Bisexual People* (*Neudobnye voprosy biseksual'nym liudiam*), which was held by the Saint Petersburg LGBTQ community centre *Action* [Deistvie] and which was livestreamed on 26 March 2021 (Deistvie 2021).[8] The second video is a recording of a panel discussion *BI-Talk: Power Within Community* (*BI-talk: sila vnutri*

[8] After Russia's invasion in Ukraine and a new crackdown on activists, the access to the video with the recording of the talk was changed from public to private.

soobshchestva) which was live-streamed on 29 September 2021 as part of the programme of the annual festival of queer and LGBT culture *Queerfest*.[9][10]

The 104-minute online discussion *Awkward Questions for Bisexual People* (Action 2021) featured three speakers seated in front of the camera, with the facilitator of the talk being off-screen. One of the participants, B., Director for Development at the St Petersburg LGBTQ community centre *Deistvie* and a bisexual rights activist in her own right, acted as the facilitator. The three discussants introduced themselves as: C., a 38-year-old cisgender woman, as of 2015 participating in activism for LGBTQ rights, bisexual rights, and protection of rights of HIV-positive people; D., a 36-year-old transgender woman; A., a 20-year-old bisexual man.

The talk was built around the questions and comments that were being sent during the livestream by the online audience. The format of the talk aimed at addressing questions and issues which might be difficult for some or most bisexual people to deal with, but which need addressing as these questions and issues are related to stereotypes and beliefs which give ground to biphobic rhetoric and attitudes.

The personal, intimate, and 'awkward' questions that the audience addressed to bisexual people reflected many of existing biphobic stereotypes and included the following points:[11]

1) What do the discussants understand by the terms bisexuality and pansexuality? What is the difference?
2) There is a widespread opinion that bisexuality means sexual permissiveness (*seksual'naia raspushchennost'*). How many men and women have the discussants had relations with?
3) Have the discussants ever experienced internalized biphobia and, if so, how did they deal with it? Have they ever had any doubts regarding their sexual orientation?

[9] The information about the festival is available on its official website (Queerfest 2022).

[10] After Russia's invasion in Ukraine and a new crackdown on activists, the access to the video with the recording of the talk was changed from public to private.

[11] The wording of the questions listed further is not a word-for-word translation, but my summary of how the facilitator presented the questions, with the name or identity of the enquirer omitted.

4) How feasible is it, in the discussants' opinion, for a bisexual person to have a relationship with a man and a woman at the same time?
5) What are the discussants' views on the fact that the letter B is the least visible amongst LGBTQ communities?
6) What would the discussants recommend to someone who realised they are bisexual at a later stage in life?
7) Have the discussants ever wondered that identifying as a bisexual person might be nothing more than following fashion? Have they ever felt that, given that the oppression of LGBTQ people is so severe at present, they might be considered 'collaborators' when they are in a relationship with a person of the opposite gender?
8) Do the discussants think that bisexual people were born to have threesomes? What kind of threesomes have they had?
9) In the discussants' opinion, to what extent are bisexual people subjected to minority stress?
10) Do the discussants have a crush on a celebrity? If so, who?

The discussants addressed all the questions they were asked, sometimes sharing very intimate information, or sharing views which might not resonate with the rest of the community. Thus, when answering the question about internal biphobia and doubts about the sexual identity, C. confessed that it was at the age of 18 that she first started realising she might be bisexual and that she had identified as a lesbian prior to that. She explained that her reaction to that revelation was mixed, complex: at that time, the representations of bisexual women she could see in the media and public discourses were predominantly oversexualized, eroticized portrayals of 'hot women'. On the one hand, C., in her own words, was striving to break away from her family's strict rules concerning sex, she was striving for 'a riot'; but on the other hand, she did not like those oversexualized portrayals of promiscuous and 'loose' women, precisely due to C.'s own complex attitude to sex and sexuality. Having joined the LGBTQ rights movement at a more mature age, C. faced biphobia for the first time. A., in his turn, confessed that it was the state of things

within the Russian LGBTQ communities that was the cause of his internal queerphobia: in the 2010s, when at the age of 12 he realized he experienced a sexual attraction to men, the stigmatisation of bisexual men was particularly strong among Russian gay men, which resulted in him not wanting to be part of that biphobic community.

When the discussants were dealing with the question whether they had had an experience of threesomes, L. admitted that her first experience of same-sex relationship was in a threesome; A. confessed that he had threesomes more than once, with two female friends of his; and D. explained that she had had the experience but found it problematic.

The participants of the 91-minute discussion *BI-Talk: Power Within Community* (Queerfest. 2021) demonstrated a similar level of openness and similar strategies of using confessions; the themes and issues they discussed also echoed those which were raised in the online talk presented above. The panel talk featured six bisexual rights activists who represent the first Russian association of activists for the rights of non-monosexual people *Non-Monolith* [Nemonolit]: B. (Saint Petersburg, woman, originally from Briansk), E. (Saint Petersburg, non-binary person, originally from Tiumen'), F. (Moscow, woman), G. (Saint Petersburg, woman), H. (Ekaterinburg, woman), I. (Perm', woman). In the first part of the talk, each participant presented an approximately five-minute speech, and a Q&A session followed in the second part of the event.

From the very first presentation, the talk was framed as a confessional and highly personal narrative. Thus, H., who was the first to tell her story, started with sharing her memories of when she fell in love with a girl who they were in the same class with: that love was unrequited, and looking back, the activist 'feels very sorry for' that young self. Another confession H. made was that she still feels invisible in the LGBTQ community, regardless of her having been involved in activism for many years. She also admitted due to bisexuality being not very visible in the community she feels like 'an impostor' and regrets that 'while for some the moment of finding their identity was beautiful', for her the pain didn't stop when she started identifying as a bisexual woman.

B. shared a similar story of unrequited love: the activist confessed that, growing up, she used to believe that heterosexuality

was the only valid sexual orientation, until at the age of 19 when she fell in love with her female friend. Having been planning to follow the socially accepted route of finding a husband and starting a family, it took B., in her own words, over a year to come to terms with the realisation that she was not heterosexual, but bisexual. E. also shared the experience of having to come to terms with their orientation: having kissed a girl for the first time at the age of ten, they felt ashamed of themself, and when they first fell in love with a woman at the age of 21, already identifying as bisexual, they were taken aback by the reaction of the people around them who seemed to find it incomprehensible and impossible that someone can have feelings for both men and women.

Activist and founder of the initiative *Being' Bi*, F., continued this narrative line and confessed to the audience that she had been a victim of abuse due to her bisexuality: her former partner, a lesbian woman, could not accept her identity and abused her emotionally and mentally, which led to the activist starting to doubt her mental health and 'normalcy'. I.'s personal story mirrored the 'impostor' feelings described by H.: I. confessed that, as a bisexual woman in a monogamous relationship with a man, she often feels she has no place among LGBTQ-rights activists, and that it was through research into biphobia and biphobic stereotypes that she could see the barriers which hindered her embracing her sexuality.

All the nine speakers featuring in these video recordings demonstrated openness when tackling complicated and even taboo topics (e.g., abuse, non-monogamous sexual practices, shame, and internalized biphobia). Besides that, they also demonstrated a willingness to use confessions for explaining their views on bisexuality and for providing an account of their journey towards an acceptance of own bisexuality. In an open discussion setting, such confessional narratives serve to connect, to bring together the individual stories of the speakers.

All the speakers underlined what a significant role the community of like-minded bisexual activists played in the processes of their self-identification and self-acceptance. They recommended those members of the audiences who are still trying to establish what their sexual identity might be and who are wondering if they might be bisexual, to talk to other bisexual people, to attend online or offline support groups or to join the local initiative for bisexual people. In other words,

through the sincerity and openness offered by confessional narratives, through sharing first-hand experiences of embracing the bisexual self and living a life of a self-accepting bisexual person, the speakers encouraged their audiences to trust them, inspiring their audiences to follow their examples and join the wider community of bisexual people.

The strategies observed in the above analysis of the oral and subsequently videorecorded confessions correlate with the findings obtained when conducting an interpretive content analysis of social media blogs of two prominent bisexual activists. The accounts were selected based on the representations and references in LGBTQ media[12] and on the individuals' active participation in bisexual rights activism. For this media sampling stage, I selected two social media channels:

- the personal Facebook blog by Saint Petersburg based male activist J., one of the longest-serving activists for bisexual rights (J.n.d.);
- the Telegram channel *LGBTitd* (*LGBTetc.*) by K., an agender bisexual person, based in Vladivostok (K. n.d.).[13]

The Telegram channel *LGBTitd* is often mentioned in the recommendations of the best Russian social media resources on bisexuality.[14] So is J.'s Telegram channel *Bisexual Thursday* [*Biseksual'nyi Chetverg;* https://t.me/bisex4]. J.'s personal Facebook blog, however, contains a higher number of posts (it shows the republished content from the Telegram channel and in addition it contains public posts written and shared by J.

[12] The activists, whose social media blogs were selected, are frequently quoted by Russian LGBTQ media with regard to the issues of biphobia, bi-activism and other topics relevant to the Russian bi-community. See, for example, the reference to J. and K. in the publication by Russia's largest LGBTQ media outlet *Parni PLUS*: *All You Need to Know About Biphobia* [Vse, chto nuzhno znat' o bifobii] (Parni+ 2021).

[13] Following Russia's invading Ukraine on 24 February 2022, K. faced police persecution, was included into the list of foreign agents and therefore had to flee Russia, shutting down her (K. uses pronouns she/her) channel on Telegram; she opened a private Telegram channel instead where access was granted by invitation only, and started publishing content on Twitter. J. continued publishing content on Facebook, including publicly accessible posts, openly speaking out against the invasion.

[14] For example, activist B. recommended it to the audience of the online discussion *Awkward Questions to Bisexual People* (Neudobnye voprosy biseksaul'nym liudiam), organized by *Being Bi** and livestreamed on 26 September 2021 (BiPanRussia 2021).

only on Facebook), as well as a higher number of potential audience (with 4500 friends on Facebook versus 231 subscribers on Telegram), which served as the grounds for selecting J.'s personal blog rather than his Telegram channel devoted to bisexuality. Aiming to conduct a time-based analysis of social media content (Anderson 2012: 330-331), I chose the period from March 2020 (the introduction of the first pandemic-related safety measures in Russia which led to an increase in online media usage and reliance) to the end of December 2021.

The content analysis entailed going through all the posting made by J. and K. between 1 March 2020 and 31 December 2021 in order to elicit posts which contained a narrative that could potentially be interpreted as confessional. The sampled media data was then further subjected to a close reading, which resulted in identifying confessional posts. These posts were then coded (Saldaña 2021) and grouped into thematic sections. The themes for coding were derived from the themes dominating the two online discussions presented earlier:

- Theme 1, 'Sex and love', entails everything related to sexual, intimate, and romantic relationships.
- Theme 2, 'Bodymind', includes everything related to the activists' perception of their body and mind, i.e., their physical and spiritual development, complexes and anxieties, emotions and sensations, feelings and reactions to the events unfolding around them.
- Theme 3, 'Activism', includes posts devoted to various aspects of activism, i.e., personal risks, relationships among activists, aims and objectives for the future, etc.
- Theme 4, 'Identity', relates to the activists' perceptions of themselves as bisexual people and the feelings and experiences connected with those perceptions.
- Theme 5, 'Community and society', includes everything related to the activists' links with family, friends, fellow activists, e.g., the support they receive from others or the conflicts they have faced due to their identifying as bisexual or being involved in activism.

The analysis of J.'s personal Facebook blog (J. n.d.) demonstrated, that within the selected period the highest number of

confessional posts he published were devoted to Theme 2, 'Bodymind' (44 posts). The second most frequent topic was theme 5, 'Community and society' (11 posts). Between March 2020 and December 2021, J. published seven posts related to 'Activism', five on 'Sex and love', and four on 'Identity'.

The reason why the confessional narratives in J.'s posting predominantly relate to the perceptions of body and mind can be found in the 3 December 2020 post which explains J.'s priorities:[15]

> Why did I just put activism on hold now? Apart from prioritizing my own recovery, I have come to realize that our external activity is a continuation of internal processes. Until you put the space around in order, until you fill it with minimal comfort and order, until you have learned to think strategically, to plan, to focus on what is most important, until then it is hardly possible to achieve systemic changes (J. n.d.).

These thoughts are continued in a post of 31 December 2020 that reflects on the year gone by and makes resolutions for the new year:

> ...This year has been hard, but important for me. Not the most fruitful in terms of the volume of activist activity, but it gave me a chance to take a breather, to focus on other aspects of life, gain new experiences and skills, and listen to myself more carefully. What do I want, what do I like, what do I believe in? What do I want to let go, get rid of, remove from my life? Most crucially, I've come to realize that unless I first meet my internal needs, my external activity cannot be effective in the long term. Therefore, now I am building this inner foundation as best I can (J. n.d.).

The dominating 'bodymind' thematic lines in J.'s writing frequently convey his moods, emotions, and feelings. These are presented in a way that transgresses discourses of stereotypical heteronormative toxic 'boys don't cry' masculinity. Thus, in a 27 December 2020 post he confesses that he 'over the last few days has been in a particularly pleasant

[15] The translation of this and further quotes is mine.

mood. [...] Even feel like crying overwhelmed with emotions, or laughing, as if life has become deeper and gained new meanings' (J n.d.).

Quite a few posts in this thematic series present an account of achievements and successes in personal growth and skills development, tackling at the same time such sensitive topics as the author's financial struggles, religious beliefs, and the challenges of dealing with the mental health issues in the immediate family. A recurrent motif in such posts is looking back to see what has been done and what is yet to be achieved ('Lately I've been wondering which qualities I managed to develop during the first part of my life and which still need working on'; 26 April 2020) (J. n.d.). The acceptance of his own bisexual identity plays an important role in such re-evaluation: 'In many respects, the positive changes are connected with coming to terms with my bisexuality and with the experience I gained due to activism – when more often than not you go against the mainstream and the old-fashioned opinions. In this sense, this life situation has paid back in abundance. "And if I could choose myself – I would have become me again"' (26 April 2020) (J. n.d.).

The themes related to 'Bodymind' and 'Society and Community' also dominate among the posts retrieved from the Telegram channel of K. (nine posts each) (K. n.d.). Seven of the retrieved posts relate to the theme 'Sex and love', six to the thematic line 'Identity', and two to 'Activism'. One of the most important topics presented under the 'Bodymind' umbrella is K.'s perceptions of her body as a nonbinary agender person. For example, in the post of 2 March 2020 she dwells on how her perceptions of her bodily hair (e.g., hairs on the forearms and nipples) have evolved thanks to being informed that it is normal not only for a male person, but for a female person, too, to have bodily hair. Another recurrent motive here is K.'s perceptions of her emotional reactions: the feeling of shame when her partner spotted a tampon in the bathroom and made a joke about her being on period, which used to be a taboo topic for her for a long time (23 June 2020) or the constant fear of being under surveillance, the police kidnapping her or coming to her home with a search warrant, on the grounds of her involvement in oppositional and LGBTQ-rights activism (6 December 2021). When writing about relationships with 'Society and community' (e.g.,

the realisation that in fact she loves her family, regardless of disagreements and issues in the past; or the 12 August 2020 reflections on participating in a debate where she had been effectively ignored and not given a chance to speak out), K. often confesses how she feels about such complex philosophical issues as death or why it is difficult for her to work as part of the team.

To sum up, the confessional posts published by J. and K. demonstrate that this format is used as a tool for both the self-writing and life-writing processes, providing an account of events happening in the activists' lives and the impact of those events, as well as an account of the activists' consistent working towards a deeper understanding and a greater acceptance of themselves.

Conclusion

The analysis of the confessional narratives produced by Russian bisexual activists on social media platforms (YouTube, Telegram and Facebook) demonstrates that this narrative genre is utilized to achieve various goals. Firstly, it allows the activists to address and challenge the biphobic stereotypes which exist both among LGBTQ as well as among heterosexual communities, e.g. the promiscuity of bisexual people. Different types of confessional narratives, e.g. the formats of the 'awkward questions' interview or of the personal blog, allow bisexual rights activists to share their personal stories with their audiences, thus educating audiences on bisexuality, as well as formulating what it means for them to be bisexual. When shared in a group environment or when audience participation is involved, confessional narratives take the form of a conversation, a dialogue, where a sense of shared experiences can potentially be created. Confessional narratives can also be used to frame activists' views on a whole variety of topics ranging from sex, love, sexuality to perception of own body and mind, to thoughts on challenges of being involved in activism, to community and society.

The above allows to conclude that one of the primary roles, if not the primary role of mediated confessional narratives in the process of self-identification as a bisexual person and activist is that of identity-building. Such narratives are employed as a strategy of establishing closer ties within the activist community and with the media audiences accessing the content. They are used as an effective means of approaching and

dealing with sensitive and tabooed topics, in particular issues related to sexual experiences and own self-identification. It is therefore applied as a tool for empowerment and a way of making bisexual people more visible among Russian LGBTQ communities.

The findings presented in the paper reveal the significance of oral and written confessional records for the processes of bisexual activists' digital self-writing and life-writing. Reflecting on the various stages and aspects of coming to terms with one's bisexuality and providing an account of one's own life as an openly bisexual and self-accepting person are crucial for bisexual activists' self-identification.

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Papers: Special Section

Tetiana Cherkashyna

Ukrainian Autobiographical Narratives in Their Historical Development

Introduction to the special cluster of articles dedicated to Life Writing in the Ukrainian literary tradition by the editor, Tetiana Cherkashyna, who reconstructs the history of the development of Ukrainian autobiography throughout the centuries, identifies the key trends and highlights the contribution provided by the articles of the special cluster.

At critical times in Ukrainian history interest in Ukraine memoirs arose. Political and geopolitical upheavals, changes in values, the desire to self-identify in new living conditions led to the emergence of a significant number of autobiographical texts. Autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, letters in all their diversity filled bookstores and the pages of several online publications, thus attracting the attention not only of ordinary readers, but also of specialists in various topics.

It was only during the twentieth century that Ukrainian autobiographical narratives went through several stages of development marked by the preservation of the traditions of the past, the search for new forms of self-expression, tendentiousness and ideological bias and the revival of traditions.[1] The proposed selection of articles by Oleksandr Halych, Artem Halych, Tetiana Cherkashyna and Svitlana Kryvoruchko gives a broader idea of the dominating features of Ukrainian autobiographical narratives. Each article details a separate stage in the development of Ukrainian autobiography, from traditional socially oriented autobiographies to autofictional novels that stand at the intersection of fictional and non-fictional literature.

The seedlings of the first Ukrainian stories about the self can be

[1] More about Ukrainian autobiography can be found in the academic works of Oleksandr Halych (Halych 1991, Halych 2001, Halych 2008, Halych 2013, Halych 2015), Mykhailyna Kotsiubynska (Kotsiubynska 2008), Maria Fedun (Fedun 2010), Artem Halych (Halych 2017), Valeria Pustovit (Pustovit 2008, Pustovit 2019), Iryna Konstankevych (Konstankevych 2014), Svitlana Kryvoruchko (Kryvoruchko 2021), Tetiana Cherkashyna (Cherkashyna 2014).

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traced back to the twelfth century. To this day, some autobiographical texts have survived, such as *Teachings* by Volodymyr Monomakh, *Letter to John Francis Commendoni about himself* by Stanislav Orikhovskii (Roksolan), *Osostevicius himself about himself and about his adventures in visiting various countries of the world* by Maciei Stryikovski, *My life and sufferings by me, Illia Turchynovskii, priest and governor of Berezan, written in memory of my children, grandchildren and all posterity* by Illia Turchynovskii. These works share the interweaving of autobiographical, historical, didactic, spiritual, legal, travel and epistolary literature, and all present syncretic and combined features of several literary genres. Ancient Ukrainian autobiographical narratives were distinctly spiritual and apologetic, but devoid of individualism and self-reflexivity. Particular attention was given to the disclosure of the theme of learning and knowledge of the world around the author. The first Ukrainian autobiographies were written either in ancient Ukrainian or Latin. Some of them have been preserved only in fragments: in 2008 there was the first attempt to combine these texts into one collection of ancient Ukrainian autobiographies.[2]

The development of the basic models of Ukrainian autobiography occurred in the nineteenth century. *Autobiography* by Taras Shevchenko, *My Life* by Panteleimon Kulish, *Autobiography* by Mykola Kostomarov, *Autobiography* by Mykhailo Drahomanov, *Autobiography* by Natalia Kobrynska, *Autobiography* by Olha Kobylianska, *Autobiography* and *Something about Myself* by Ivan Franko, *Biography of Ivan Levytskii (Nechui) written by himself* by Ivan Nechui-Levytskii marked a new qualitative stage in the development of Ukrainian autobiography.

The mentioned authors (mostly writers and public figures) changed the ideological and content landscape of Ukrainian autobiographical narrative.[3] While for the ancient Ukrainian autobiographer the main idea was serving God, the autobiog-

[2] See Valerii Shevchuk's textbook of ancient Ukrainian literature (Shevchuk 2008).

[3] Autobiographies of this period were already written in Ukrainian and were collected by Iurii Lutskii in abbreviated form together with autobiographies of Ukrainian public figures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the volume *About themselves: Autobiographies of Prominent Ukrainians of the XIXth Century* (Lutskii1989).

rapher of the nineteenth century promoted the idea of serving their people, as the vast majority of autobiographies were of nationalists and Ukrainophiles. In the texts of this period, it is still possible to trace apologetical features, but attention towards professional and creative achievements by the autobiographers is increasingly noted. Great importance is devoted to family, school and university education. The historical and cultural context is more widely covered.

The first decades of the twentieth century in Ukraine were marked by two revolutions, the civil war, the radical restructuring of life. All this led to a significant revival of autobiographical texts. Famous Ukrainian playwrights, such as Mykhailo Starytskii and Marko Kropyvnytskii, wrote their memoirs. Using a large palette of artistic images, they recreate the atmosphere of the cultural and social life of their time, they recount in minute detail the peculiarities of family upbringing and relationships between people, they analyze how their own worldview change, and focus on how theatre changed their lives and their psychological traits.

A large number of Ukrainian autobiographical texts of 1900–1920s were written by famous public and political figures of the time, such as Mykhailo Hrushevskii, Serhii Yefremov, Dmytro Bahalii, Yevhen Chykalenko, Sofia Rusova, Oleksandra Kulish (Bilozerova). These authors came from wealthy, progressive-minded families; had a good upbringing and brilliant education, received in the best Ukrainian and foreign educational institutions; were fluent in several foreign languages; travelled extensively; were acquainted with the most prominent people of their time; had a strong civic position and were actively involved in social activities. They left informatively rich, Ukrainian-centric and socially oriented autobiographical texts, 'living testimonies' about how they lived, how people from their social circles lived, what moods and interests prevailed in the educated society of that time, and recorded the most socially significant events they took part in.

As true chroniclers of their time, they provide information for generations to come about the activities of Ukrainian communities of their time, included in their autobiographies detailed ethnographic sketches, told about their revolutionary activities and the consequences of such activities. They created self-images of moral, modest

people who, despite their significant professional, intellectual and socio-political achievements, and carefully avoided the assessments of their own activities. Self-censorship was a typical feature – it existed for both moral issues or safety reasons. This is why these authors spoke quite cautiously and carefully about the Bolshevik government, about their attitude towards it, or about their mostly complicated relationship with it.

This type of Ukrainian autobiographies, typical of the early twentieth century, is presented in more detail in the article by Oleksandr Halych, an authoritative Ukrainian researcher of non-fictional literature. On the example of Serhii Yefremov's autobiographical texts, Oleksandr Halych shows the main dominants of the Ukrainian socially oriented autobiographical narratives of that time.

Poorer in terms of historical facts, but more informative from a literary point of view, were several autobiographies by Ukrainian writers of both the older and younger generations, written during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Olena Pchilka, Vasyl Stefanyk, Stepan Vasylchenko, Hnat Khotkevych, Marko Cheremshyna, Valerian Polishchuk, Volodymyr Sosiura, Ostap Vyshnia, Mike Johansen and many others wrote general accounts of their life and creative paths at the request of researchers of their works and their publishers.

Literary-oriented autobiographies of this period were usually autobiographies of formation, which is why the dominating theme was that of spiritual growth and the origins of one's own spiritual world. Of great importance were spiritual mentors, who were mostly close relatives (such as grandparents or parents), school and gymnasium teachers, foreign and Ukrainian literary classics, whose works were admired by the writers. According to Olena Pchilka, 'the natural environment' too played an important role (Pchilka 2011: 22).

A common feature of the autobiographers of that period was a thirst for reading everything they could get their hands on, and most of the autobiographers were respectful of the literary authorities of the past and present.

In their autobiographies, Olha Kobylianska, Vasyl Stefanyk, Marko Cheremshyna, Hryhorii Kosynka, Olena Pchilka modelled the traditional, in some ways even archetypal, image of a modest, highly moral writer whose works came from life it-

self. The above-mentioned autobiographers, despite the popularity of their works, did not consider themselves exceptional people. Usually, these writers had no special literary or philological education. As Olha Kobylianska, Vasyl Stefanyk, Marko Cheremshyna recall, they lived separately from the rest of the writers, had little contact with anyone, rarely travelled and wrote mostly for their own pleasure.

However, as Solomiia Pavlychko rightly notes, already at the turn of the 1920s 'literature and culture ceased to be a leisure activity of single, scattered authors. Culture was finally beginning to resemble a spiritual industry' (Pavlychko 1999: 170).

Numerous literary unions and organizations began to appear, writers united around the literary editorial offices in which they worked. Preserving partially the traditions of Ukrainian folk autobiographical prose. Writers of the young generation of the period increasingly began to depart from the established canons of writing autobiographical works and to change their ideological and artistic parameters.

The article of Artem Halych, a researcher of Ukrainian autobiographical texts, is devoted to the Ukrainian autobiographies of this period. Halych currently works on unpublished texts that are stored in the literary archives of Ukraine. Through the analysis of literary portraits depicted in unpublished autobiographical texts, Halych provides a wide panorama of the life of Ukrainian writers of that time. The changes of the inner self of such writers are also shown in his article.

In the 1920s, the autobiographical works of Valerian Polishchuk, Mike Johansen, Volodymyr Sosiura, Ostap Vyshnia produce the image of the 'new generation' writer – an active, effective, tireless fighter for the word, ironic and self-ironic – began to form.

At that time, the autobiographies of young writers, despite their utilitarian nature, became one of the means of self-expression for those authors. Irony, wit, ease of writing combined with deep introspection became the hallmarks of the autobiographical works by Ostap Vyshnia and Mike Johansen. Dreaminess, heightened emotionality, authenticity of immediate feelings, and at the same time sadness and disappointment caused by real-life troubles characterized the autobiography of Volodymyr Sosiura.

Autobiographies began to include various types of literary

mystifications and games with the reader. Irony and self-irony became widespread: in most cases, they performed a protective function, because such a frivolous, playful form of writing autobiography allowed the authors to hide the real self, to avoid 'slippery' topics and facts of one's own biography. This was most evident in the autobiographies *Autobiography of Mike Johansen, the Johansen who decorated the 133rd book of the* Literary Fair *with prologue, epilogue and interludes* by Mike Johansen and *My autobiography* by Ostap Vyshnia – both authors deliberately hid their 'I' under the mask of a jester.

More about this period in the history of the development of Ukrainian autobiographical narratives, which were written primarily in Kharkiv, the capital of Ukraine at that time, can be found in my article. Through the prism of the representation of Kharkiv in Ukrainian autobiographical texts of the twentieth century, the main stages of autobiographical consciousness of Ukrainian authors of that period are revealed – from the fight for free expression of the author's opinion to strict self-censorship.

Ukrainian autobiographical prose of the first two decades of the twentieth century testified to the free coexistence of socially oriented, Ukrainian-centric, sometimes ethnographic autobiographies that continued the best traditions of Ukrainian autobiographers of the nineteenth century; and autobiographical works whose authors boldly experimented with the style, form, artistic specificity of the author's self-representation, developing new typological varieties of autobiographies. All autobiographical texts of this period were written in Ukrainian.

Since the 1930s, Ukrainian autobiography has been divided into two large groups – Ukrainian Soviet autobiographies and Ukrainian emigration autobiographies, each of which followed their own path of development and developed their own autobiographical traditions.

Ukrainian Soviet autobiographies shared a common path of development with the autobiographies written by representatives of other republics of the USSR. In 1934, the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers was organized, which proclaimed the creation of the Union of Soviet Writers. Ukrainian Soviet writers became members of the union and continued to write with a nod to the ideological instructions they were indoctrinated with.

At this time, the development of the Soviet autobiographical can-

on began, according to which the only autobiographical texts that could be published were those ideologically verified and devoid of taboo topics. This was clearly represented in the autobiographies of Ukrainian Soviet writers written in Russian for the large-scale literary publication *Soviet Writers* (Brainina et al. 1959a, Brainina et al. 1959b, Brainina et al. 1966, Brainina et al. 1972, Brainina et al. 1988).

Asceticism, chastity, unpretentiousness in everyday life, modest assessment of one's own life achievements became the defining features of the autobiographical texts of the Soviet period. Writing autobiographical texts became less appealing.

During this period, a review of existing autobiographical texts was carried out, as a result some texts were removed from libraries, while some were eventually rewritten in accordance with the prevailing mindset of the time.

The description of the history of one's own life could be interpreted as a manifestation of individualism, which was severely criticized and eradicated in every possible way. In view of this, the autobiographers, recreating their life path for future generations, constantly emphasized that there was no individualism in their autobiographies, as the description of their lives was meant to depict the typical life of their social stratum.

The Ukrainian autobiographies of the 1930s present a new motif, that of 'predetermined guilt'. As a result, autobiographers often justify themselves in the pages of their autobiographies to readers who lived in the same period and criticised them. The motive of 'constant guilt' was present to the greatest extentmostly in the 'prison autobiographies' written for the investigators of the State Political Department in order to clarify certain facts of the authors' own biography and to explain in more detail their socio-political and public beliefs, as well as their personal attitude towards the most resonant events of the time or towards some 'unreliable people'. These texts were written in prison cells, under the close supervision of investigators, and often underwent the necessary 'processing', which is why, according to Oleksandr and Leonid Ushkalov, they became not so much the authors' self-autobiographies, but rather 'monuments to the bloody creativity of the State Political Department officers' (Ushkalov et al. 2010: 6–7).

This type of Ukrainian Soviet autobiography has been actively developing since the 1930s, since mass arrests and political re-

pressions began. The bulk of these autobiographies are still stored among other materials and investigative documents in various state archives of Ukraine, although recently there has been a tendency to make them public (see the scientific and documentary volume *Archive of the Executed Renaissance* compiled by Oleksandr and Leonid Ushkalov, Ushkalov et al. 2010).

Obligatory motives of the 'prison autobiography' were 'sincere' confessions of the authors' own political unconsciousness in the turbulent revolution and post-revolution years, self-accusatory passages and confirmation of their loyalty to the current Soviet government. However, even this did not save the 'prison autobiographers' from their tragic fate.

The new Ukrainian Soviet literature needed a new type of hero, and the autobiographical trilogy of Yurii Smolych (*Childhood*, *Our Secrets*, *Eighteen Years*), which became a vivid example of socialist realist Ukrainian autobiography of the 1930s, was aimed at the realization of this task. Only the first part of this trilogy (the autobiographical story *Childhood*) belongs to the field of autobiographical literature, as the next two parts (the autobiographical novels *Our Secrets* and *Eighteen Years*) were fictional works. *Childhood* was written in compliance with all the requirements of the socialist realist canon, such as the presence only of typical socialist realist images, the deep morality of the main characters, codified aesthetics and patriotism.

Another reason for the unpopularity of autobiographical writing during the 1930s–1980s was that, with the total control by the authorities over what one could talk and write about, writing out one's true life story could endanger not only the autobiographers themselves, but also their family members, friends and acquaintances, whose names could appear on the pages of the autobiographical work. Therefore, Ukrainian Soviet autobiography of the 1930s–1970s was strictly self-censored.

One of the ways to overcome the dilemma between the desire to recount about oneself and of one's life and the danger of touching upon undesirable topics and names is to depict only the formation of one's own personality during childhood. This is the path followed by Oleksandr Dovzhenko, the author of the autobiographical film story *Enchanted Desna*, which is significant not only for the Soviet autobiography of the 1940s and 1950s, but also for the

Ukrainian autobiographical tradition as a whole. Having rejected the principles of didacticism, which were to be used by the autobiographers of that time, Oleksandr Dovzhenko focused primarily on the ethical and aesthetic possibilities of the autobiographical narrative, giving the work a deep philosophical connotation. As a result each generation of researcher discovers thoughts relevant to their time throughout.

A significant achievement of Ukrainian autobiography of this period was the literary autobiography of Volodymyr Sosiura *The Third Company*, which the author wrote in segments during the years 1926–59. Volodymyr Sosiura, as well as Oleksandr Dovzhenko, was one of the most prominent Ukrainian autobiographers, whose work was considered ahead of his time. Innovative for the Ukrainian Soviet autobiography of the 1950s was his bold public appeal to speak about taboo topics and forbidden names, which became one of the main reasons for which this work was silenced for years. The author was not afraid of the public exposure of his own self – he chronicled with a greater or lesser degree of frankness the history of his own mental and emotional life in different periods of his life.

The description of their difficult era against the background of their own lives was provided not only by officially recognized Soviet writers, but also by writers who were well aware of the impossibility of publishing their autobiographical works during their lifetime due to their difficult life and tense relations with the Soviet authorities. With the memoirs of Nadiia Surovtsova, Borys Antonenko-Davydovych and Zinaida Tulub, the Ukrainian autobiography includes not only the topic of the Gulag, but also philosophical and existential reflections on the meaning of human existence, on the peculiarities of human stoicism, the transformation of the human psyche in a closed space, mental and psychological breakdowns from violent trials, etc.

Another path in the development of Ukrainian autobiographical narratives was taken by Ukrainian emigrant autobiographical prose, the purpose of which during the 1930s and 1940s was not only to raise the morale of political emigrants, but also to support them morally, as the main message of such works was that the struggle was still not over and emigrants were to hope for the best. The first Ukrainian emigrant autobiographers (Ivan Ohiienko, Vasyl

Koroliv-Staryi and others) acted primarily as carriers of historical memory, recreating their own vision of the Ukrainian events of 1917–1919 and the first years of life abroad as an emigrant.

While autobiographies of socio-political and public figures who found themselves in exile played, according to Maria Fedun, the role of 'a full-fledged "word-weapon"' (Fedun 2010: 18), literary autobiographies focused primarily on educational and cognitive tasks. In the best traditions of the Ukrainian folk-ethnographic autobiography of formation, dating back to the nineteenth century, Bohdan Lepkyi and Stepan Smal-Stotskyi turned to a detailed revision of the origins of their self, and showed how the natural environment, folk customs, traditions, beliefs, folklore, deep religiosity and high morality of parents, relatives and fellow villagers shaped the consciousness of the autobiographers at a young age.

Another, more lyrical and nostalgic stream, marked by a pronounced longing for the 'lost paradise' of early youth, was represented by the autobiographies *Without Roots* by Natalia Koroleva, *Chrysanthemums* by Uliana Kravchenko, *Distant World* by Halyna Zhurba, *Distant Close Up* by Maria Strutynska, *The Path Home* by Lesia Lysak-Tyvoniuk and others. The works of Maria Strutynska and Lesia Lysak-Tyvoniuk testify to the emergence of another trend in Ukrainian emigration autobiographical prose of the mid-twentieth century. In their memoirs, in addition to the motif of nostalgia, there is a pronounced longing for their native lands, with which the authors, who found themselves in exile, did not break the inner spiritual and emotional connection. A significant place is given to the image of home. The autobiographers were well aware that their homes were not what they once were. 'The owners have gone, there are collective farmers, whom I felt sorry for. They cut down old cherry trees in the garden for fuel. They do not call on Saturday evening to announce the coming of the God's Day – Sunday. It is completely different there now' (Lysak-Tyvoniuk 1978: 306), sadly stated Lesia Lysak-Tyvoniuk. However, the authors did not lose faith for the future, because, according to the author, 'these are only temporary changes. Earth and sky remain the same' (Lysak-Tyvoniuk 1978: 306), and 'people are still healthy in spirit' (Lysak-Tyvoniuk 1978: 307).

Autobiographies devoted to the youth years, *From Yellowed*

Leaves from Australia by Stepan Rodion, *My Youth* by Fedir Dudko, *Wanderings of Life* by Mykola-Sydir Chartoryskii, *War Experiences of a Grey Man* and other autobiographical texts by Volodymyr Barahura were characterised by a more remissive tone. These authors departed from the idyllic perspective of interpreting the events of their ancient past and, taking inspiration from their own life, showed how socio-political changes, wars, and emigration destroy the established ways of life of people who are forced to leave their homes and go in search of a better life. The immediacy of their impressions, the lack of documented evidence, and the reliance on one's own memory became the defining features of these Ukrainian emigration autobiographical narratives.

Ukrainian emigration autobiography increasingly included comparative elements, as can be seen in the autobiographies *On a White Horse* and *On a Raven Horse* by Ulas Samchuk, *I am 85* by Volodymyr Kubiiovych, *Conversations on the Way to Myself* by Ivan Koshelivets, *Under the Sun of Australia* by Dmytro Nytchenko, *From Far to Close* by Vasyl Sokol, *Meetings and Farewells* by Hryhorii Kostyuk, *Eudothea's Gift* by Dokiia Humenna, *I – my – me… (and around)* by Yurii Shevelev. In these texts words such as 'Western' – 'Ukrainian', 'arranged' – 'unsettled', 'idealized' – 'real', 'present' – 'past', etc. are correlated. Many pages are devoted to reflections on the reasons for the unsettled life of the emigrants, especially for those autobiographers who spent part of their lives in Soviet Ukraine, such as Dokiia Humenna, Ivan Koshelivets or Vasyl Sokil.

As in the Ukrainian emigration autobiographical works of previous decades, in the autobiographies of the 1970s and 1980s a significant place is given to the motif of the road. In most autobiographers, the road was associated with dramatic changes in life. Initially, the authors often moved from place to place for education, job search or business trips. Then came the time to emigrate, which was associated with hopes for a better life, but also with worries about the unknown – in most cases, it was a 'road to nowhere'. Later, after settling in a new place, the motif of the road is mostly used to describe the roads-travels to new, previously unknown places. The majority of Ukrainian emigration autobiographers proved to be bright analysts, portraitists and landscape painters, as one of their main tasks was to leave

the most accurate memories of their past life.

Since the mid-1980s, after half a century of information vacuum, bans, silences, taboos of 'undesirable' topics, names, phenomena and permission to publish only autobiographies which were neutral, devoid of criticism towards the ruling power, and ideologically verified, the first printed memoirs appeared in Ukraine (*The Story of One Fate* by Dmytro Zatonskii, *To Live and Tell* by Anatolii Dimarov). Both authors wrote with a greater or lesser degree of frankness about themselves and their real life during the Soviet era, i.e. about the real life of their country and their contemporaries.

However, the real 'breakthrough of information borders' began in the early 1990s, when the autobiographies *Museum of a Living Writer, or My Long Road to the Market* by Volodymyr Drozd, *Solo for a Girl's Voice* by Halyna Hordasevych, *The Greatest Miracle is Life* by Mykola Rudenko, *Free and Unfree Roads* and other works by Roman Ivanychuk appeared.

Public self-repentance for their own sins, sincerity, extreme frankness about themselves and their actions, self-criticism, constant thirst to get to the root of their failures and troubles became the distinctive features of autobiographical writing of that time.

Since the 1980s and 1990s, the image of a system characterized by total control, intrusion into the most intimate spheres of human life, the presence of a repressive and punitive mechanism, etc. has been a constant motif of Ukrainian autobiographies. Authors used a large palette of artistic images to depict the image of the system and its relationship with the individual. The contrast of the colour system, metaphorization, metonymy, allegory, allusiveness became the distinctive features of such theme.

Autobiographers unanimously agreed that the colour that was most associated with the image of the system was grey. Grey clothes, grey routine, grey life became the defining characteristics of the system and life inside it. Individuals lived in the system, they were closely interconnected. The system influenced a person, changed their inner essence, transformed them.

The main image that was used in regards to the repressive and punitive machine of the system was that of knocking. Knocking on the door was a harbinger of arrest, knocking on the cell wall was an invitation to communicate. However, as Volodymyr Drozd concluded, 'despite all the

losses, we were destined to survive and resurrect, albeit with crippled souls' (Drozd 1994: 197). Yurii Andrukhovych (*Moscoviada* and others), Oksana Zabuzhko (*Field Studies on Ukrainian Sex*), Oleksandr Irvanets (*Rivne/Rovno*) turn to new forms of autobiographical self-expression. These authors offered readers a new 'system of aesthetic values and priorities' (Ahieieva 2011: 33), a new vision of the world and of how they live it. Their autofictional works, as well as traditional autobiographies of this period, were not devoid of social analysis, but the angle of interpretation was different.

A more detailed analysis of one of these autofictional works is included in the article by Svitlana Kryvoruchko, a well-known Ukrainian researcher of psychoautobiographical writing.

In Ukrainian autofictional novels of the 1990s there was an alternative representation of Ukrainian history, presented not in its objective truthfulness, but primarily in the author's personal perception. The socio-historical background was decisively reinterpreted, much attention was paid to anti-colonial discourse. At the same time, a new type of autobiographical hero emerged from the pages of Ukrainian autofictional novels, which are distinctly self-reflective, attentive to the author's inner, deeply hidden mental states.

Ukrainian autobiographies of the first decades of the twenty-first century continued the main trends laid down in the Ukrainian autobiography of the late twentieth century. Among the new autobiographies, there is a tendency for the coexistence of autobiographies of the traditional type, which were characterized by their analytical nature, deep psychological and attentive attitude towards the word, moral responsibility of the autobiographer for every word spoken in public (this is revealed in the autobiographies *Book of Memories* by Mykhailyna Kotsiubynska, *Homo feriens* by Iryna Zhylenko, *Memories and Reflections at the Finish Line*, *Not a Separate Life* by Ivan Dziuba, *On the Shore of Time* by Valerii Shevchuk); and experimental autobiographies that were aimed at finding new forms of autobiographical self-expression through the decentralization of autobiographical material, and autofiction (as in the texts *The Secret*, *Lexicon of Intimate Cities* by Yurii Andrukhovych, *From This You Can Make a Few Stories* by Taras Prokhasko, *From the Map of*

Books and People by Oksana Zabuzhko).

In conclusion, Ukrainian autobiography has passed through various evolutionary stages of its development over the centuries, and the proposed selection of articles by Oleksandr Halych, Artem Halych, Tetiana Cherkashyna, Svitlana Kryvoruchko gives a broader picture of the main dominants of the Ukrainian autobiographical narratives.

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Oleksandr Halych

Memoirs of Serhiy Yefremov: stages of struggle for the Ukrainian word

The article is devoted to the study of diaries and memoirs of the prominent Ukrainian figure of the early twentieth century Serhiy Yefremov. Yefremov was one of the active figures in the creation of Ukrainian periodicals, having worked in the magazine *Kievskaia starina*, and was an active member of the Old Hromada. His literary works were subjected to strict censorship, which he tried to avoid. Serhiy Yefremov became the founder of the Ukrainian publishing house 'Vik', where he conducted active educational activities. He became the founder of the first Ukrainian newspaper, despite the oppression by the authorities and strict censorship of all print media. The diaries and memoirs of Serhiy Yefremov contain many literary portraits of prominent people of that time and analyze the cultural life of that time.

One of the most prominent Ukrainian humanitarians of the early twentieth century was Serhiy Yefremov (1876–1939). His scientific interests were multidirectional and included monographic studies of the classics of Ukrainian literature. The scholar left a significant mark in publishing, journalism, politics, state-building. In his youth he wrote fiction.

The ego-documents of Serhiy Yefremov are the diaries of 1895–early 1896 (Yefremov 2011: 37–180) and 1923-1929 (Yefremov 1997), as well as the memoirs *About the past days (memories)* (Yefremov 2011: 181–620). They contain a variety of records relating not only to the autobiography of the scholar, but also shed light on his scientific, journalistic, publishing and editorial work. The memoirs of Serhiy Yefremov reveal many events of the surrounding reality, to which the author was involved at the turn of the XIX – XX centuries. The most important of them are the work in the journal *Kievskaia starina*,[1] his participation in the creation of the publishing house 'Vik' and the foundation of the first Ukrainian-language publications in tsarist Russia.

[1] Monthly magazine that published articles on history, ethnography, literature. It was published in Kyiv during 1882-1907. Initially published in Russian, since 1906 it was published in Ukrainian.

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Serhiy Yefremov's interest in the journal *Kievskaia starina* arose in the late nineteenth century, when its editor was V. Naumenko. During his work, *Kievskaia starina* underwent a significant evolution, turning from a popular scientific publication into a stronghold of Ukrainophilia. The struggle for the Ukrainian word, the development of literature in the native language, the publications analyzing the political situation in the sub-Russian part of Ukraine, as well as in Halychyna and Bukovyna, which were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, can be clearly traced on the pages of the journal. In Serhiy Yefremov's opinion, the 'revival' of the journal is connected with the arrival of a younger generation to the editorial office, a prominent representative of which was V. Domanytskii (pseudonym Viter). The memoirist admits that 'we were sure that no one would be lucky enough to breathe a living spirit into this dead creature,[2] and we chastised Viter for not respecting his work and time in a friendly manner' (Yefremov 2011: 389). However, V. Domanytskii's stubbornness won. He not only gained a foothold in the editorial office, but also gradually began to involve his friends, in particular S. Yefremov, in the work of *Kievskaia starina*. The latter saw that his materials were not superfluous in this journal because 'in Ukraine, these chronicle notes, as well as the corresponding department in the *Kievskaia starina*, which Domanytskii tried to start, were replacing the newspaper, and he sent them more and more, especially since 1899, gradually pushing the narrowly informational lines to purely journalistic ones' (Yefremov 2011: 443–44).

S. Yefremov in his memoirs makes a small excursion into the past of the journal, connecting its activities for a long time with the Old Hromada:[3]

> Formally, the publisher of *Kievskaia starina* was the Old Hromada, an organization that had existed for many decades because it grew out of the Hromada that was founded in the late 50s by then young students Antonovych, Mykhalchuk, Rylskii, Zhytetskii and others, although the former, since

[2] The author here means the *Kievskaia starina*.

[3] The organization of Ukrainian intellectuals in Kyiv, engaged in social, cultural and educational activities, operated from 1859 to 1876, when it was banned by the Ems Decree.

> the time I joined the editorial staff and the Hromada, was no longer a member of it, having left due to some misunderstandings with Naumenko, and the latter also almost never visited the Hromada due to old age and weakness (Rylskii also did not live in Kyiv) (Yefremov 2011: 500).

On the recommendation of E. Chykalenko, S. Yefremov became a member of the Old Hromada. Sometimes the author of memoirs had misunderstandings with the leaders of *Kievskaia starina*. In particular, not everyone liked the article published in Lviv, where he criticized *Kobzar*,[4] which was published by the editorial board of *Kievskaia starina*.

S. Yefremov described in detail the circumstances under which he unexpectedly became one of the leaders of the *Kievskaia starina*: '[...] V. P. Naumenko fell ill and [...] had to go to the Crimea, *Kievskaia starina* was losing its secretary[5] and editor. None of the then members of the editorial board had the time, and probably the desire, to take on these troublesome and thankless duties, at least the technical side of the case we had to look for a person on the side' (Yefremov 2011: 498). At the suggestion of E. Chykalenko, S. Yefremov was appointed secretary of the editorial board. From the end of 1901 he officially became the secretary and temporarily, until Naumenko returned, the technical editor of *Kievskaia starina*. Before his departure V. Naumenko introduced S. Yefremov to the course of business, told about his duties, the specifics of working with the printing house. At the same time, he disliked the young and ambitious journalist, but, handing over the affairs to him, in no way hinted at his dislike. With the arrival of S. Yefremov to the leadership, the number of subscribers increased from 300 to 700 people: 'The figure itself, of course, is small, but it is too symptomatic for the growth of Ukrainians in those times' (Yefremov 2011: 499). After all, in those days it was not possible to create a separate Ukrainian edition due to obstacles from the Russian tsarism, and therefore, in the opinion of S. Yefremov, *Kievskaia starina* managed to compensate for this loss, especially with its literary and journalistic departments. 'When the Ukrainian press was born, *Kievskaia starina*

[4] *Kobzar* is the title of the first book of poetry by Taras Shevchenko.

[5] V. Domanytskii resigned from the post of secretary.

was falling down, because that press had stripped it of its staff, readers, and even the small funds it had been living on for 25 years' (Yefremov (2011: 500). The memoirs contain many interesting historical facts related to the activities of the editorial office of the magazine, which was located on the second floor of the house number 58 on Mariinsko-Blagovischenska Street. Editorial meetings were held every Monday evening. S. Yefremov describes the duties he had to perform: 'The department of current life was the responsibility of the secretary, who also looked through newspapers, selecting from them news and notes interesting for the journal' (Yefremov 2011: 501). Editorial board meetings were conducted mainly in Russian, but E. Chykalenko and junior staff tried to speak Ukrainian.

'In general, the editorial staff was clearly divided into two parts – old and young – and there was always a struggle between them' (Yefremov 2011: 501). The elders tried not to accept the innovations of the youth and were indifferent, which sometimes led to conflicts in the editorial office. The author of the memoirs gives examples of serious disagreements in the team, but they did not reach extremes: '[...] we did not quarrel and did not scatter to different sides, it was only because both sides still valued in *Kievskaia starina* the only way of legal Ukrainian – even half, even a quarter – publication, and both sides did not want to contribute to its decline, nor let it completely out of their hands' (Yefremov 2011: 503). Administrative duties burdened the author of the memoirs, and he writes frankly that he soon managed to distance himself from them: 'However, I did not stay as a secretary for long: leaving for the summer of 1902 to Sytkyvtsii,[6] I handed over my duties to F. P. Matushevskii and never returned to them, remaining only a member of the editorial board and an employee' (Yefremov 2011: 498).

Memoirs showed that S. Yefremov was a good physiognomist. They contain a number of detailed portrait sketches of leading employees of *Kievskaia starina*. Of course, the author put in the forefront V. Naumenko, whom he considered the real head and creator of not only the journal, but the entire Old Hromada: '[...] We must put in the first place V. P. Naumenko, who, not at all in accordance with his character, so tragically ended his life in 1919. He was the

[6] A village in Podillia.

real head and creator of *Kievskaia starina* and the whole community' (Yefremov 2011: 503).

Describing this figure, S. Yefremov tries to outline not only the features of his appearance, but also the peculiarities of his character, in particular V. Naumenko's tendency to compromise:

> Intelligent, with soft movements, rounded, affectionate speech, he had a habit of fixing everything, reconciling everything, erasing sharp horns and smoothing the path for that moderate Ukrainophilism, of which he was the best advocate and representative. Incapable of a drastic act, he managed with the reputation of a Ukrainophile not only to hold on to his official position, but also to remove the glory of one of the best teachers, which he really was (Yefremov 2011: 504).

The author of the memoirs perfectly understood the role of V. Naumenko in the Old Hromada and the editorial office of the journal: '[...] in his group, in the Old Hromada, in the editorial office of *Kievskaia starina*, everything was held by Naumenko, until new elements squeezed in and opposed him' (Yefremov 2011: 504). The memoirist believes that the main feature of V. Naumenko's character was compromise: 'For the sake of caution, he never put the Ukrainian question, or any other, on the table; for the sake of caution, he compromised in everything' (Yefremov 2011: 504). Younger employees of the *Kievskaia starina* became a kind of opposition to V. Naumenko, and, given his caution, they called their leader 'Fox Mykyta' behind his back: 'With his right hand he was always destroying what he did with his left, and vice versa, and being cautious, he went his own way into such unclimbable muds from which it was impossible to get out' (Yefremov 2011: 505). Trying to give an objective description of the director of the journal, S. Yefremov sought to show all the complexities of his nature:

> Without leaning clearly on our, younger, side, he, however, defended the power of *Kievskaia starina* and thus helped us a little, although he could in some important matter and at a crucial moment so turn the case that we remained on ice. We did not trust him, we treated him cau-

> tiously, with reservations, but we considered it possible, under the circumstances, to work together, although it was sometimes hard and disgusting in this atmosphere of principled compromises, timidity, softened insincerity and convenient cunning (Yefremov 2011: 505).

The direct opposite of V. Naumenko was E. Chykalenko:

> I remember very well this short, squat figure in a checkered jacket, with an open face, free manners and a loud voice. [...] Extremely sharp of tongue, truthful to the point of harshness, frank and sincere, passionate about the Ukrainian cause 'not only to the depths of his soul, but also to the depths of his pocket', as he sometimes jokingly said about people, Chykalenko quickly took an original place among Kyiv citizenship. [...] He lived extremely simply and modestly, although his house was always open to people of all kinds (Yefremov 2011: 506–07).

S. Yefremov noted the generosity of this man who voluntarily took upon himself the duty to help Ukrainians by financing fiction and journalism, promoting the development of young talents: 'Attaching extraordinary importance to literature in the matter of our national development, Chykalenko began to pay for Ukrainian fiction, and later journalism, at his own expense in the *Kievskaia starina*, enthusiastically following all the appearances in our writing, and especially the literary youth' (Yefremov 2011: 507). Other employees of the *Kievskaia starina* and the Old Hromada received much shorter descriptions in S. Yefremov's memoirs.

Much space in the memoirs is given to the characteristics of his own scientific and journalistic works that were published in the journal:

> At first, as secretary, I offered brief notes and news from daily life, from newspapers and magazines. I had already done some similar work for three years before that on my own initiative for the *Literaturno-naukovyi visnyk*[7]

[7] The first all-Ukrainian literary, scientific and socio-political journal, published from 1898 to 1932. It was founded on the initiative of Mykhailo Hrushev-

> and now divided it between the two publications, albeit briefly. My first original work here was the article 'In the struggle for enlightenment', originally published in 1902, is an overview of the struggle of Ukrainian students in Halychyna for their own university, which then took on very sharp forms and ended in the memorable 'secession' at the end of 1901 (Yefremov 2011: 515).

An important place among the publications is occupied by the article 'In search of new beauty', which caused a discussion among Ukrainian literary scholars and critics:

> In the summer of 1902, while in Sytkyvtsii, I wrote a considerable work on modern literary creativity and trends, which was entitled 'In search of new beauty. Notes from a reader' and appeared in the second half of the year… The reason for these notes was the talks and competitions about the non-placement of Kobylianska's works in 'Vik', and then the whole issue of Ukrainian modernity. I took the works of Khotkevych, Kobylyanska, and Iatskov and tried to show the negative features of the so-called new trends in our writing based on them (Yefremov 2011: 517).

Some Ukrainian writers and critics did not accept S. Yefremov's negative opinions about modernism in Ukrainian literature, which clearly declared itself at the turn of the XIX – XX centuries. As a reaction to his publication, S. Yefremov calls 'a long series of curses and slanders from Khotkevych, articles by O. Y. Yefymenkova, Hryhoriy Hryhorenko' (Yefremov 2011: 517). The controversy lasted for several years. S. Yefremov recalled that when he 'arrived in Lviv in February 1903, they […] asked if I had arrived there "in pursuit of new beauty"' (Yefremov 2011: 517).

Since the works of S. Yefremov owing to their acuteness and political relevance were under special control of censorship, the head of the *Kievskaia starina* V. Naumenko always worked hard on them, removing what seemed to him politically or ideologically unacceptable. However, even

skii. It was published by the Taras Shevchenko Scientific Society. The journal published the best Ukrainian writers and scientists.

after such processing of texts, there was still something to do for the censor. In this case, S. Yefremov himself went to Vynohradna Street, defending his own position:

> It should be noted that even before printing, my articles attracted the sharp attention of the censor's eye with their contemporary content and even, as censors told me, headlines passed through editorial censorship, and Naumenko sometimes did a good job of cleaning them up, throwing out what seemed obscene to him. But there was still some work left for the censor, and as an author I had to go to Vynohradna Street to 'bargain' (Yefremov 2011: 525).

The *Kievskaia starina* published 'Reader's Notes' ('On a Dead End', 'Literary Bonaventure'), as well as reviews and bibliographical reviews, which caused a number of indignant materials sent to the editorial office, in which the author of the memoirs was accused of monopolizing critical thought: 'In addition to the above-mentioned literary notes, I also published literary texts and purely journalistic works in *Kievskaia starina*. Among the first I will mention here the work about Franko, *The Singer of Struggle and Contrasts*, for which I collected material while in Halychyna' (Yefremov 2011: 519).

Work in the *Kievskaia starina* took more and more time from S. Yefremov, and he was gradually forced to abandon active cooperation with Lviv publications, in particular the *Literaturno-naukovyi visnyk*, as stated in the memoirs: 'The work in *Kievskaia starina*, which took up the time I had left for publishing and public affairs, drove me away from more active cooperation in the *Literaturno-naukovyi visnyk*, to which I had a weakness, because it was my first truly literary arena' (Yefremov 2011: 520).

Censorship restrictions on Halychyna publications also contributed to the fact that the author of the memoirs paid more attention to publications in *Kievskaia starina*, avoiding the hassle of sending materials to Lviv. In addition, due to the difficulties of getting such publications into the sub-Russian Ukraine, their relevance was significantly lost:

> During the same time of rest, in 1905 I wrote reviews for *Kievskaia starina* under the title *Notes on*

> *current topics*. Such reviews, which would cover the events of current life from the Ukrainian position, have long tempted me, but the censorship was so strict that it was impossible to think about it. At least, this should be said about *Kievskaia starina*; in *Literaturno-naukovyi visnyk* they were less useful because even then the censors did not allow it to us, and there was a lot of trouble with sending urgent articles abroad, and they were systematically late (Yefremov 2011: 520–21).

S. Yefremov's memoirs reveal his work as a publisher and one of the organizers of the publishing house 'Vik', which functioned in the late 90s of the XIX century – early XX century. While studying at the Kyiv Theological Seminary, S. Yefremov realized that educational activities occupy an important place in the awakening of the national consciousness of the Ukrainian people, and for this purpose it is necessary to provide them with cheap books in their native language:

> The seminary community prioritised the publication of books for the people, because in our educational activities in the village we felt a terrible lack of Ukrainian books. Some even tried to do something, for example, Skochkovskii published a book, *Whose Work is Harder* (in Kyiv, 1891) at public expense, and came to an understanding with such publishers as Nagolkin, Homolynskii, etc. Especially these publishing plans were revived when Ol[eksandr] I[vanovych] Lototskii[8] appeared in Kyiv with his fascination for books and energy. On the other hand, B. Hrynchenko's publishing initiative in Chernyhiv showed us that even in the crazy times of censorship terror, something can still be done (Yefremov 2011: 384).

The memoirs of S. Yefremov convey unique descriptions of the beginning of the publishing house. The author lists in detail the participants of the meeting at which it was decided to create the publishing house. He mentions their names, accompanying some of them with concise

[8] Here the patronymic of Lototskii is mistakenly written. It is Hnatovych, S. Yefremov wrote Ihnatovych.

portrait characteristics: 'In addition to the host, a slim young man Domanytskii, then a freshman, Lototskii and me, I remember the brothers Pylynskii, Denys and Kostia, and the bearded figure of Ol[eksandr] S[erhiiovych] Hrushevskii, also a freshman, in the window' (Yefremov 2011: 385). O. Hrushevskii, recalled S. Yefremov, 'attracted our attention as the brother of our hope and pride Mykhailo Serhiiovych, whom only a year before we had sent to Lviv and often corresponded with him, receiving all kinds of orders and orders of literary and scientific content' (Yefremov 2011: 385). The author of the memoirs did not forget about O. Konyskii, who was not physically present at the meeting, but 'was invisibly present, [...] whom we considered our honorary member and collaborator: after reaching an understanding with him, we began our work' (Yefremov 2011: 385). According to S. Yefremov, during the meeting they made quite a specific decision: it was instructed to rewrite and submit to the censorship office the manuscripts of the classics and to create brochures of popular scientific content. It was also decided to publish the first book. It was a work by the initiator of the publishing house O. Konyskii, *At a close woman*: 'It seems to have already had censorship permission' (Yefremov 2011: 385). Highly appreciating the role of V. Domanytskii in the process of establishing the publishing house at the beginning of its activity, S. Yefremov emphasizes the difficult working conditions, as the formation of the publishing house was too slow, during the first years of its existence 'three or four brochures were published, and even then they did not know what to do with them' (Yefremov 2011: 386). Especially valuable is the information in the memoirs of people who were involved in the work of the publishing house:

> The publishing house, initially, in the first period of its existence, had no name and it began to work quite energetically. We gathered every week, it seems ... mostly at Domanytskii's (a room with a separate passage from Kuznechna Street or on the mezzanine) and at Dm[ytro] ('Fly') Antonovych, who was soon drawn to our society by Domanytskii; sometimes at Konyskii's. In general, we had a lot of people, mostly students who were comrades of Domanytskii: I remember Ol. Rahozinskii, Davydov,

> Prymachenko, O. Havrysh, once or twice even V. Chahovets was there in a healthy smush hat. But this audience was somehow too fluid, casual and did not stick together for a long time: having taken a job and not done it, a man soon left and disappeared; so disappeared, for example, Chahovets, who promised a lot, but found himself in a year or two among the Russian-patriotic company. When the two Pylynskiis left Kyiv, only Lototskii, Domanytskii and I remained the permanent and unchanged employees of the publishing house, until later a sincere and inseparable group of employees was formed. But that formation was already later, in 1898–99, when the second period of work began, already with the company 'Vik' (Yefremov 2011: 386).

Some of the students involved in the activities of the publishing house turned out to be casual. Having failed to cope with their obligations, they gradually withdrew from the activity, and sometimes turned to the opposite side. S. Yefremov mentioned in this regard the name of a student of Kyiv University, V. Chahovets, who later found himself on the side of the Russian Black Hundreds. Later, in the diary of the 20s, he appeared as an active Bolshevik.

'Vik' became a literary refuge for S. Yefremov. In addition, there were his friends nearby, whose positions were similar in many ways: 'Lototskii and Domanytskii were already connected with us not only by similarities in views and plans, but also by those personal sympathies that bind the strongest and, over time, grow stronger and turn into a friendly attachment, into a deep friendship' (Yefremov 2011: 444). They often thought about the future of their publishing house:

> With all the changes in our publishing circle, the three of us remained unchanged and often, meeting somewhere at O. Y. Konyskii's or Lototskii's, he had already graduated from the academy and served or was serving in the Control Chamber, dreamed of how to expand our publishing house… I remember with what joy, and at the same time with envy, we published the brochure *About how to invent a car. About Yurko*

> *Stephenson*. About Yurko Stephenson in Ukrainian! Well, if it is possible to talk about Yurko Stephenson, then why is it not possible to talk about Dante, Gutenberg and all the luminaries of humanity, and about all the things that humanity lives by and to which we so much wanted to involve our Ukrainian people? (Yefremov 2011: 444–45).

S. Yefremov's memoirs acknowledge Fedir Pavlovych Matushevskii, a future Ukrainian journalist, lawyer, politician, diplomat, and then a teacher from Cherkasy, whom the author of the memoirs met during a party in Kyiv dedicated to M. Hrushevskii's farewell to Lviv. This acquaintance helped S. Yefremov and his friends in the work of the publishing house:

> During one of his visits, Fedir Pavlovych informed us that there is a printer in Cherkasy, his teacher friend, V. Kolodochka, who is looking for a printing job and can even give unlimited credit. And as our publishing finances were too small, we decided to use a printer from Cherkasy. Naturally, Fedir Pavlovych became our intermediary, assistant and proofreader in Cherkasy and thus became a member of our publishing circle long before he settled in Kyiv (in Cherkasy were printed 5 [...] national publications of 'Vik'), and then joined it immediately as a tried and close employee. This was helped by his extremely good, cordial, gentle nature, which in many ways resembled the nature of Vasyl' Domanytskii, but without his shyness. In the person of Matushevskii 'our regiment received' good comrades and friends, connected ideologically and personally (Yefremov 2011: 393–94).

A significant breakthrough in the work of the publishing house occurred in 1897. It was at that time that the idea to create an anthology of Ukrainian poetry spanning 100 years appeared. S. Yefremov recalled:

> The idea of this publication, as far as I remember, belongs to O. Y. Konyskii. In 1897, believing that the next year would be the 100th anniversary of the first edition of Kotliarev-

> skii's *Aeneid*, he once suggested that we start compiling a collection of Ukrainian poetry spanning 100 years. As a model, he searched for and extracted, compiled and censored his old textbook *Pashnytsia*, from the '70s, with samples of poems and biographies of authors (Yefremov 2011: 446).

S. Yefremov and his friends analyzed the manuscript of *Pashnytsia* and saw that it was quite outdated at that time, but they liked the idea of publishing an anthology. Together they developed a plan for the publication, selected the authors, each of them was instructed to read the poets assigned to them, choose the best works, weighing the possibility of their passing through censorship. It was decided to add to the poems some brief information from the biographies of the authors. Since there was a lot of work and little time, it was decided to involve a few more people. S. Yefremov, in this regard, mentions the name of V. Bachynskii, a graduate of the Kyiv Theological Seminary, who then served in the Control Chamber. In his memoirs, the author noted:

> For a whole year we worked, gathering weekly, or even more often, to discuss individual verses. Everyone brought what they had chosen during the week to the meeting, and then we re-read them together and finally decided whether to accept or reject them. We gathered at Konyskii's place, and when he went to Crimea for the winter, at Lototskii's or Bachynskii's place (Yefremov 2011: 446).

The work on the anthology brought the team of authors together. Meetings to discuss the materials were the best rest for S. Yefremov and his friends. It was a reward for selfless work. The memoirs reveal the technology of work on the book, attempts to bypass censorship, the chosen artistic principle of presentation of the material and its violation:

> No matter how hard we tried to clean and iron out all the obscene things, the very idea of such a collection was, as for those times, quite obscene; no matter how we hid with it, the needle came out of the bag, especially since we could not avoid some spe-

> cific temptations of our time. Thus, when choosing authors and their works for the collection, we generally set ourselves an artistic principle (Yefremov 2011: 447).

In fact, the anthology not only provided samples of Ukrainian poems for the whole century, but it was also a kind of textbook or even a textbook which, at that time, could be in the history of Ukrainian literature. The final work to prepare the book for printing was entrusted to S. Yefremov:

> I gave the manuscript to rewrite to seminarians-citizens who helped the publishing house with rewriting manuscripts for free, took it to be bound, alone, without consulting anyone, because the members of the circle were away for the Christmas holidays, gave it the title *Vik* and with a broken heart sent it to the St. Petersburg censorship in late December 1898 (Yefremov 2011: 447).

Three months later, the news was received from St. Petersburg that the publication of the book *Vik* had been authorized. Then came the idea to add to the text an appendix, which was mainly worked on by O. Lototskii. The manuscript of the appendix was sent to St. Petersburg about a month later. While the appendix was being considered in the capital, the members of the publishing house team were engaged in technical work, since they had never had to prepare a solid book, large in volume, for publication.

The memoirs honestly recreate the financial difficulties faced by the publishing team. All improvements required funds, and, of course, considerable ones. The Council of the Ukrainian Organization, of which Lototskii was a member, helped with two hundred karbovanets. Everyone understood perfectly well that this money was not enough. When Lototskii showed S. Yefremov and other elders the agreement with the printer S. Kulzhenko for the amount of thousands of rubles, everyone was scared:

> It occurred to us then to issue notices for the first time, as far as I know, … in the Ukrainian publishing business, and to notify, also for the first time, on the 'Vik', and together with the story Levytskii's *Old World Fathers and Moth-*

> *ers*, which was allowed to be printed. We hoped to collect another two or three hundred in this way, and the rest we relied on the grace of God and Cooper's philosophy 'somehow it will be'. With these thoughts in mind, we wrote notices and sent them by the hundreds to the addresses from the 'catalogue of Ukrainians' and the Charitable Society's newsletter, and to those who gathered in our public bookstore, and to the members and communities of the organization. Several information notes were also sent to newspapers. The results were beyond anything we had imagined in our wildest dreams. Subscriptions, to our surprise, went very well, both members of the organization and people completely unknown to us signed up and sent money. Even those 'elephant' (4 karb.!) copies, which we never expected to buy, were bought. We had to increase the number of copies from 1200 to 1600, and half of them have already been provided by subscription. We raised so much money that we were able to pay for the publication of both *Vik* and Levytskii's story (Yefremov 2011: 449–50).

The success that came after the release of the poetry collection *Vik* made the members of the publishing circle think about the second, improved edition. And since there were free material resources, S. Yefremov and his friends decided to make *Vik* the first volume of the anthology, where the second and third volumes would be devoted to Ukrainian prose, and the fourth to drama (although the last volume was never published). Their plans did not end there, they decided to publish a series of works by Ukrainian writers, 'Ukrainian Library'.

The death of the experienced advisor O. Konyskii, O. Lototskii's move to St. Petersburg and F. Matushevskii's move to Dorpat, at first glance, significantly weakened the group of publishing house employees. However, the funeral of O. Konyskii, which S. Yefremov considers 'the first public manifestation of national content in Kyiv' (Yefremov 2011: 456), led to the fact that in the autumn of 1900 the publishing circle significantly replenished its losses and had more than a dozen active employees. The

memoirist names them: G. Berlo, Y. Shulhyn, Ol. Hrushevskii, M. Oppokov, M. Pavlovskii, M. Strashkevych, V. Prokopovych, Y. Kvasnytskii.

In autumn 1900 S. Yefremov and his friends began to collect material for the prose *Vik*. The author of memoirs remembered that O. Konyskii shortly before his death managed to write a biography of Yu. Fedkovych for this purpose. S. Yefremov received a scrapbook from the old writer, which contained the text of the biography of the Bukovynian. This red scroll was used by the centuries for biographies of other writers. The methodology of forming the two-volume book remained the same as it was tested when creating the volume of poetry: first, they made a list of authors, divided among themselves and chose texts that would be suitable for the *Vik*, and then re-read them together. Much of this work fell on the author of the memoirs, he also got all the editorial work. The same members of staff compiled the first of a series of periodical collections, which later appeared in a censored form, dedicated to the memory of O. Konyskii. However, as S. Yefremov admitted in his memoirs, 'still the most attention was attracted and the most work was required by *Vik*. And it caused us a lot of trouble and again raised passions in literary and Ukrainian circles in general. Especially much indignation was caused by the incident with the non-placement of our modernists with Kobylyanska at the head in *Vik*' (Yefremov 2011: 456).

The *Vik* was prepared in the first half of 1901. It consisted of three large binders and was sent to St. Petersburg to O. Lototskii, who was already working in the Russian capital at that time. The latter submitted the three-volume manuscript for censorship. At that time, the centenarians already had considerable experience of working with this institution. Their experience with censors had taught them something. They knew that thicker manuscripts had a better chance of passing censorship,

> and so we deliberately added all sorts of junk, which we then threw away before printing. The story of *Vik* was actually interesting from a censorship point of view. Censor Tuchynskii, seeing the terrible folios and examining them superficially, said to Lototskii: 'I wonder why and for whom you have to print this nonsense' and allowed this 'nonsense'.

> Then, when he saw that 'nonsense' published, he had to change his mind and admit that he had missed something that should not have been allowed (Yefremov 2011: 457).

S. Yefremov in his memoirs noted:

> All three volumes of *Vik* sold very well both by subscription and on sale and brought us our own material basis for the publishing house. Everything that came out next was paid for by the profits generated by *Vik*, and the years 1901-1905 can be considered the apogee of our publishing house (Yefremov 2011: 458).

The events of 1905 in the Russian Empire gave hope to the Ukrainian intelligentsia for the appearance of the native word in newspapers and magazines in the Dnipro region of Ukraine, because before that it practically did not exist in the press. S. Yefremov noted in his memoirs that at first one of the options was journalism in Ukrainian. The author of memoirs recalled with great pride his first journalistic work in his native language, which was published on the pages of *Kyivski Otklyky*. S. Yefremov was proud that 'an issue of a newspaper with a Ukrainian article was paid for 5 karb. each, a price unheard of then' (Yefremov 2011: 607). This publication of the author's memoirs had a powerful public response not only in the Dnipro region of Ukraine, but also abroad: 'F. P. Matushevskii, who was in Lviv, said on his arrival what an impression this first Ukrainian word made abroad: he read it loudly in the Scientific Society in front of a group of casual listeners of Franko, saying everything: "So that's how they write now in Russia!"' (Yefremov 2011: 607). After this publication, several more articles were published in Ukrainian. However, S. Yefremov considered all these facts as local and accidental. He and many other conscious Ukrainians faced an urgent task: 'Not to go to the neighbors, but to lay the foundations for our own house' (Yefremov 2011: 607).

At a meeting at Ye. Chykalenko's house, they decided to found a newspaper, the publisher of which should be he himself. The assistants were V. Symyrenko and V. Leontovych, who had leverage over V. Symyrenko, who was his uncle. The memoirist noted: 'We all agreed that we should publish a newspaper.

There were thoughts about a weekly and a daily' (Yefremov 2011: 608). S. Yefremov was entrusted with the task of becoming the future editor of the newspaper, and for this purpose it was necessary to draw up an estimate of the newspaper, come up with its name, select employees, and solve many different economic problems. The author of the memoirs himself admits that 'technically, I was not very familiar with the newspaper business at that time, because I only occasionally wrote in newspapers, but I had never been closer to the business' (Yefremov 2011: 609). He had to visit the editorial office of *Kyivske Slovo*[9] to get acquainted with the work of the editorial staff, office and printing house. The consequences of these trips were repeatedly discussed at meetings. There was a problem with the name of the new edition. After analyzing several variants of the name, we decided on *Hromadske Slovo*.

S. Yefremov recalled that his heart was not in the newspaper, he did not want to be its editor. After long discussions, the following was decided:

> Editor was Matushevskii, secretary was Kozlovskii, who seemed to us a model of accuracy, daily staff were Hrynchenko, Levytskii, Chykalenko, Slavynskii and me were for introductory political, literary articles, etc. V. Yaroshevskii was for reviews of foreign life; V. Samoilenko was for a feuilleton on the evil of the day; M. M. Hrynchenko was to submit factual material, news from newspapers; M. Vynohradova was hired as a translator of telegrams' (Yefremov 2011: 609–10).

F. Matushevskii was a well-known journalist. S. Yefremov knew him from his joint work at the publishing house 'Vik' and *Kievskaia starina*. The first Ukrainian newspaper 'was to be printed in the printing house of S. Borysov, my old colleague at "Vik"' (Yefremov 2011: 610). Immediately after returning from Lviv F. Matushevskii quickly set to work. A room was rented for the newspaper and journal at 7, Mykhailivska Street, and 'appointed people began to arrange it' (Yefremov 2011: 610). On behalf of the community, S. Yefremov wrote the program of both publications.

[9] Russian-language daily newspaper, published from 1886 to 1905 in Kyiv.

On November 12 1905, the 'Temporary Rules on the Press' appeared, which significantly strengthened the position of censorship in tsarist Russia. S. Yefremov immediately remembered the prophecy of censor Sidorov, who said: 'You will regret the previous state censorship' (Yefremov 2011: 611). However, the necessary documents for permission to publish *Hromadska Dumka*[10] and *Nove zhyttia* were immediately submitted to the governor. However, the permission was not granted. The reason for the refusal was a paragraph of the temporary rules, which allowed banning publications that called for a change in the existing order in the state. When S. Yefremov spoke with censor Sidorov about the grounds for refusal, he said: 'Yes, you see that your language itself is somehow rebellious, revolutionary. Well, in Russian is "struggle" [...], "struggle" for yourself, and that's it. And you have "bo-rot-ba"! As you wish, but it sounds too revolutionary! It's ugly, no, whatever you want to say, but it sounds ugly...' (Yefremov 2011: 612).

The request for permission to publish the newspaper and magazine had to be submitted for the second time, and V. Leontovych was named as the publisher, and the names of the publications were slightly changed: *Hromadska Dumka* and *New Hromada*. Taking advantage of the invitation of his old friend O. Lototskii, S. Yefremov came to St. Petersburg at the end of November 1905, using this opportunity to obtain permission for Ukrainian publications: 'The political "spring" with its sweet words and promises gave some hope that eventually a Ukrainian periodical could be published' (Yefremov 2011: 559).

S. Yefremov's memoirs reveal his steps aimed at achieving permission for Ukrainian publications: 'Now upon my arrival, I went to the Ministry of the Interior and made an appointment to see the Minister of Books (Sviatopolk-Mirskii) to submit to him a request to authorize the publication of a Ukrainian periodical' (Yefremov 2011: 560). Then the memoirist recalls his conversation with the all-powerful Minister, trying to convey all the details of the dialogue as accurately as possible:

[10] The first daily Ukrainian socio-political, cultural and educational newspaper. It was published in Kyiv from the end of December 31, 1905 to August 18, 1906, closed by the authorities after a gendarme search.

> 'How can I serve you?' I heard the stereotypical question.
> – I appeal to you, Your Excellency, with a request to allow the publication of the magazine in Ukrainian, – I said briefly.
> He looked at me, apparently surprised.
> – But the law prohibits it, – he said quietly, as if hesitating.
> – No, – I said, – there is no such law and there never was. There were administrative bans and it is entirely up to you, Your Excellency, to cancel them.
> – Well, okay… – the minister hesitated again – I'll talk… I'll consult with the Head of the Cabinet Office press and then I'll give you an answer. You have a request in writing?
> I gave him a special request with the program of the journal and all the documents required by the censorship office, and I realized that the audience had finished. When I returned home, I recorded this conversation (Yefremov 2011: 561).

S. Yefremov concluded from the audience that the Minister did not understand anything about the Ukrainian issue. However, it is unknown whether the results of the conversation with the Minister and other high-ranking officials gave a positive result or not, but shortly before the New Year V. Leontovych managed to get permission to publish a newspaper and journal. The first issue of the newspaper was scheduled for December 31 1905. It had to be edited by a group, articles were read aloud, polishing various technical details. The preparation of the Ukrainian-language newspaper was perceived by the team as a holiday: '[…] the first issue was interesting, informative' (Yefremov 2011: 613). S. Yefremov received the corrected proofs of the newspaper, he wanted 'to correct the articles himself before the publication of the first issue' (Yefremov 2011: 613), which he did, and 'indeed the first issue of *Hromadska Dumka* was published on December 31' (Yefremov 2011: 613), but without S. Yefremov. On December 29, 1905 he was arrested.

Hromadska Dumka, for the publication of which was directly involved S. Yefremov, became the first daily Ukrainian-language newspaper, which was published in Kyiv from December 31 1905 to August 18 1906. After another gendarme search, the authorities banned it. The successor of

Hromadska Dumka was the newspaper *Rada*, which was published in Kyiv from 1906 to 1914. Its editor was the same F. Matushevskii. While S. Yefremov was in prison, it was possible to establish the publication of the literary and scientific monthly *Nova Hromada*. It was published in Kyiv during 1906 (12 issues in total). Among the editors, along with V. Leontovych and Ye. Chykalenko, was the name of S. Yefremov.

S. Yefremov's memoirs reveal his vision of the development of Ukrainian in tsarist Russia at the turn of the XIX–XX centuries. The considered episodes of the author's work in the journal *Kievskaia starina*, publishing house 'Vik', creation of the first Ukrainian-language newspaper *Hromadska Dumka* are the stages of the struggle of the Ukrainian intelligentsia and the memoirist himself for the right of the Ukrainian people to their own language in periodicals and book publishing. Autobiographical moments of memoirs are vividly combined with episodes that reflect generalized pictures of the struggle of Ukrainians for their right to education and culture in their native language. Objective and subjective are organically intertwined in the author's narrative. The memoirs reveal the figures of several comrades whose Ukrainian-centric views helped S. Yefremov in the struggle for the future independent Ukraine.

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Artem Halych

More Subjectivity, More Frankness: Portraits in Ukrainian Autobiographical Texts Stored in Archives

This article is dedicated to the study of the peculiarities of literary portraiture in the hitherto unpublished autobiographical texts of Ukrainian writers of the twentieth century, which are stored in the Department of Manuscripts and Textology of the Taras Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Kyiv, Ukraine). Under study are the diaries of Varvara Cherednychenko and Mykhailo Ivchenko. These works contain numerous portrait sketches of Ukrainian and foreign writers of the time, as well as of relatives, friends, colleagues and casual acquaintances of the autobiographers. The peculiarities of literary portraiture in the diaries of Cherednychekno and Ivchenko largely depended on the chosen genre of the autobiographical work and the individual style of the autobiographer. Cherednychenko turned out to be a master of frank, detailed and literary portraits. She wrote literary portraits of almost all the people with whom she met. By contrast, Ivchenko created mostly laconic deconcentrated literary portraits of people he knew personally.

The etymology of the word 'portrait' dates back to ancient times. The word 'portrait', originally denoting a pictorial reproduction of a certain object, existed in the culture of many European nations. Scholars have long noticed that portraiture is an important artistic means of reproducing reality in fiction. It has a special role in the palette of images used by the writer. In a literary work, a portrait can never have its own smile, completely different from the hero's fate. Unlike the Cheshire cat of the English writer L. Carroll (*Alice in Wonderland*), which could be 'separated' from its own smile, every portrait detail of the hero (eye expression, hairstyle, facial expressions, gestures, gait, smile, etc.) is always intertwined with their inner world. The portrait is a source of many detailed observations directly related to the specifics of the study of the creative process.

The art of portraiture originated in ancient times in the works of sculptors: 'Already in ancient Egypt, sculptors, without delving into the inner world of man, created a fairly accurate likeness

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of his appearance. Idealized, as if involved in the beautiful world of gods and mythical heroes, the images of poets, philosophers, public figures were widespread in the plastics of Ancient Greece. Ancient Roman sculptural portraits were characterized by striking truthfulness and at the same time rigid determination of psychological characteristics' (Platonova et al. 1983: 281).

Aristotle wrote about the peculiarity of portraiture in literary works in his famous work *Poetics*: 'poets should emulate good portrait painters, who render personal appearance and produce likenesses, yet enhance people's beauty' (Aristotle 1998: 1082).

However, portraiture as a genre of art was absent in ancient times. G. Pocheptsov, referring to the Canadian scientist M. McLuhan, noted that people who get used to change language linearly, begin to decompose their own social life in the same way (Pocheptsov 2012: 10). McLuhan explains the lack of portraits in ancient times by the underdeveloped visuality of the Greeks (Pocheptsov 2012: 10–11). Although, as S. Averintsev emphasized, one of the types of ancient biography provided 'the most recent information about the origin of the hero, about his physique and health, virtues and vices, likes and dislikes, private tastes and habits, with possible brevity about the history of life, more detailed about the kind of death' (Averintsev 2004: 334) – that is, the origin of portraiture can be traced to the Ancient Greeks. When, instead of oral civilization, a visual one came, portraiture became possible (Pocheptsov 2012: 10–11).

The famous Polish literary critic J. Faryno believed that the portrait is only a small part of a larger whole. It is 'narrowly historical', because for centuries 'European literature managed perfectly well without it although the human being as such was constantly present in it, but his appearance in the modern sense did not attract its attention, was not considered worthy of depiction, or was built on completely different principles that ignored both the private appearance of a person and the visual perception of a person' (Faryno 2004: 166).

The medieval French scientist Villard de Honnecourt, who lived in the thirteenth century, tried to introduce his own term for portraiture: counterfeit (from the Latin *contrafacere*, 'to imitate'), but in his understanding this word referred not only to the image of a person, but also to animals. In the seventeenth century, a compatriot of Villard

de Honnecourt, the artist Abraham Bosse, used the word 'portraiture' as referring to both paintings and engravings.

In the Renaissance, it was in the portrait that artists sought to reproduce the beauty and perfection of man. Later sentimentalists began to give preference in portrait characteristics to the psychological portrait hero. 'In the Romantics, the portrait is vivid, a relief, as if speaking about the contrast between the hero and his environment (for example, Esmeralda in *Notre Dame de Paris* by V. Hugo) or about the contrast between appearance and spiritual essence (in the same novel, Quasimodo's external deformity is combined with his nobility, and the beautiful Phoebus is an empty person)' (Borev 2003: 307).

Romanticism first raised the question of portraiture as an artistic technique that would combine the richness of the hero's inner world with his relationship with surrounding reality. Realism begins with attempts to create a psychological portrait. 'Realistic portrait is detailed, includes description of costume, manner of behaviour, characterizes not only the "nature" of the hero, but also his belonging to a certain social environment' (Borev 2003: 307).

The term 'portrait' for the reproduction of the human personality was first used by the French scientist of the seventeenth century André Félibien. The famous German scientist J. Winckelmann, who lived in the next century, noted that the approaches to portraiture discovered in ancient times were valid in his time, because of '...the custom of conveying the likeness of people and at the same time decorating them' (Winckelmann 1935: 95). This was valid both in ancient Greece and in later times – to imitate beauty in nature is to direct it to a particular object or a whole series of objects: 'In the first case, a similar copy, a portrait, is obtained [...]. The second way leads to generalized beauty and its ideal representation – this is the way chosen by the Greeks' (Winckelmann 1935: 98–99). The first way is suitable for documentary creativity, the second is for artistic creativity. Another German scholar, a contemporary of J. Winckelmann, G. E. Lessing focused on portrait characteristics in literary works. He agreed with Aristotle, who demanded idealization in portrait art, but he believed that idealization should nevertheless preserve the hero's external traits. Thus, in the well-known work of G. E. Lessing *Laocoön, or On the Limits of Paint-*

ing and Poetry there are fragments devoted to the peculiarities of portraiture in the famous Greek dilogy of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (Lessing 1957: 289–90). For example, the German scholar notes that instead of describing the clothes of King Agamemnon, Homer describes in detail the process of his hero getting dressed; similarly, to depict the shield of Achilles, the author reproduces the process of how it was made.

Another way of portraiture, to which Homer refers, is to reproduce the influence of the hero's appearance on other characters. To give an example, in the *Iliad* there is no portrait of Helen, whose unsurpassed beauty was allegedly the cause of the Trojan War (Homer writes about her attractive face, white hands and beautiful hair in separate sections). The poet instead convincingly shows how Helen's beauty influences the Trojan elite. The Trojan leaders, contemplating her beauty, conclude that this woman is equal to the goddesses.

By the time of Romanticism, idealizing portraits became widespread in literature. They were especially often used in 'high' literary genres and marked by the presence of a significant number of epithets, metaphors, and comparisons.

Individualized and typified portraits of the hero in world literature existed also in romantic and realistic art of the late eighteenth – early nineteenth centuries. However, even before that, prominent writers produced works that featured elements of portraits. A striking example of this is the *Sonnet 130* by W. Shakespeare.

In Ukrainian literary studies, the term 'portrait' was actively used by Ivan Franko. According to the authors of the *Dictionary of Literary Terms by Ivan Franko*, in his understanding 'portrait is the appearance of a person in a literary work, in a broader sense an image' (Pinchuk et al. 1966: 192).

V. Khalizev stated: 'Over time (most clearly in the nineteenth century), portraits that revealed the complexity and multidimensionality of the characters' appearance dominated the literature. Here, the painting of appearance is often combined with the writer's penetration into the character's soul and psychological analysis' (Khalizev 2002: 219).

K. Sizova, starting from the position of M. Moklytsia, draws attention to the peculiarities of portraiture in modernism. In this direction, 'the function of the portrait has changed again: the characters approach the author, they either have a general-

ized portrait or no portrait at all, and the secondary characters, not endowed with a detailed psychology, have a detailed, characteristic appearance' (Sizova 2010: 19).

Semiotics allow us to draw a clear distinction between documentary and fictional portraits. In a fictional portrait, the denotate (hero) has a name that is a product of the author's imagination, which does not correlate with any name of the real hero. This name is designed for multiplicity of reception. The meaning of the portrait, which is formed from a detailed description of the hero's appearance and the disclosure of his inner world, is also based on multiple perceptions, as it is entirely a product of the author's imagination. Every stroke of the hero's portrait is executed by the writer in accordance with their own ideas, aesthetic beliefs, level of artistic skill, mood at the time of the creative act and other factors. The same applies to the meaning of such a description. The author has the right to emphasize any component of the portrait characteristics, as long as such emphasis corresponds to their subjective vision of the personality they have modelled.

The author reveals the peculiarities of the reproduction of eyes and gaze, facial features, hair colour, hairstyle, posture, gestures, facial expressions, gait, costume, etc. in memoirs and literary biography. Writers often pay attention to these components of the portrait characteristics of real characters, because their reproduction helps to comprehend the corporeality, preferences, aspirations, and inner world of individuals. In memoirs, this is facilitated by memory, which can significantly expand the author's knowledge about a particular person.

However, the history of literary studies shows that portraits in documentary texts barely attracted any attention from researchers. In addition, there are no scholarly works that would consider the portrait in unpublished works by Ukrainian writers, which are stored in archives. The archives of Ukraine contain dozens of different genres of documentary works that have not yet become the object of attention of scholars. In particular, the Department of Manuscript Collections and Textology of the Taras Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine keeps diaries of M. Ivchenko, V. Polishchuk, V. Cherednychenko; memoirs by S. Vasyl'chenko; autobiographical texts by V. Polishchuk and Z. Tulub. In each of these works

an important place is taken by portrait sketches of real historical figures. The specificity of portraiture in them is often determined by the genre of the work and the creative personality of the author, as well as features of their individual style.

Let us first turn to the diaries of Varvara Cherednychenko, which are unpublished, apart from a fragment of her 1937 diary, published by O. Halych in the journal *Kyiv* (Halych 1993: 106–10). The diaries, which are general notebooks in 20 different formats, which the Ukrainian writer kept over a period of 25 years (from 1924 until her death in 1949), contain many portraits of real historical figures, among them a significant number of Ukrainian, Russian, Caucasian (the writer lived in South Ossetia for 10 years) and non-Soviet writers.

When considering the diaries of Cherednychenko, one should take into account the specifics of this genre. The author keeps regular records about the events she witnessed or participated in. While she prefers concentrated portraits of her contemporaries, she does not exclude the possibility of creating deconcentrated portraits. Here we should note another genre feature of the diaries by Cherednychenko, about which she wrote on May 9, 1941, comparing her notes with the diary of Taras Shevchenko: 'I remembered Shevchenko's diary. He wrote it for his friends. This focus will keep the author away from the unnecessary trifles of everyday life. And everyone, like me, writes "for themselves", and it still turns out to be not quite sincere…' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 188. 38). Therefore, Cherednychenko wrote the diary for herself. This means that she did not avoid trifles or frank and subjective assessments of the people mentioned in her diaries. All this is reflected in the portrait characteristics of the individuals mentioned in her notes. Moreover, the entries often appear unedited; they contain grammar mistakes and some violations of logic, there are no punctuation marks, and some phrases are unfinished. This is also a specificity of the diary genre.

Cherednychenko's early portrait characteristics are dominated by gender stereotypes where women are evaluated negatively at a subconscious level. Their behaviour and inner world evoke disgust, although outwardly it seems that there is nothing negative in the description of their appearance. An example of such portrait characteristics is the reproduction of the appearance of

the famous Ukrainian writer N. Zabila:

> 26/29 – XI [1924].
> Poor Natalia Zabila. Beautiful. 22 years old. Had more than 20 husbands. She joined the Komsomol after poisoning herself at the age of 17. She was expelled from the party for 'disorderly conduct'. Wife of postgraduate historian S. Bozhko. Has a 1-year-old son. Now she is pregnant by O. Kopylenko. His wife is pregnant as well (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 177. 7).

There are almost no physical features in this description, except that her name and surname are given, as well as her age (22 years); also, the author calls her 'beautiful'. Everything else complements the portrait of Zabila in terms of morality, frivolity and promiscuity.

The portrait characteristics of Ukrainian women writers with whom Cherednychenko maintained friendly relations are no better. The record of December 25, 1925 testifies to friendly relations with V. Polishchuk's family:

> Valerian Polishchuk came with his wife and little Mark… They all climbed on the couch. Valerian is cheerful, vigorous, brought me his book… He says: 'Now that I have killed Tychyna and smashed the editorial board of the *Red Way*, I am the one who has nothing to print in my greedy journal except for the unfortunate *Evpatoriia*…' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 178. 38–39).

In this entry, it is important to mention the wife of the writer, who himself appears extremely ambitious and boastful. In the next entry, made on March 28, 1926, V. Cherednychenko reveals a portrait of Polishchuk's wife from a gender perspective:

> Iola Polishchuk with Mark. Valerian, not seeing me in the theatre, sent them to rest himself. What a female parasite. She does not even know the content of the *Red Stream* and is so primitive in her aspirations and desires and grossly untidy… Well, there is nothing to talk about with her. She goes to concerts, but does not know anything about what she has heard (Chered-

> nychenko: F. 95. fol. 178. 71).

Consciously or subconsciously, the portrait of Iola Polishchuk is entirely negative. Cherednychenko avoids depicting her appearance, but from the brief description we can see the inner world of Polishchuk's wife as an untidy, stupid bourgeois, whose spirituality is primitive and poor.

In the record of December 4, 1927, reflecting the events of a meeting between French writer H. Barbusse and leading Ukrainian writers at Kharkiv airport, Cherednychenko creates a concise portrait of the Ukrainian writer Kh. Alchevska, the main detail of which is the flushed but beautiful face of the latter. Her assessments of Barbusse testified to a certain infantilism in Alchevska:

> Next to me Kh. Alchevska was all excited. She blushed, her face became unbearably [illegible] beautiful and behave like a sixteen-year-old girl, she repeated everything to disgust: 'What an idealist Barbusse is! What an enthusiast he is!' (Cherednychenko: F. 95. fol. 184. 6).

A confirmation of Alchevska's admiration for Barbusse is in a quote from her memoirs: 'In the autumn of 1927, one fact greatly influenced the direction of my thoughts and my writings. [...] It was a French speech, *On the aims and directions of literature* delivered in the house of Blakytnyi. Henri Barbusse pronounced it' (Alchevska 2015: 42).

The portrait of Alchevska continues with an entry in Cherednychenko's diary dated December 20, 1927, which testifies to her doubts about Alchevska's intellectual development: 'Khrystia Alchevska was there. I can't make out whether she was naturally stupid or just stupid to the end... She shouts such things in the corridor and on the stairs, it is embarrassing' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 184. 43).

The portrait of Barbusse during the meeting at Kharkiv airport differs significantly from Cherednychenko's impression about the next day's meeting at a concert in his honour. At first, Barbusse seemed to her quite young:

> A round-red young face. With a suitcase in his hands... A young red-cheeked lady and him... A tall figure... The lines of his skeleton are guessed under the coat, and he has

> a tired face with reddened eyes, which was familiar from photographs… (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 184. 6).

And then, in the entry of December 5, 1927, she describes Barbusse, using several expressive details of his face and neck, described as old and exhausted, not at all similar to the impression he made on her the day before at the airport: 'An exhausted face… The neck is covered in senile wrinkles and veins…' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 184. 6).

Concentrated portraits in Cherednychenko's diaries are often laconic. The author sometimes indicates only one feature of somebody's appearance. Thus, the portrait of the academician Bahalii, except for the surname, has only one feature – he is losing weight: '23. V. [1926]. I saw the academician Bahalii in the Narzan gallery… He moved here from Essentuki. He is losing weight' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 179. p. not specified). Her portrait of M. Halych also contains only one feature, in addition to the surname – a feature not of appearance, but of character, namely hospitality: '23/III [1940]. I spent the night at Halych. To me, she is truly hospitable…' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 188. p. not specified).

The laconic portraits of I. Kulyk and Fel'dman, which Cherednychenko saw when she met them at the airport with H. Barbusse, have only three absolutely identical details related to their appearance. This creates a specific paired portrait with a touch of irony: 'Iv[an] Kulyk and Fel'dman are both in grey suits, the same height, with blond beards, walking back and forth… Natalia Zabila is flirting with O. Mykytenko…' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 184. 5). In passing, another feature is added to the portrait of Zabila. In the entry of August 13, 1937, Cherednychenko creates a laconic portrait of A. Holovko: 'I saw Andrii Holovko at the meeting. He lost weight, grew bald, and I did not recognize him' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 184. p. not specified). Here, in addition to the name and surname of the Ukrainian writer, two features of his appearance are mentioned (weight loss, baldness), as a result of which Cherednychenko did not recognize him. The record of June 23, 1939 reproduces a laconic portrait of V. Sosiura: 'Sosiura wanders, thoughtful with sparkling eyes… He escaped from the hated sanatorium. It seems that no one cares about him. The atmosphere here is in-

describably heavy. Sosiura suffocated in it, as the least protected in his personal life. What can I do for him' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 187. 6). Here Cherednychenko pays attention to only two features of appearance (thoughtful, with sparkling eyes). The verbs 'wandering' and 'escaped' outline the uncertainty of the poet's situation, who escaped from a sanatorium for the mentally ill, staying in which may have saved his life during the repressions. The writer cannot help him, because she is in a similar situation. Her husband, the Ossetian writer Ch. Begizov was shot as an 'enemy of the people', and she herself, having returned to Ukraine, could not find shelter.

Portrait sketches of casual acquaintances are very explicit. To give an example, here are the sketches of the patients of the sanatorium Khliborob, where the writer was treated in September 1929. From among 235–240 patients, the author of the diary chooses several characteristic types, as evidenced by the entry of September 20, 1929:

> Zaliznohirsk. I have been living in the sanatorium Khliborob for three weeks. 235–240 patients. Characteristic figures: Sofia Hryhorivna Veprintseva from Moscow, a woman who is 34 years old as written in the sanatorium book, but who knows how old she really is. The features of her body and face indicate a climacteric period in the life of a woman... She is being injected... (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 181. 38).
>
> Hanna Ivanivna Hladkovska. 42 years old with an amazing dry little figure. A lecturer at the Institute of Public Education in Luhansk. I recognize her by her graceful and young dressed legs, which are disharmonized by a white blouse and black tie (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 1841. 39).

Cherednychenko evaluates the age of the sanatorium's patients, drawing attention, in the first example, to the discrepancy between her appearance and the patient's real age, and in the second example to the outfit, which is clearly designed for younger women. Naming the profession of the woman and describing her costume, the writer focuses on the woman's inability to choose her wardrobe. In both examples, Cherednychenko dispassionately draws

portraits of women with surname, name and patronymic as a key. This is done professionally: the writer wants to capture the figures of the patients of the sanatorium through her attention to portrait details in order to possibly use them in her own creative activity. In this way they turn into social types for future tales or novels.

Cherednychenko's diaries are filled with entries containing ideas for her works of art and descriptions of her writing process. It is clear that they contain many portrait characteristics of future heroes. For example, shortly before the war, the writer was working on the tale *The Story of the Himalayan Cedar*. The diary contains detailed short portraits of the main characters of the work:

> Today I have to write Chapter I. The title remains the same: *The Story of the Himalayan Cedar*. The characters also remain the same:

1. Kharytyna Serhiivna Kolodii. A medium height, slim, well-built 35-year-old woman with grey-green eyes, black eyebrows and eyelashes, sharp and fine-toothed, with an upper lip... Her upper face is respectful as if sad, and the lower part is somehow boyishly desperate, cheerful... She dresses simply to the minimum: she has three outfits. 1) Black with pink sundress with a blouse. 2) A grey woollen skirt with two blouses and 3) A silk blue dress... A woollen grey knitted scarf and an old leather coat. Sandals, thick boots and expensive suede beige shoes to match the dress and the same bag. She brought with her poems of Ukrainian Soviet poets. She teaches physiology (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 188. 4–5).

2. Orest Pavlovich Vecher. Tall, bony with long arms and legs and a big head like a bulge. He has brown eyes with an armour shine, big witch's eyes. Black weak thinning hair, grey at the temples. Horn-rimmed glasses, a gold watch, these Soviet binoculars, a Leica camera, some kind of artistic cane with a handle and a large umbrella made of sailcloth for the beach. He has an outfit for every weather and changes it four times a day. Everything is elegant. 45 years old. Professor-

surgeon (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 188. 5).

3. Inna Vasylivna Dobriachko. 50 years old according to her passport, but looks the same age as Kolodii. Her face is not beautiful, it is as if made of liquid dough. Small, somehow oily dark eyes. Sparse eyebrows. A lot of gold and steel teeth in the mouth. But the body is beautiful, attractive, slender with graceful lines. She dresses simply, preciously and with great taste. The timbre of her voice is rich in various modulations and gives the words some deep sincerity. She is soft-spoken. She sings beautifully. An ethnographer-enthusiast by vocation, and by profession an accountant from Konotop industrial cooperation, she once said that she studied at the Smol'nyi Institute (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 188. 5).

Working on the story, Cherednychenko pays attention primarily to such components of her characters' portraits as age, profession, surname, name and patronymic. However, she puts special emphasis on elements of appearance such as eyes, eyebrows, eyelids, lips, costume, and shoes. In particular, Kolodii has a handbag, Professor Vecher is distinguished by black thinning hair that is grey at the temples. In addition, he has horn-rimmed glasses, a gold watch, binoculars, a Leica camera, a cane and a large umbrella. Dobriachko has gold and steel teeth in her mouth, as well as a rich timbre of voice; she sings.

Deconcentrated portraits, i.e. scattered fragments throughout the text, are much less common in Cherednychenko's diaries. However, such a portrait makes it possible to trace the evolution of the appearance and inner world of the person who is the object of portraiture. A striking example of such a portrait is the description of the appearance and an attempt to reveal the inner world of the outstanding Ukrainian poet P. Tychyna. The entries in Cherednychenko's diary show that she was in love with Tychyna in the 1920s and had an intimate relationship with him, but for unknown reasons, their relationship broke down at the end of the 1920s and the writer left Ukraine and stayed away for decades, moving to South Ossetia and marrying the writer Ch. Begizov.

The portrait of Tychyna's appearance in the diary can be

clearly traced back to 1927, when his relationship with Cherednychenko began to deteriorate (although in the subtext, the entries contain evidence not only of the present, but also of the past, predicting the future). In particular, on January 15, 1927, the writer notes: 'P. Tychyna. He did not take off his coat and a cap under his armpit and sat for about 2 hours' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 180. p. not specified). There are several attributes of a laconic portrait: the initial and surname of the character, the poet's clothes, the duration of the stay. The absence of punctuation marks in the sentence, which makes it somewhat illogical, is a trait of the diary genre, when a text that is not intended for publication in advance appears unedited by the author. In the entry of March 6 of the same year, Cherednychenko visits the poet at his home. She records a new laconic portrait of him, which partially complements the previous one: '[Tychyna] is wearing an overcoat. The bed is somehow covered. There are clothes on the chair. [...] He looks somewhere to the side and is silent...' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 180. 38). A look to the side, silence: these are already signs of Tychyna's break with Cherednychenko. Further, their meetings take place mainly in an official setting or by chance. Cherednychenko's eyes catch only some details of the poet's appearance. Thus, when meeting Barbusse at the airport in Kharkiv on October 4, 1927, Cherednychenko notes that 'Tychyna is wearing new black boots and a dirty linen blouse...' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 184. 5). On the one hand, the poet has new shoes, and on the other there is a dirty blouse.

On January 12, 1928, she accidentally met Tychyna in the dining room. Cherednychenko tried not to meet the poet's eyes, but secretly watched him, noting his attractive face, which testified to the feeling of love that still smouldered in the writer's soul: 'Tychyna was having lunch in the corner. Our eyes did not meet. He had a slightly pink colour from lunch or excitement, and his whole face was so pure and young...' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 184. 51). Their next chance meeting again took place in the dining room on March 3, 1928. The poet was wearing again a coat and a cap, and Cherednychenko once again notes the attractiveness of Tychyna's face:

> In the dining room [of Blakytnyi's house], when I was drinking tea after

> lunch, P. Tychyna came. He sat down at the next table and put his coat and hat on the chair next to it. This chair blocked my way… […] His face was fresh, calm and beautiful… Very handsome! (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 184. 68–69).

Then came a long break in meetings with P. Tychyna, as the writer was living in South Ossetia and visiting Ukraine only occasionally. In November 1934, she saw the poet at the theatre. Instead of a face Cherednychenko seemed to see a small insect, noting that she wanted to hear his voice:

> 26/XI [1934]. Tychyna was in the lodge… He has some kind of mascara on his face, is it his old manner of controlling his features or is it because he has become fat? I am afraid to talk to him, after listening to his works in his own reading, and I do not want to do it as a favour… (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 184. 161).

When Cherednychenko saw the poet again a few years later, it would seem to her that it was a completely different Tychyna, not the one she was in love with:

> 17/VII [1937]. […] A heavy, raw, Tychyna with swollen eyes impressed me even more with his appearance. […] I hurried to say goodbye to Tychyna. He stood up and solemnly shook my hand again, squeezed it and shook it again (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 186. p. not specified).

This laconic portrait significantly complements the previous ones. There is no longer any admiration for the poet's beauty, although somewhere in the subtext there are traces of her former admiration for him. This can be seen at least from the way Cherednychenko describes the moment when Tychyna solemnly shook her hand. After almost a ten-year break in their relationship, Tychyna tried to avoid meetings with Cherednychenko. The following entry complements the portrait description of the poet with a description of his shoulders and back: '29/ IX [1937]. Tychyna hid … I saw his shoulders, then his back. He is not sick. Apparently he is working' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 186. p. not specified). This is further and significantly complemented by a laconic por-

trait of Tychyna in the entry dated October 5, 1937, where the author of the diary focuses on the poet's eyes, highlighting their grey-blue colour, their fun, boyish joy: 'I have never seen such eyes in Tychyna. Gray-blue and as if overflowing with merriment, something good, some boyish joy' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 186. 6. p. not specified).

Cherednychenko saw again Tychyna at the celebrations on the occasion of his 50th birthday. The poet was touched by the greeting and shook hands with the writer. In the record of January 28, 1941 Cherednychenko provides a portrait of Tychyna's wife, who obviously knew about their past relationship, so she looked fiercely at the writer. Cherednychenko reproduces her portrait in negative connotations: important details include not only her look, but also the old-fashioned details of her outfit and her large, strong teeth:

> So when P. Tychyna and his wife were leaving the hall, and my place was near the wall at the end, I greeted him and congratulated him. He was touched and squeezed my hand tightly, and his wife looked at me fiercely, turned her head away and hurried to hide behind the door. Tychyna's wife was wearing an old-fashioned black dress with her lips heavily painted (they were up to her ears) and all the time showed her big strong teeth, and when the presidium and the audience applauded the poet, his wife also applauded (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 189. 9).

The portrait of Tychyna is replenished with new details in the record of August 30, 1942, written in Saratov, to where Cherednychenko had been evacuated. Tychyna was there at the time: 'Here comes Tychyna… With his belly, well-fed chin, all festively shining. He smiles at me kindly, as if we met in Kyiv, not having seen each other for several days…' (Cherednychenko: F. 95, fol. 190. 6. p. unnumbered). It can be seen that the love of a woman exhausted by illness and hardship during the war has already faded, so the description, instead that on the poet's beauty, focuses on such details as his belly. At the same time, this meeting was not unpleasant for Tychyna, as evidenced by the poet's friendly smile noted in the diary entry.

M. Ivchenko's diary of 1920 is much poorer than that of Cherednychenko when it comes

to descriptions of appearances. Family portraits prevail here. Particularly worth noting is a detailed portrait of the writer's mother-in-law, which not only contains a description of her appearance, but also reveals the poverty of her spiritual world:

> My mother-in-law, obviously, like any mother-in-law, is a small person, and a very small soul, and pretends at the same time to be both Napoleon and Joan of Arc, besides, by nature, a person bravely lying, boastful, and of great bourgeois ego.
> What experiments she performed on my soul.
> I personally lived in a separate corner, had no table, no place for books and papers. She somehow pushed me away from my family and my daughter. They kept me in the 'black body', always hungry. At the same time, the favourite part of the family ate dishes that only the bourgeois could eat at the best of times. And I brought home everything I could get.
> This person could not sit quietly on the chair out of envy and some brave lust. The effect on the psyche was incredibly disgusting. I once observed such an order only in one family of elders.
> She did some strange eccentric things with my daughter. My wife somehow left me. Everyone used to speak loudly, to interfere, everyone expressed their idea as something completely brilliant. There was some chaos, disorder, meaninglessness around. In addition, this man is used to living fashionably, like in a market. In one room, we had a lot of people from the village, always crowded, noisy, just like in a tavern.
> This little person, some tiny boundless soul, however, filled the whole life, polluted it. When she sat over business papers, then she looked like a vulture. When she laughed in silence, her hoarse laugh resembled that of Mephistopheles (Ivchenko: F. 109, fol. 220. 5).

The appearance of the heroine in the portrait of Ivchenko is presented in detail: small in height, thin, she has a hooked nose and laughs hoarsely. The author of the diary characterizes

the mother-in-law as a person who is extremely deceitful, boastful, endowed with a bourgeois ego, and stingy; at the same time, she likes to live amidst chaos and disorder. Since she does not arouse the author's sympathy, he portrays her as a negative character, constantly referring to vivid comparisons, either with a family, or with a bird of prey, a vulture.

The framing, which mentions the names of Joan of Arc and Napoleon, to whom the mother-in-law is compared, creates the impression that her figure is something of an oxymoron. On the one hand, there is Napoleon's megalomania, on the other there is the heroism of Joan of Arc. As a result, we have a full-blooded portrait of a real person in the subjective vision of the writer.

Thus, the features of portraiture in non-fiction are significantly determined by the genre of the work. The most objective portraits can be found in diaries. It is in them that the distance in time between the vision of the person and the fixation of their image is the shortest. The author does not need to strain their memory to recreate the appearance of a person they saw a few hours ago. Authors recreate portraits of their heroes without looking back at certain taboos. Their characters, especially in diaries, were created on fresh impressions, and since the distance between the event and its vision was minimal, the portraits of real characters accurately convey features of appearance and reveal the portrayed person's inner world. In particular, Cherednychenko's diary is extremely rich in descriptions of the appearance of real historical figures she met on her way. The peculiarity of her individual style is the representation of concentrated portraits of her heroes through laconic descriptions of appearance, consisting of only a few details, which in the subtext partially reveal the characters. Portraits of women are shaped by negative assessment, and on a subconscious level their behaviour and inner world evoke disgust, although the portrait description contains no outwardly negative features. Deconcentrated portraits (which are much more infrequent) use individual details to create largely complete descriptions of characters' appearance and their evolution over a longer period of time. A large time distance in such portraits (for example, Tychyna) makes it possible to trace how the appearance of the character changed as the author's feelings of love for him faded. The diary of Cherednychenko,

which was not intended for publication, gives the author the opportunity to express herself more frankly, more subjectively, and more accurately, and this includes the portraits she drew. In Ivchenko's diaries, descriptions of appearance are much poorer than in Cherednychenko. They are dominated by family portraits. Sometimes they are detailed and not only contain a description of a real persons' appearance, but also delve into their spiritual features, showing the poverty of their inner world. The study of the specifics of portraiture in documentary discourse opens up prospects for studies, the main focus of which would be to clarify the peculiarities of landscape and interior reproduction in non-fiction literature, which has not yet been the subject of research in Ukrainian literary studies. This is especially true for works stored in archives.

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Kharkiv of the 1920s–1930s in Ukrainian Autobiographies of the Twentieth Century

In the 1920s–30s Kharkiv was the capital of Ukraine, a powerful intellectual, cultural, scientific, industrial and financial center of Ukraine. State authorities, numerous scientific and educational institutions, theaters were located in the city. Thanks to constructivism, the architectural style of Kharkiv was changing. There were many literary and artistic associations in the city (Pluh, Hart, VAPLITE, VUSPP, Prolitfront and others). The literary portrait of Kharkiv of that period appears from numerous autobiographies of Ukrainian scientists, writers, cultural figures who lived and worked in this city in the 1920s–30s. From the Ukrainian autobiographies of the twentieth century, Kharkiv of this period appears as a place populated by active, effective, creative people who constructed a new reality, built a new life according to new rules. Significant literary loci of the city for Ukrainian autobiographers of this period are the House of Blakytnyi, the Peasant House, the Literary Fair quarter, the Slovo House, the Berezil Theater. From 1933, all spheres of life were strictly controlled by the authorities, many leading figures of that period were repressed, and every mention of them was prohibited. The Soviet system gripped the city.

Autobiography, as a story of the life of a real person, reproduces various content stages, such as: the author's family life, his everyday, cultural, intellectual, professional, social, political life. One of the components of the autobiographical text is autobiogeography,[1] which includes all the geographical areas that somehow affected the life of the autobiographer. The geographical space in which the autobiographer was at one time or another could significantly influence them,[2] because the autobiographer was not just in a certain geographical space, but also in the historical, social, cultural space. The autobiography of each autobiographer is unique and inimitable, however sometimes the autobiographical markers of different autobiographers can overlap in one geographical space, which becomes

[1] There are other terms for this concept, such as autogeography, author's geobiography, personal geography of the author.

[2] More about this in the publications Regard 2000, Soubeyroux 2003, Collot 2021, Dupuy 2019, Westphal 2007, Lévy 2016, Moretti 2000, Cherkashyna 2022.

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decisive for those who share it at the same time. This is what Kharkiv of the 1920s–30s became for a significant number of famous Ukrainian figures of that time.

Kharkiv is a large city in the north-east of Ukraine, founded in 1654. It is the main city of Sloboda Ukraine (Slobozhanshchyna). During the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries Kharkiv was a city with its unique material and spiritual culture, the center of the Kharkiv Cossack regiment, later Sloboda-Ukrainian province.

In 1804, with the foundation of the Kharkiv Imperial University,[3] Kharkiv became a university city, thanks to which it received a significant further development. Already in the late nineteenth century the city was a powerful trade and industrial center, and the center of active intellectual and cultural life.

Many events in the history of Ukraine were connected with Kharkiv. The city survived revolutions, civil war, interventions of the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1919, the Bolsheviks proclaimed it the capital of Ukraine, in 1923 this status was officially confirmed by the decision of the Council of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR and the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee, and a new stage of development of the city began.

Kharkiv of the 1920s absorbed the best that was in Ukraine at that time. Extraordinary figures, creators of a new intellectual and cultural reality were gathered in one city at one time.

The city paradoxically combined two mutually opposite sides. On the one hand, the all-powerful state apparatus, represented by numerous government agencies, security agencies, industrial departments, trade unions, which regulated and strictly controlled the construction of a new post-revolutionary Soviet life. On the other hand, the development of free intellectual and artistic life, which, in turn, also created a new reality.

Since the 1920s, the city housed the Central Executive Committee, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, the Council of People's Commissars, the headquarters of the Southwestern Front. According to Iurii Shevelev's recollections, the move of state authorities to the city significantly changed the mental landscape of the city:

> The commissars were the bosses, they ruled because

[3] Now the V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University.

> they had mandates to do so, they issued decrees, they carried out requisitions and confiscations, they wanted peace without annexations and contributions. The workers themselves even became proletarians, and their class enemies were the bourgeoisie and individual bourgeois. The program was to reconstruct the country in order to build socialism and communism, and to destroy capitalism and the remnants of feudalism (Shevelev 2001).

On June 1, 1923, after the item 'Kharkiv as the capital of Ukraine' appeared on the agenda of the meeting of the political bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine, several research agencies where famous scientists of that time worked – such as the Academy of Sciences, the Ukrainian Institute of Physics and Technology, the Ukrainian X-ray Academy, the Institute of Hematology and Blood Transfusion and other scientific institutions – opened in Kharkiv.[4]

At the same time, an education reform was carried out. Numerous institutes emerged from the Kharkiv Imperial University, which was closed in 1920 – the Law Institute, the Medical Institute, the Veterinary Institute, the Pharmaceutical Institute, the Institute of National Economy, the Institute of Engineering and Economics, the Institute of Political Education, the Kharkiv Institute of Public Education, in total 23 new higher educational institutions were created on the basis of the former faculties of the Kharkiv Imperial University.

Many autobiographers, including Vasyl Mynko, the author of the autobiographical story *My Mynkivka* (Mynko 1981a) and the book of memoirs *Red Parnassus: Confessions of an Ancent Pluhman* (Mynko 1981b), recount this 'new' Kharkiv, now a capital. Describing his trip to the city in 1921, he left an interesting topographical portrait of Kharkiv of that time:

> The window of my room on the fourth floor overlooked a wide square. In its center stood a clumsy wooden building – a tram

[4] More about this in the autobiographies of Dmytro Bahalii (Bahalii 1927), Mykhailo Hrushevskyi (Hrushevskyi 1926), Dmytro Zatonskyi (Zatonskyi 2007), Iurii Shevelev (Shevelev 2001).

> control room [...]. To the right, across the square, there was a long banner with the inscription: 'Peace to houses, war to palaces!' And to the left, on the bank of the Lopan, there was a large multi-storey building with a sign along the entire facade. On a red background it read: 'All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee', the highest body of Soviet power in Ukraine (Mynko 1981a: 175).

As Dokiia Humenna recalled in her multi-volume autobiography *The Gift of Eudothea*:

> At that time, Kyiv was stagnating and sinking deeper and deeper into provincial life. No industry was developed in Kyiv, no construction projects. What was started before the war was overgrown with grass and woods, like in my neighborhood on Levashivska Street. This was explained by the fact that Kyiv was a center of reactionary petty-bourgeois elements, while Kharkiv was full of dynamism and new revolutionary forces (Humenna 1990: 99).

According to the famous researcher of Ukrainian literature of the 1920s Yaryna Tsymbal, 'Kharkiv, or rather the metamorphoses that it experienced during some ten years, really captivated, fascinated and "dictated" itself as a theme' (Tsymbal 2020: 55), as a result, the city quickly got its literary biography. The 'Kharkiv text' has firmly entered the literary imagery of the time: 'Kharkiv was the center of literary life at that time, and writers could not but refer to the image and theme of the city they lived in, so every second urban work is about Kharkiv' (Tsymbal 2010: 55). The literary biography of the city was also reproduced in numerous autobiographical texts written and published during the twentieth century in Ukraine and abroad.

Some of the autobiographers (such as Mike Johansen, Yurii Shevelev) were native Kharkiv citizens, the new history of the city was created before their eyes and in their autobiographical works they could compare the life of Kharkiv in different periods of its existence.

Kharkiv as a theme of a large canvas has been of interest to me for a long time, and it interests me not because I know it

best, I was born there, spent my childhood, studied. Of course, this also matters, but the theme of Kharkiv prevails over the others mainly because this place – which today hosts industrial giants, who meet at the former meeting place and gathering place of merchants – more than any other, was affected by the creative and life-giving power of the proletariat. Where there was an old city with dilapidated shacks and huge garbage dumps, a new and gigantic city has appeared, equal to, and in some ways even exceeding European ones. Those who know the old Kharkiv will not say that this is an exaggeration. I am not talking about the tremendous changes in life that have occurred during this time. Even in our new buildings, I have not seen such amazing metamorphoses in life as in Kharkiv (Johansen 1936: 2).

Other autobiographers (such as Volodymyr Gzhytskyi, Dokiia Humenna, Vasyl Mynko, Yurii Smolych, Vasyl Sokil, Volodymyr Sosiura) came to Kharkiv when it became the capital of Ukraine, so their autobiographies are full of references to the first acquaintance with the city, the first impressions of it. For them, as, for example, for Vasyl Mynko, post-revolutionary Kharkiv was associated, first of all, with the capital of Soviet Ukraine, 'a symbol of a new life, a better future and the inevitability of revolutionary transformations in the social, economic, and spiritual spheres of human existence' (Mynko 1981b: 39), because 'the brightest pages of the national history of the early twentieth century were written in this Slobozhanskyi city: Mykola Khvylovyi, Les Kurbas, Oles Dosvitnyi, Volodymyr Sosiura and others lived and worked here; the literary and artistic organizations, the VAPLITE, the world-renowned Berezil theater were formed and broadcast their ideas here' (Mynko 1981b: 39).
Yurii Shevelev, a native Kharkiv citizen, was convinced that the city of that time was not suited to be the capital:

> The large industrialized village of Kharkiv was not built to be the capital of Ukraine, much less was it provided for this purpose, because the new regime was a regime of unheard-of centralization and bureaucratization of life. In particular, with the cessation of private initiative, all enterprises, except for small crafts, were subject to a central apparatus that had to manage every

> plant, factory, and commercial establishment. This apparatus had to be placed somewhere (Shevelev 2001).

The lack of premises to accommodate public administration, industrial associations, for the life of numerous people who daily filled the capital city was very noticeable and all autobiographers without exception mentioned it.

> There were essentially only two large and modernly equipped buildings in the city – the 'Salamander' and the 'Russia'. True, they were residential buildings, and their bathrooms, kitchens and storerooms were not provided to the institutions, but there was not much choice. It was decided to throw all the residents out of the 'Salamander' and transfer all the accommodation to the 'heads', then to the 'trusts'. [...] It was the time of so-called 'densification', a family should not have more than a room, and it was a blessing when they could have a room. All kitchens became communal. Other rooms were given to whoever happened to have a warrant, and suddenly the residence became a cluster of families that had nothing to do with each other, and the kitchen became a communal hell (Shevelev 2001).

In 1923, the legendary lines of the Ukrainian poet Pavlo Tychyna appeared, who, having arrived in the capital city, asked him 'Kharkiv, Kharkiv, where is your face?'. And gradually, thanks to numerous constructions, it began to appear.

> The Old Kharkiv, merchantly multi-storeyed in the center and miserably one-storeyed on the outskirts [...] was slowly changing its face. At first, when a new building appeared, it was the number one event. Such events related to buildings were: the palace of the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee, which appeared in 1922 on Tevelyev Square, on the site of the former house of the noble assembly; the stock exchange (not the labor exchange, but the stock exchange that existed during the NEP) – in 1925, the sunny and slen-

> der Derzhprom, which was built in the pasture behind the university garden. Simultaneously, new residential buildings appeared here and there (Mynko 1981b: 270).

We can also find a portrait of the new capital city in the autobiography of Dokiia Humenna, a writer who lived in Kyiv at the time, but often visited Kharkiv on editorial and literary matters:

> Kharkiv was growing and expanding into the steppe. Here, away from the border, plants and factories grew, here were the capital's buildings, at least the House of Industry, which Kharkiv residents were so proud of as a miracle of modern construction, with a colossal square in front of it… these new streets and houses in the steppe […]. This is an industrial capital in the steppe, and I am walking in a new city… I don't know anyone here yet. But I feel this other atmosphere, other people. It is no longer a dreamy, forested Kyiv with blooming canes in the streets, with blossoming chestnuts, with sanatorium air, but a dynamic industrial steppe city with streets lined with buses and trolleybuses, with fast cars (and in Kyiv you will see cars here and there), with accelerating and stubborn winds, with dust, with two faces: the provincial city of yesterday, disappearing before our eyes, and modern slender buildings, squares in the distance, surrounded by factories and plants. Kyiv suits me better and I immediately began to long for Kyiv. But… Here is life, writers have already fled here, here is the pulse of the whole Ukraine… (Humenna 1990: 111–12).

During the 1920s–30s, a new face of the city was formed, a new city center was built with the largest square in Europe, the Dzerzhinskii Square (now Freedom Square), a complex of buildings in the style of constructivism[5] was built around it, such as Derzhprom (House of State Industry), the House of Projects, the House of Cooperation, the first Soviet skyscrapers, which became a symbol of the power of the Soviet Union.

[5] More about this can be found in the project 'Constructivism. Kharkiv' (Constructivism. Kharkiv n.d.).

> The unusual plan of its construction was caused by the need to fit the building into a semicircle of a round square. The building of Derzhprom consists of three H-shaped blocks with long, radially arranged buildings connected by a kind of passages-bridges. There is a legend that the different heights of its blocks correspond to the notes of the 'International'. Reinforced concrete, from which Derzhprom was built, was a relatively new material, so the methods of calculating its structures were developed directly during construction (Formuvannia ukrai'ns'koi' identychnosti 2006).

In parallel, at the same time, a complex of other city buildings (administrative, educational, residential) was also built in the style of constructivism, in particular, the residential quarter 'New Life', now known as Zaderzhprom (modern Science Avenue, Chichibabin street, Romain Roland street, Culture street of Kharkiv) was built directly behind the Derzhprom.
The transport system of the city was also being rebuilt:

> They dismantled the horse-and-track city road. The tram network was slightly extended [...]. In winter, the trams were not heated, the windows were covered with a thick layer of ice, and the floor was covered with icy snow. But trolleybuses were brought, and they ran from the station along Katerynoslavska and then Sumska streets, in the wake of the former horse-drawn carriage, and two or three taxis even appeared on Mykolaivska Square (Shevelev 2001).

According to the autobiographers, under the pretext of the arrangement of the capital city, there was also destruction, especially of churches.

> One of the first churches to be blown up was St. Nicholas Church, which had previously been a member of the Ukrainian Orthodox Autocephalous Church and enjoyed unusual popularity among Kharkiv residents. It was destroyed under the pretext that it was obstructing the straightening of the tram line, and it was also written that it was against

> the building of the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee, and this could not be tolerated. Many more churches followed. I had to witness the destruction of the Myrrh-bearing church,[6] the closest to us (Shevelev 2001).

Despite the great development of the city, the enthusiasm for the creation of a new post-revolutionary Soviet reality, the native Kharkiv resident Yurii Shevelev defined grey as the typical colour of the city:

> Grey took over the behavior of people and their clothes, and it harmoniously entered the cityscape. Women's hats disappeared, no one could even think of going out with a veil on their face, manicure was forgotten. Men's so-called caps replaced hats. Ties became rare. Surdutas were forgotten, the so-called sweatshirt or plain shirt, of course not embroidered, spread. In winter, both men and women wore cotton woolen jackets, and leather jackets became a sign of the new elite in the process of formation. [...] In the grey city, it was not possible to be colourful, people had to become grey, and they did (Shevelev 2001).

According to Vasyl Sokil, 'the cultural life of the capital was developing rapidly, dynamically, promisingly and diversely. Literary life was full of discussions, oral and printed' (Sokil 1987: 69).
The researcher of Ukrainian literary life of the 1920s Rostyslav Melnykiv noted that

> From the summer of 1921, in Kharkiv, the capital of Soviet Ukraine, Volodymyr Koriak, an active participant in the literary process of the first revolutionary years, a former fellow party member of Ellan and a recent tsarist political officer, has been gathering around the newspaper, *News of the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee*, edited by the famous poet Vasyl El-

[6] The Myrrh-bearing Church has existed in Kharkiv since the end of the seventeenth century, it was named in honour of women-myrrh-bearers. It was rebuilt again during the era of independent Ukraine, during 2013–15, away from its historical place, because during the Soviet era another building was erected in its place.

> lan-Blakytnyi, a leading figure of the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionary Party, Mykola Khvylovyi, a volunteer of the First World War, a rebel against the Hetmanate and a communist since 1919, Volodymyr Sosiura, a recently demobilized Red Army soldier, and not so long ago a Cossack of the Army of the Ukrainian People's Republic, and Master Mykhailo Johansen are all almost the same age, with such different and at the same time characteristic destinies, in love with the word and full of creative, bubbling energy and faith in themselves, in the Ukrainian word, in the renewed Ukraine. It is with their direct participation and assistance that the literary process begins. It is already interpreted by literary critics as one of the most interesting phenomena in the history of Ukrainian literature (Melnykiv 2013: 15–16).

A significant role in the literary life of Kharkiv of that time was played by the House of Blakytnyi, the Peasant House, the quarter called 'Literary Fair', literary loci that are mentioned in almost every autobiography.

The history of these literary loci began with a small room located in the central part of the city at Sumska Street, 13, where at that time the editorial offices of the newspapers *News of the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee* and *Peasant's Truth* were located. Vasyl Ellan-Blakytnyi was the editor of the *News of the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee* newspaper. He became the founder of the Union of Proletarian Writers 'Hart' and held the first literary parties of Ukrainian writers in a small room of the editorial office. Here was organized the union of peasant writers 'Plough', whose chairman was Serhiy Pylypenko.[7]

According to Vasyl Sokil, 'the most prominent center of cultural and public life in general, not only in Kharkiv, but in fact, throughout Ukraine, was the House of Blakytnyi' (Sokil 1987:

[7] Subsequently, other literary associations emerged, such as VAPLITE (Free Academy of Proletarian Literature), VUSPP (All-Ukrainian Union of Proletarian Writers, which later became the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine), 'Avangard', 'New Generation', 'Molodniak', and others. As Rostyslav Melnykiv noted, 'each of the organizations had its own printed organ, which were formed according to artistic, aesthetic and political preferences' (Melnykiv 2013: 18).

69), located at 4, Kaplunivska Street (now 4, Arts Street). 'All the main events related to the development of Ukrainian literature of that time took place in it. There were fierce debates in the stormy passions, at that time especially sharply caused by the combat pamphlets of Mykola Khvylovyi <...>. Mykola Skrypnyk was an indispensable participant and active speaker. And especially important meetings were attended by several secretaries of the Central Committee and members of the government' (Sokil 1987: 70).

In 1929, the World Congress of Progressive Writers of Capitalist Countries was held here, among the participants were French writers Henri Barbusse and Romain Roland. Maxim Gor'kii repeatedly performed in the House of Blakytnyi. It was in this house that the legendary billiard duel between Mike Johansen and Vladimir Maiakovskii took place, in which the latter lost and was forced to crawl under the table, which was mentioned by almost all autobiographers of that time.

In 1922, the Union of Peasant Writers 'Pluh' also received a separate spacious room for 200 people on the ground floor of the former inexpensive hotel with rooms for peasants who came to local fairs, at 4, Rosa Luxemburg Square (now 4, Pavlivska Square). This locus was then known as the Peasant House. Literary parties, known as 'Pluzhanski Mondays', chaired by Serhii Pylypenko, also took place here.

The 'Literary Fair' quarter[8] quarter was the name given to the area of the central part of the city, from Sumska Street to Pushkinska Street, from Theater Square to Myrrh-bearing Square, the place where numerous newspaper and magazine editorial offices were located, as well as the large 'State Publishing Association of Ukraine'. According to Iurii Smolych's memoirs, 'on the sidewalks of these three blocks, one could always meet someone from the writers and editorial staff: literary news and editorial sensations were exchanged here. Here one could 'sell' and 'buy' poems, short stories, plays and novels' (Smolych 1968: 25).

In autumn 1926, Les Kurbas's theater 'Berezil' moved from Kyiv to Kharkiv. Before that, according to Yurii Shevelev, 'there were actually two theaters in Kharkiv: a drama theater on Sumska Street and an opera the-

[8] From 1928, the name 'Literary Fair' was also given to the literary revue of the literary organization VAPLITE and its supporters. It was published from December 1928 to February 1930.

ater on Rymarska Street' (Shevelev 2001). These theaters staged plays exclusively by foreign playwrights, and Russian troupes were frequently on tour. The appearance of the 'Berezil' theater in Kharkiv was perceived by the citizens ambiguously. According to Yurii Shevelev, Kharkiv citizens did not accept the first performance of the theater, the hall was almost empty, but over time Les Kurbas and his troupe were able to win the love of the public and each premiere of the theater became a real event in the cultural life of the city.

According to Vasyl Sokil's observations, it was 'the time of enthusiastic hobbies! The first Ukrainian opera house! The first state theater! Ukrainization! Urbanization! We are creating a new culture, a new theater, a new art!' (Sokil 1987: 65), 'freedom of relations, freedom of behavior, freedom of creativity, freedom of discussion, that is, everything that is inherent in a democratic system' (Sokil 1987: 82).

> We are reading the advertising page: in the 'Berezil' theater, from November 29 to December 5, 1927, there will be performances of the opera *Mikado* by M. Johansen and O. Vyshnia (after Salivan), the drama by I. Dniprovskyi *The Apple Captivity*, the tragedy by Karpenko-Kary *Savva Chaly*, the eccentricity by V. Yaroshenko *Hooligan*, the melodrama by V. Hugo *The King is playing*. New premieres are announced: *Armored Train* by V. Ivanov and *Sadie* by V.S. Moem, in which, as Mykola Khvylovyi later wrote: 'Uzhviy was going crazy and "Berezil" gave the illusion of an exotic downpour' (Sokil 1987: 66).

Kharkiv citizens accepted the innovative theater of Les Kurbas, his bold directorial decisions, original interpretation of roles by actors, colourful stage design. 'The performances of "Berezil" were really the holidays of Ukrainian cultural life of those times. And everyone was impatiently waiting for new premieres, new creative discoveries of the famous theater directed by Les Kurbas' (Sokil 1987: 76).

In the late 1920s, the 'housing issue' became important for the writers of that time, who mostly lived in rented rooms or were 'crammed' in communal apartments in Kharkiv. For example, Pavlo Tychyna, who moved from Kyiv to Kharkiv to head the *Red*

Way magazine, lived in a small editorial room.

In the mid-1920s, writers living in Kharkiv at the time appealed to the government to build them a cooperative house. The government agreed, part of the funds for the construction of a cooperative house for writers was allocated by the state, the rest of the writers had to raise on their own and pay off within fifteen years. In 1927, the construction of this house began in the upland district of Kharkiv (at the time the outskirts of the city) in Bairachnyi lane (later Red Writers Street, now 9, Culture Street). The house was built in the style of Kharkiv constructivism.

In 1930 the construction was completed and 66 apartments received their first owners.

The house was built in the shape of the letter 'C', which is why it was called 'Slovo' [Word] ('Слово' in Ukrainian). According to the memories of one of the first residents of this house Volodymyr Gzhytskyi:

> The House of Writers 'Slovo' deserves close attention and to be remembered dearly. Sixty-six writers with their families lived in this beautiful house. It was like one big family. For the three years that I lived there, I do not recall any conflict between families or individuals. The angel of peace seemed to hover over the house. [...] People of different literary groups lived in 'Slovo', but this could not affect human politeness. Meeting in the courtyard or in the city, the inhabitants greeted each other amiably as cultural people, although they may have been fundamental antagonists (Gzhytskyi 2011: 305–06).

'It was a cheerful, friendly, joyful house. Open to all, hospitable' (Sokil 1987: 85), wrote another first inhabitant of this house, Vasyl Sokil, who at the same time noted that

> this house is waiting for a chronicler who will be able to write everything about this house, from its first days to the last.[9] I

[9] The chroniclers of this house will appear later. The history of the life of this house during the first seven years of its existence will be written by Volodymyr Gzhytskyi (Gzhytskyi 2011), Yurii Smolych (Smolych 1968, Smolych 1969, Smolych 1972), in 1966 Volodymyr Kulish's memoirs *Word about the House Slovo* (Kulish 1966) will appear. Already in our time, the Internet projects 'ProSlovo' (ProSlovo n.d.) and 'Con-

> confess that I am incapable of doing so, because it is impossible to contain in one work all the short-lived joys of the early years with the endless tragedies that took place within the walls of this famous and God-cursed house (Sokil 1987: 84).

The autobiographies of the first inhabitants of this house provide a detailed description of it:

> The house had five floors and 68 rooms. It also had five stairwells, or entrances, as they were called in the 'Slovo'. Each entrance had access to the street and the courtyard. [...] Each dwelling consisted of five or four rooms. The rooms faced the yard and the street. [...] All dwellings had a bathhouse, a dressing room, a kitchen with a small stove and it had to be heated with coal or wood. [...] The house had central steam heating (Kulish 1966: 10).
>
> There are basements and semi-basements around the perimeter of the house. A bomb shelter was made under the first entrance before the war. Under the second and third there was the stoker of the house. And in the semi-basement of the fifth entrance, two apartments were turned into a dining room for the residents of the house. [...] A solarium was built on the roof above the first and second entrances. The front door was made of massive oak. A large garden with flower beds was laid out next to the house. It had a spacious yard, part of which was intended for volleyball, and in winter this area was flooded with water for skating. The whole house, garden and yard were surrounded by a low brick fence (Sokil 1987: 85).

Among the first inhabitants of the house 'Slovo' were primarily writers, poets, playwrights, artists, composers, actors, people who knew each other well, who together created a new reality.

structivism. Kharkiv' (Constructivism. Kharkiv n.d.). In 2017, a documentary film directed by Taras Tomenko *The House 'Slovo'* will be shot about the history of this house and its famous inhabitants, in 2019 Taras Tomenko will shoot a feature film of the same name. Kharkiv Literary Museum will prepare and publish a board game dedicated to the Slovo House and its inhabitants.

'We all had great hopes… We had great hopes. It was a time of great hopes and unfulfilled expectations. And even some believed (as I am a sinner) that it was a time of great opportunities' (Sokil 1987: 88). Numerous stories of love, hunting, and mischief of the first inhabitants of the 'Slovo' house are described in detail in the autobiographies of Ukrainian authors[10].

The free development of literature and art lasted until the end of the 1920s, and in 1930 the state system began to strengthen punitive measures. One after another, high-profile public trials began to take place, the participants of which were accused of espionage and harmful counter-revolutionary activities.

In 1930, the infamous trial of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine took place on the stage of the then Capital Opera (Kharkiv Opera House), tickets to which were distributed free of charge through trade unions to employees, workers, students. Many people witnessed this process, so it is documented in many memoirs of eyewitnesses.

> On the dock, you see, there were pests in various spheres of life: science, culture, medicine, education, industry, agriculture with detailed branches such as agronomy, seed production, mechanization, livestock, beet growing, etc. Sitting on the stage of the opera house were the main leaders, under whose leadership, allegedly, hundreds and thousands of members of criminal organizations were acting in schools, institutes, collective farms, hospitals, factories… Everywhere and anywhere they 'fiercely resisted socialist construction, sought to disorganize and destroy the entire state system on the instructions of Western intelligence'. The process of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine ended with a famous sentence (Sokil 1987: 89–90).

From 1931, mass arrests began, people disappeared one by one, according to the memoirs of autobiographers:

[10] See the autobiographies of Ostap Vyshnia (Vyshnia 1927), Mike Johansen (Johansen 2009), Valerian Polishchuk (Polishchuk 1997), Volodymyr Sosiura (Sosiura 2010), the memoirs of Volodymyr Kulish (Kulish 1966), Volodymyr Gzhytskyi (Gzhytskyi 2011), Dokiia Humenna (Humenna 1990), Yurii Smolych (Smolych 1968, Smolych 1969, Smolych 1972), Vasyl Sokil (Sokil 1987) and others.

> For five short years, from 1931 to 1936, a lot of disasters were committed in Kharkiv. They extinguished everything good, ignited disaster… The suicides of Mykola Khvylovyi in May and Mykola Skrypnyk in July 1933, […] the removal of Kurbas and the renaming of 'Berezil' to the state-owned T. H. Shevchenko Theater (yes, it must be T. H., Taras, probably, would sound too nationalistic) were loud events. But no less, and maybe more terrible for us than in their incomprehensibility and meaninglessness were the quiet events, the disappearance of people at night, the disappearance of organizations and institutions, the uncertainty – 'Is it my turn today? Or tomorrow? Or maybe never?' (Shevelev 2001).

People could be arrested even by accident, not finding someone at home (and the plan of arrests had to be fulfilled) or confusing the names, arresting the wrong people for whom the warrant was issued.[11]

Experimental theatrical productions were curtailed, literary organizations were liquidated, the number of literary newspapers, magazines, revues were reduced, party 'purges' open to the public began, during which the accused publicly confessed all his sins to the Soviet society.

> The sinner repented and promised to reform, and each of those present had the right and was encouraged to use this right to speak against the sinner and repentant, to cite their other anti-party acts or statements, the repentance was proclaimed insincere and incomplete, the accused had not only to express all their faults, but also to 'reveal their methodological roots'. These public torture sessions dragged on for hours and hours, deep into the night, lasting many days, driving the victim to hysteria and despair, and the accusers to sadistic frenzy (Shevelev 2001).

[11] Thus, instead of Vasyl Mynko, Vasyl Mysyk was arrested and sent into exile (Nykonorova 2012).

In 1933, the life of the inhabitants of the 'Slovo' house changed dramatically. The period of state control, supervision, prohibitions, and restrictions began. 'Later it became worse. Control and supervision is only a stepping stone to the final reprisal against unwanted people. Mass arrests, prisons, exile began. And executions' (Sokil 1987: 101).

The real tragedy of the 'Slovo' House began in late April 1933, when Mykhailo Yalovyi, a friend and associate of Mykola Khvylovyi, was arrested. On May 13, 1933, Mykola Khvylovyi committed suicide. The residents of the house stopped visiting each other, playing volleyball in the yard andhunting together, it became dangerous to meet more than two people. The House of Blakytnyi closed. According to Vasyl Sokil, 'dark nights, black days' are coming. In the house 'Slovo', each of its residents was under strict control according to all the laws of the punitive machine.

According to Vasyl Sokil: 'From the point of view of the punitive bodies, it was a fortress of the nationalist counter-revolution, an environment of anti-Soviet conspiracies, a bastion of espionage activities of residents of all foreign intelligence agencies that were possible at that time' (Sokil 1987: 110).

> Having all Ukrainian writers in one pile, it was easier to control their lives. The NKVD[12] had its ears and eyes here, with the help of those who knew in great detail everything that was happening in the house. To this we must add telephones, which in those days were simply impossible for individuals to get. And suddenly one day, whether you wanted it or not, they were introduced in all homes. Is it worth mentioning that during the investigation against this or that writer, their telephone conversations were cited word for word as evidence for the prosecution? (Kulish 1966: 12)

One by one, the residents of the house began to disappear. During the day, they usually did not come to arrest them. Every evening the residents of the house would listen out for any noise, trying to understand who they came for this time. They went to bed in tension with

[12] People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs.

things prepared in advance. Psychological tension was growing, not everyone could stand it. Volodymyr Sosiura, unable to withstand the tension, was admitted to a psychiatric hospital,[13] before that he repented in unconsciousness before the punitive machine:[14]

> When the arrests of Ukrainian Soviet writers began, I was afraid that my faith in people was shattered. I, we all knew this person as a good, honest, Soviet man. Suddenly he is an enemy of the people. And so blow after blow, and all in the soul, the soul of the people, because writers are the expressors of the people's soul. I believed the way the deaths of Khvylovyi and Skrypnyk were officially interpreted, and I sincerely said that I loved these people and that it was very hard for me to be disappointed in them. That I condemn their suicide as a horror of responsibility before the Tribunal of the Commune, as a shameful desertion. The secretary of the district committee said that the speeches of Kulish, Dosvitnyi and Kasianenko were unsatisfactory, but she found my speech sincere and that it satisfied her. Others agreed with this (Sosiura 2010: 152).

According to the memoirs of the autobiographers, it was impossible to leave the house, to escape to other places, because it would automatically be interpreted as an admission of guilt. The doors of the entrances to the street were locked tightly, and the NKVD officers were constantly on duty at the entrance to the courtyard. The house plunged into an atmosphere of fear, suspicion, gradually turning into a dead house.[15]

It was dangerous for the residents to keep ego-documents (diaries, letters, memoirs, autobiographies), as each personal document could become accusatory material in the subsequent court case.

Many years later, with the opening of the KGB[16] archives and the publication of the materials of investigative cases, researchers received more information

[13] This psychiatric hospital is known in Kharkiv as 'Saburova Dacha'.

[14] However, even public repentance did not save him later from persecution for the poem 'Love Ukraine'.

[15] At that time, it was called by local residents the 'House of Pre-trial Detention', and later – 'Crematorium'.

[16] State Security Committee.

about the fate of the residents of the 'Slovo' house. According to statistics, during 1933–1938, residents of 40 apartments out of 68 were repressed, 33 of them were shot, 11 of them (the most talented artists such as Les Kurbas, Mykola Kulish, Hryhorii Epik, Oleksa Slisarenko, Mykhailo Yalovyi, Valerian Polishchuk, Valerian Pidmohylnyi, Antin and his sons Bohdan and Ostap Krushelnytskyi, Andrii Panov) were shot in the Sandarmokh tract in Karelia on the same day – November 3, 1937, a few days earlier Mike Johansen was shot in Sandarmokh, and two more residents of the house died in exile. Some of them managed to survive and return home many years later.

During the Soviet era, references to repressed Ukrainian writers of the 1920s–30s were banned, their literary works were removed from school and university curricula and textbooks, libraries and bookstores, their publications were resumed in the era of independent Ukraine.

In 1934, the capital of Ukraine was transferred to Kyiv, and the systematic construction of a conscious Soviet society began. Kharkiv became a powerful industrial, scientific, educational, trade, transport center, which in February 2022 had one and a half million inhabitants, was repeatedly recognized as the best Ukrainian city for living standards, had a full set of awards from the European Council. During the Second World War, the city went through occupation and destruction. Kharkiv suffered and continues to suffer significant damage due to the war between Russia and Ukraine in 2022. However, the period of 1920s–30s remained one of the most significant stages of the city's life, the period that determined the vectors of further development of Kharkiv, formed its modern portrait. Literary mapping of the city continues in the ego-texts of the next generations of autobiographers, and therefore can become the object of further scientific research.

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Svitlana Kryvoruchko

Biographical fiction: love/patience in Oksana Zabuzhko's novel *Field Studies in Ukrainian Sex*

The novel of the Ukrainian contemporary writer Oksana Zabuzhko (born in 1960) *Field Studies in Ukrainian Sex* (1998) can be appropriately attributed to the fiction critique (critical fiction) movement of the turn of the twenty-first century. The article identifies emotional and psychological problems in the relationship between a man / woman in the complex syntax of the novel, which is a sign of O. Zabuzhko's idiostyle. O. Zabuzhko's parents' biographical facts are woven into the fabric of the novel. They mentally influenced the formation of the phenomenon of the genius of the Ukrainian writer of the turn of the twentieth–twenty-first centuries, which arose through pain as an overcoming of the feeling of fear and the complex of slave consciousness thanks to love, which fills with meaning any activity of an individual: art, life, relationships.

The novel of the Ukrainian contemporary writer Oksana Zabuzhko (born in 1960) *Field Studies in Ukrainian Sex* (1998) can be appropriately attributed to the fiction critique (critical fiction) movement of the turn of the twenty-first century.

Drawing on a feminist critical approach, it is appropriate to analyze that the main character of the novel is a woman, Oksana. It is through the image of Oksana that the novel reveals the ideas, conflicts and pathos of the space of love and/or patience. The biographical method helps to comprehend the relationship between the author and her work by using the concepts of 'author as subject of consciousness' and 'personality of the writer'.

The novel traces the principles of fiction critique (Kryvoruchko 2016), including the writer's attempt to revive the communicative act, to establish communication between the author and the reader. The writer addresses the reader: 'Ladies and gentlemen'. She tells a 'story', it seems, to the reader, but in fact here the author/author communication opens: O. Zabuzhko writes for herself, establishes a dialogue with herself, 'narrates' to herself in order to better understand her own ego, to know herself and the space of love she has entered. In addition to the reader and the author, there is a narratee – the listener Donna, to

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whom the heroine Oksana tells about her love, subconsciously trying to highlight the 'Ukrainian' at the level of male/female relations. The orientation towards 'Ukrainian' is introduced in the very title of the novel through the term 'Ukrainian sex'. Donna, like Oksana, is an intellectual: 'She is writing her dissertation on genderism in post-communist politics' (Zabuzhko 1998: 112). Despite the complex syntax and intellectual vocabulary, O. Zabuzhko strives to be understandable; she clarifies and illuminates the heroine's experiences and her analytical observations. To do this, the writer adheres to the plot, depicts the environment, interiors, and narrates (plot nodes of communication between a woman and a man, the peculiarity of the heroine-writer's existence and the process of writing, the mission or meaning of the writer's / creative personality's / artist's life).

Regarding the genre of this work, researchers K. Abramova, O. Punina argue that the text deploys 'the features of a philosophical novel, a novel-confession, a feminist novel, memoirs, autobiography, diary, psychoanalytic research, essay' (Abramova et al. 2016: 80). Ukrainian researcher T. Cherkashyna in her monograph *Memoir and Autobiographical Prose of the Twentieth Century: Ukrainian Vision* in paragraph 3.6, 'Fictionalization of One's Own Life Path: from Literary Non-Fiction to Autofiction' comprehends memoir and autobiographical fiction as memoir writing (Cherkashyna 2014: 290). T. Cherkashyna emphasizes that in Ukrainian literature in the discourse of the novel, novella and short story 'a whole layer of synthesized genres has emerged, which have absorbed the typical features of both documentary and fiction' (Cherkashyna 2014: 290). It should be noted that in O. Zabuzhko's work *Field Studies in Ukrainian Sex* these very tendencies can be traced. T. Cherkashyna states that 'The autobiographical story covers a small time period of the author's life... the history of the formation and development of the author's personality, the origins of their worldview and life values, the history of internal psychological changes' (Cherkashyna 2014: 291). These works have 'one main plot line, [...] the author's main attention is drawn to [...] the emotional atmosphere, to the inner psychological experiences of her characters' (Cherkashyna 2014 : 291).

I would like to draw attention to the technique of postmodernists of the second half of the twenti-

eth century, which was noted by I.I. Ilyin, when a scientist writes as a writer, and a writer as a scientist: 'poetic thinking is characterized by modern postmodern theorists as a fundamental feature of postmodern sensibility. Its essence lies in the fact that philosophers turn to the very way of artistic, poetic comprehension of thought… Another aspect of the same phenomenon is the fact that critics and theorists act mostly as philosophers, and writers and poets as art theorists' (Ilyin 2000: 211). Not only postmodernists wrote this way. For example, S. de Beauvoir is not part of the postmodernist discourse, although her works harmoniously combine scholarly and fiction writing. Similarly, O. Zabuzhko establishes this 'program' in the title of the work: *Field Studies in Ukrainian Sex*. The term 'field studies' was new for the Ukrainian linguistic mentality of the academic community in the 90s and Its significance remains unclear in 2022. This is a loan translation from English of 'field studies' – literally field studies, but in fact it is something like sociological research-surveys or pedagogical experiments: testing some principles in the public space. If a non-academic reader saw this title, they might imagine a field with wheat, or flowers, or something else that has absolutely nothing to do with it. And the title itself already contains the writer's challenge to the reader: he must be an intellectual, he must know what field research is. This book is thus for a very advanced readership. Categorically, this work cannot be defined as postmodern, despite the game with the title, because there is no double coding in it at all.

This work belongs to elite literature, as it is aimed only at highly educated readers (Kryvoruchko 2012). And the heroine-writer herself even notes: she is not understood when she speaks; she is listened to, looked at, but the essence of the message is not grasped, because the author herself occupies a more elite position than the general public. Zabuzhko is well aware of this, and she is absolutely satisfied with it: to be better, smarter than her contemporaries. 'When nobody, no way, understands words' (Zabuzhko 1998: 16). The heroine-writer speaks to an audience that does not understand her. People came to see her and benefit from her strong energy, which is supposed to be transmitted in the sense of words, but is perceived on more emotional deeper levels: with the skin, in the process of communication between the artist and the

crowd. O. Zabuzhko conveys in the work the meeting of the writer and readers: 'in the midst of the festival program, in the thick fumes of sweat and alcohol, where you came down from the stage, having recited your two poems, two damn good poems just in the drunken hum of circular flashing of yellow-spotted fictions merged into one, or rather, on top of it holding on to the sound of your own voice, which does not count on anything, only on words' (Zabuzhko 1998: 16). Unlike the concept of the 'writer', who never intersects with the reader, but communicates with him only through the reader's imagination and the recipient's ability to create in his mind the artistic world that the writer has formed in the work with the help of words, O. Zabuzhko depicts a writer who meets and sees 'her reader'. This reader is drunk, not reading, unable to form something in their own imagination, not understanding, but really present in her writing life. This action – the exchange of energies – is defined in the novel as a 'public orgasm' (Zabuzhko 1998: 16). This is a metaphor for the euphoria that a certain person feels when speaking in front of an audience (the public) because that person is strong and endowed with the virtue of 'power': the ability to hold an audience because they like you. This function was given to the ancient Greek goddess Aphrodite – she was liked, so everyone wanted to be with her and wanted to make love to her. The audience wants its 'idol', the 'reader' wants the 'writer', but cannot have him because he is unattainable.

In the novel, O. Zabuzhko defines the figure of the writer: intelligent, unattainable, incomprehensible to the majority, causing desire. Communication takes place, but not in the intellectual, rather in the emotional plane. The title *Field Studies* refers to genres like a scientific article or monograph, but the writer defines the work itself as a novel (not essay). That is, the reader is presented with a work of fiction which is a novel that stylistically contains the features of an essay, diary and includes biographical facts of the writer's life, albeit creatively comprehended and processed, so it is built on the material of documents, but is not itself a document.

This is not an autobiography, nor a diary. This is a work of fiction, in which the heroine Oksana should not be identified with the writer Oksana Zabuzhko, as she is a literary image, a product of the writer's imagination. However, in this

novel there are biographemes from O. Zabuzhko's real life, which give the biographical fiction a documentary flavor. This heroine is an intellectual who seeks to understand herself, the time, the environment: the end of the twentieth century. The invariability of the heroine is that she, like all women at all times, seeks love; she wants a relationship with a man. The problems of communication between a woman and a man (Kryvoruchko et al. 2021b) are the angle from which O. Zabuzhko creates a picture of the world of the novel. The continuation of the title, *in Ukrainian sex*, is an allusion to S. de Beauvoir's essay 'The Second Sex' of 1949, in which the French writer comprehended a woman as a phenomenon in the history of mankind. O. Zabuzhko also seeks to 'know' a woman, but not in diachrony – she is a person of the end of the twentieth century. This woman already has freedom of choice, the right to work at the university, free relationships with men outside marriage.

The work traces the features of fiction criticism. O. Zabuzhko revives the plot (the life of the heroine-writer abroad, etc.), depicts the modern environment (the heroine's communication), refers to the procedural nature of the narrative (through a highly complex, elitist way of using the syntax). The work undergoes a genre transformation thanks to its representational aims: to depict the survival of a post-colonial personality in a post-totalitarian / post-imperial / post-Soviet atmosphere; to reveal the complex of inferiority and ethnic minority. To do this, the writer implants features of essays, scientific articles, autobiography into the discourse of the novel.

O. Zabuzhko depicts the environment: the circumscription of leading Ukrainian intellectuals who integrate into the Western space and are successful and patriotic. Having the opportunity to stay and work in the United States (as most would have done in the 1990s), they return to Ukraine – to a 'native' pain, a 'Ukrainian' one as suggested by the subconscious of the heroine: 'our only choice [...] is between victim and executioner: between non-existence and existence that kills' (Zabuzhko 1998: 113).

The question that arises in the 'ladies and gentlemen': why does the heroine allow her husband to behave in such a way towards her? Why does not she quit / change / answer? O. Zabuzhko gives the answer at the end of the novel: it is a matter of national mentality, genetic

memory – the ability to endure. 'the same can be done with nations' (Zabuzhko 1998: 113). In this spectrum, the writer reveals that 'Literature' is 'a form of national therapy' (Zabuzhko 1998: 113). And the novel itself, which O. Zabuzhko writes, among other things (or even primarily) for herself, is this therapy: a psychologically damaged woman tries to heal herself in the process of self-telling about her painful but chosen love, which filled her life with thrills and fullness of being, but with the taste of the object of love not meeting the woman's expectations. He is just 'not her man'.

The features of fiction critique in *Field Studies* reveal autofictionalism or biographical fiction, which is the basis for placing the work in the discourse of ego-literature. The critical orientation of the novel is the basis for defining the work as a dialogic one (Kryvoruchko 2014), since it traces references to the scientific and literary heritage of the past, which becomes a synthesis of O. Zabuzhko's imagination and reflection, because the text is formed on the border of science and art. The mixing of narrative instances of the author O. Zabuzhko and the heroine Oksana occurs in a combination of biographism and essayism in fiction. Therefore, there is a difficulty in defining the genre, which the writer outlined as a novel. The 'ladies and gentlemen' are tempted to read *Field Studies* as a psychological striptease by O. Zabuzhko, although I am sure that this is a trap of the writer, who created a 'myth' for the reader as a model of herself, which she would like to present: fatal S&M-intellectual-unattainable-incomprehensible.

With her non-standard narratives, O. Zabuzhko has created a different type of writing that differs from the previous Ukrainian and European tradition, which is ahead of its contemporaries and can become a model for the future.

The problems of mutual understanding of man and woman reduces aesthetics to miniaturization. The writer focuses on the heroine, her private life and the psychology of her internal reactions to the world around her. The love of the chosen woman is much more important than cataclysms. The novel resembles a letter. Structurally, it is unified, without division into sections... According to the principles of fiction criticism, narrative minimalism can be traced in the work *Field Studies in Ukrainian Sex*, as the intrigue (the heroine's love, the development of relations between a man and a woman) and characters are re-

duced to an intimate level. The artistic space (the life of a successful intellectual abroad into dreamland) is presented by the writer from a different angle: as a debunking of the 'myth' of life in the United States, and this helps the reader to see the realities in an unusual critical interpretation. The artistic world of the novel is an 'invention' of O. Zabuzhko, which is due to her individual style: the existence of a disappointed woman in love through the prism of the creative process is a 'creation' of paintings, poems, essays, articles, her own life.

The desire to communicate with the reader can be traced in the writer's prediction of their opinion about the characters of the novel, which O. Zabuzhko introduces in the work: 'national masochists' and 'autistic maniac' (Zabuzhko 1998: 46). But O. Zabuzhko seeks this communication with an intellectually 'advanced' reader, who has to be oriented in nuances. For example, when depicting the financial insolvency of Mark, Rosie's husband, it is emphasized 'even being a full professor, he is, of course, unable to pay' (Zabuzhko 1998: 46). Full professor is a literal translation from the English of 'full professor', which is equal to the Ukrainian title of professor, awarded by the Ministry of Education for normative achievements, resulting in a certain percentage being added to the salary (33% in Ukraine). So, if Mark was a full Professor, his salary would be higher, and maybe he could pay for his wife's psychoanalyst. But when O. Zabuzhko writes 'full professor', these allusions encourage the reader to make complex thinking and interpretations (Belimova 2022).

O. Zabuzhko debunks the 'myth' of the American dream and high material security of US citizens when he introduces a gallery of characters of scholars into the context of the novel: Mark and Rosie. 'Rosie [...] has been seeing a psychoanalyst for the seventh year in a row' – in her marriage she is deprived of sexual relations with her own husband: '[...] in the sixth year [...] they stopped fucking' (Zabuzhko 1998: 46). The relationship between man and woman is conflictual in all nationalities. The writer encodes this conflict as 'psychological problems' (Zabuzhko 1998: 46), in which she introduces the relationship between the heroine Oksana and the artist and the correlation in the married couple of the full professor. And no one can solve these problems: 'problems are problems, and society tells

us to solve them according to four actions: given A, given B, they can be added, multiplied, divided, rearranged… the answer… someday we will be shown it. Someday each of us will read our own answer – though it will be too late to change anything' (Zabuzhko 1998: 47). Because of the inability of man and woman to find the way to each other, the gap appears: 'and a burning horror grips you when your leg hangs over the emptiness, from where invisible vapors slowly smoke that devastating, bone-sucking longing' (Zabuzhko 1998: 47).

With irony, O. Zabuzhko reflects on the smile, which is a mask of American mental culture, hiding the real pain, which the personality has to cope with independently, without bothering others. This is symbolically reflected in linguistic communication: 'How are you doing?… Fine'. 'Fine' in the work becomes a sign of despair, which is the tragic reality of the life of the heroes of the novel: Chris, Ellen, Kati, Alex. In the emotional routine behind the daily response 'Fine', 41-year-old Chris 'has breast cancer, has been going to radiation for five years now' (Zabuzhko 1998: 50). Zabuzhko illuminates the emotional loneliness of the 50-year-old sexy lady Ellen with a touch of bitter humor that descends into irony. Ellen has doomed herself to eternal youth: 'she drowns herself with work' (Zabuzhko 1998: 50). The paradox is depicted in the medical examination by a gynecologist, which is usually a rather unpleasant procedure for most women, however Ellen 'just adores visits to the gynecologist – every time she has an orgasm on the chair' (Zabuzhko 1998: 50). Ellen desires male attention with all her might, and therefore has to lie about her life, stating that is full of sexual adventures. The 60-year-old Kati is afraid to retire. All three heroines have feelings particular to their age, which are built in a sequential growth: 40 – 50 – 60. But they are all unhappy and lonely. The only man whose age is not indicated by a number stands out as 'oldish' (Zabuzhko 1998: 51). The writer also portrays the Yugoslav Alex with irony: narcissistic, nostalgic for the past (he feels like a Yugoslav even after the collapse of his country, Yugoslavia), always emphasizing his own achievements: 'Alex does not hear himself from the outside, he also does not see or hear anything from the outside, he is completely absorbed in an enthusiastic eulogy to himself – to his books' (Zabuzhko 1998: 51).

The writer outlines the problems of Oksana and the artist as the intuitive jealousy of a woman to the process of her husband's creativity, and here the conflict moves from the plane of woman / man to the dimension: woman / artist. The most important thing for Oksana's chosen one is creativity, love for art, desire to join the process of painting:

> 'I have always wanted one thing to be realized... Smell, smell how it smells...' he leaned, lustfully flaring his nostrils, over the case of freshly purchased paints, escatically closed his eyelids (what a luxury these American stores are, what is there, oh bitches, look, look! I was furtively fondling a silky sheet of Chinese rice paper, how much does it cost? oh, what a sponge, touch it, it's alive! and the canvases are already stretched, well, damn it, and what is this, whitewash? How much? They'll choke, fall down, that's it, let's get out of here, and suddenly he would abruptly brake on the spot, gasping for air with the agony of untiring thirst: do you smell it?), she liked this predatory intentionality, in vain that it was not directed at her, in vain that she only got the remains from it: she also loved the word in a thoughtful way first of all for its sound (Zabuzhko 1998: 47).

This scene depicts the woman's jealousy of the creative process, despite the fact that she herself is an artist: 'in vain that it was not directed at her, in vain no matter that she only got the remains from it'.

O. Zabuzhko reveals the phenomenon of language in two hypostases: 1) language as space in the specific feeling of the writer, 2) Ukrainian language as a sign of genetic patriotism of the heroine Oksana. 1) Language as space is defined by musicality, magic, dimension: 'the *language* [...] in front of the audience shrank around you into a transparent, changeable, fluttering [...] ball, in the middle of which [...] some kind of divination was taking place: something was living, pulsating' (Zabuzhko 1998: 16); 'your own text protected you from abuse and humiliation, you read as you wrote by voice, led by the self-moving music of the poem' (Zabuzhko 1998: 17). Here a complex narrative intersection is built: the pronoun 'you' indicates a dialogue in the work of

the heroine-writer with herself: she seems to be talking to herself about herself – the text defended you; you read. 2) The Ukrainian language is defined as a refuge for a representative of a nation and ethnic group, especially when this individual is territorially separated from their native geographical space, a painful aggravation in situations of indistinguishability of Ukrainian from Russian: 'is it not Russian? [...] listening only to your own text, hiding in it, as in a lighted house at night, entering and locking the door behind you [...] your home is the language' (Zabuzhko 1998: 16).

Abroad, the native language is dying. This is felt by the heroine Oksana, who is a 'stranger', and it is confirmed by the narcissist Alex: 'the reserves are depleting, and for the first time there's a gloomy expression on his face: there is such a thing' (Zabuzhko 1998: 52). O. Zabuzhko reveals the depths of the Ukrainian mentality, highlights the problems in the unsuccessfully formulated national idea, critically explains the choice by the ruling circles of the text of the national anthem, the meaning of which does not allow to get out of the past troubles: 'all that Ukrainians are able to tell about themselves is how, and how much, and in what way they were beaten [...] little by little you begin to be proud of this' (Zabuzhko 1998: 84). It is in the hymn that the writer notices this landmark that becomes a national virtue, the essence of which causes criticism of Celtic descendants: 'friends from Cambridge were laughing when you translated the beginning of the national anthem for them' (Zabuzhko 1998: 84–85).

As a contemporary of the writer, I agree with her criticism. Why was this poem by P. Chubynskii chosen? We have many achievements: the deeds of Prince Igor, which are recorded in the *Slovo*, the *Book of Veles*, the deeds of Iaroslav' the Wise, the wisdom of Hryhoriy Skovoroda, scientific discoveries of the twentieth century... Why do we keep returning to our unfree past, even after gaining independence?!

And this affects all the representatives of Ukraine, whose life is a continuous burden that cannot be got rid of. O. Zabuzhko exposes the influence of the energy of words on people's lives at a personal, psychological level: 'rejoice and be glad that you did not die, poor sexual victim of the national idea [...] and for what it seems, life without love [...] it would be better to die, [...] or even better not to be born' (Zabuzhko 1998: 85).

Here, ironically, one can read O. Zabuzhko's pain for the Ukrainian people. The writer defines the national idea as the basis of the relationship between a man and a woman. The inability of Oksana and Mykola to be together is exacerbated in the United States, when from a distance one can better see the gap that has always been there. In Ukraine, it was intuitively psychologically felt, physically responded as pain, but it was in a foreign country that the 'strangeness' of the Ukrainian, whom Oksana mistakenly wanted to see as 'her own', became more acute.

The catharsis is depicted by the introduction of plot twists. The tragedy is revealed in the humorous accumulation of obstacles on the way to the long-awaited meeting with the beloved. But the meeting is not an approach to each other, but the heroine's epiphany: being together will not work. The writer uses a repetition: 'you are open to evil' (Zabuzhko 1998: 86; 91; 92). The repetition is introduced three times and italicized in the text. 'Evil' is conventionally symbolically encoded by everyday troubles, technical inconsistencies, weather conditions, which are graded in the process of physical approach to the beloved: 'a torn sandal' (Zabuzhko 1998: 87); 'all United flights delayed' (Zabuzhko 1998: 87); a change in the time of a possible flight; an unplanned overnight stay in Washington with distant acquaintances; a Pakistani taxi driver who does not know the way; menstruation (Zabuzhko 1998: 90–91). The writer portrays the dear one as a ridiculed tragedy. It is a path to enlightenment: this man is not her man. Already on the road she feels irritated: 'I left Cambridge for him' (Zabuzhko 1998: 87); 'to meet a brilliant Ukrainian artist who doesn't know a word of English (idiot)' (Zabuzhko 1998: 87–88). Here, opposites are pretentiously juxtaposed, forming a stinging implication of irony: 'brilliant' / '(idiot)'. The man turned out to be a 'stranger': 'How could you be so blind, poor fool? Blinded like that – at a time when everything was speaking, shouting, calling out to you in a direct language?... you were in love, ay, you were sure that you could ("I can do everything!") do what one person cannot do for another alone, fish' (Zabuzhko 1998: 93).

A man cannot offer equal relations, there is arrogance, she claims, but this is the maximum he is capable of. The pride of the artist is the reason for the impossibility of kinship. Pride is manifested in the confidence of one's own unsurpassedness: 'he

was already churning [...] with a screw [...] only a frightened pride, a burning fear, lest, God forbid, "people should say" (oh, mother province, how Khvylovyi would sigh!) that it was she who left him, pulled him out of his native soil, carried him across the ocean and abandoned him, that, they would say, *kobieta*' (Zabuzhko 1998: 96). Intertextually, the name of Khvylovyi establishes an intersection with the comprehension of the tragic fate of the artist (Arey 2022) and his heroes (Kryvoruchko 2022a).

The syntax of the novel consists of lengthy compound sentences. Some of them are as long as 6 pages, e.g. pp. 18-23 (Zabuzhko 1998: 18–23), which are a chapter of the novel. The sections of the novel are defined by spaces in the text. The text itself is written in block letters, in which the author's emotional and ideological accents are italicized. The prose text includes poems by the writer. But the poems are written as in scientific articles: the lines are separated by a slash /. 'Something has shifted in the world: someone shouted / Through the night my name, as if tortured / And someone on the porch layered leaves, / turned over and could not sleep / I learned the science of parting: / the science of distinguishing between pain that is sick / And pain that is life-giving (someone wrote) / Letters to me and threw them into the stove, / without writing a line). Someone was waiting / For something from me, but I was silent: / I was learning the science of parting' (Zabuzhko 1998: 18).

The poems are highlighted in bold italics. This way of writing poems fits into the genres of the scientific style of an article or monograph, the purpose of which is research, which subtextually echoes the title of the novel *Field Studies in Ukrainian Sex*. The emotional poems express the writer's idea: the eternal separation of man and woman throughout all time. People passionately love each other, but cannot be together.

The idea of separation is also realized by the leading messages, which the writer also emphasizes in bold italics, for example 'This man will hurt you' (Zabuzhko 1998: 17).

The biographemes are introduced by O. Zabuzhko throughout the novel and intensify at the end, after Oksana and Mykola's separation, when the author talks about the origins of her formation: her family, father and mother. And here, through the emotional fabric of complex sentences, the biography of a real person emerges (Zabuzhko 1998: 104–11). O. Zabuzhko was

born in the family of an 'unreliable Ukrainian', a patriot who did not accept the totalitarian pro-Russian Soviet regime, for which he was arrested and sent to a labor camp. Therefore, throughout her childhood and adolescence, the writer behaved very cautiously, as she was always surrounded by spies, boys/young men who worked for the special services of the USSR government. Oksana's fear was a genetic component of her worldview: 'Fear started early. Fear was inherited – you had to be afraid of all strangers (anyone who showed interest in you was actually sent by the KGB to find out what you were talking about at home, and then those uncles would come again and put daddy in jail' (Zabuzhko 1998: 103). The novel introduces the images of the boys who tried to provoke her – an excellent student 'with a Leninist sparkle in his eyes', who asked about Oksana's knowledge of forbidden Ukrainian patriotic activities (Shteinbuk 2022). O. Zabuzhko introduces this text in Russian: 'the Ukrainian writer Vynnychenko, haven't you read? [...] and about the Ukrainian People's Republic, and about emigration [she listened without doubting who was in front of her, sweetly dying from the near danger], she froze him [...] in a drumming pioneer voice ['Atryad! Ravniy! Smir na!'], confessing that she was not interested in all that emigrant scum, at a time when the international situation was so complicated and tense, and that she was always outraged by young people listening to various radio voices' (Zabuzhko 1998: 104). With these memories, the writer conveys the oppression of the 'Ukrainian' in the USSR, in which she was forced to live. Although at home she saw the true reality, the extermination of Ukrainian culture, because of which her father suffered; he 'listened in the evenings, with his ear to the ground [...] memoirs of the dying Snegirev, listed the operated entrails, beaten kidneys and bladders, insulin shocks, noisily inserted probes, pools of blood [...]: Marchenko, Stus, Popadiuk...' (Zabuzhko 1998: 104–05). O. Zabuzhko's father was a Ukrainian patriot, and the writer was 'daddy's daughter'.

One biographema is the poverty in the writer's childhood, in which the majority lived at that time: 'one dress is a school uniform, petal-white frayed at the elbows, went to school parties [...] in a borrowed blouse and a short, pioneer still, white-top-black-bottom, skirt' (Zabuzhko 1998: 105). The novel introduces the biographeme of the theft of

the brassmatic 'from the lightly opened briefcase of the queen of the high school' (Zabuzhko 1998: 106). The family was supported by the mother, as the father did not work because he was not hired after the camps. In the context of 'Ukrainian sex', the writer depicts the life of a mother, a child of the famine of 33 years old, whom she sympathizes with, and whom she defines as frigid with a taste of pain: 'my mother was innocent, like a lamb, or rather the Virgin Mary' (Zabuzhko 1998: 107), stating with great sadness that this generation was hungry throughout their lives: 'they wanted to eat in their twenties, to eat and nothing else! to choke on student ration bread, to stuff handfuls into their mouths and arms, picking up crumbs, they never learned what a clitoris is' (Zabuzhko 1998: 107). Hunger was a physical block to the discovery of corporeality and sexuality.

Other biographemes are the images of his mother and father, about whom O. Zabuzhko writes with compassion and understanding, as Ukrainian intellectuals who were not allowed to realise their full potential: 'mother, singing birds, officious lamb, was writing her dissertation on poetics in a communal "Khrushchevka" [...] but she finished the dissertation, just in her seventy-third year, and made with it' (Zabuzhko 1998: 107). Alongside intellectuals, O. Zabuzhko introduces the image of a 'boor', a neighbour who lived next door and spoiled life with her hopeless primitiveness and rudeness: 'a cook from the worker's canteen, the one who was supposed to "manage the state" (a single mother with five children from five men, who threw rags and broken teeth into the pot of borscht)' (Zabuzhko 1998: 107–08).

O. Zabuzhko herself is the pride of her parents. Defending her PhD thesis in philosophy was an important event in the life of the writer's mother: '...the day of the defense (what the hell was it for!) was her holiday, she rejoiced like a child, "if only daddy were alive!"' (Zabuzhko 1998: 108). Biographemes are also features of portrait/character traits: mother was a guitarist, father died of cancer (Zabuzhko 1998: 111).

Emotionally, O. Zabuzhko concludes her novel with conclusions, which are the leading idea: as a problem to be overcome, the writer defines the fear and slave mentality of the Ukrainian people, which can be saved and revived only with the help of love, the consequences of which will be the discovery of individual sexuality in everyone

who wants it: 'Slavery is infection with fear. And fear kills love. And without love are children, poems, and paintings – everything is pregnant with death' (Zabuzhko 1998: 112).

In the complex syntax of O. Zabuzhko's novel *Field Studies in Ukrainian Sex*, which is a sign of the writer's idiostyle and demonstrates her orientation towards the intellectual reader, the desire to revive communication is realized. Allusions to previous literature (Khvylovyi) are an attempt to revive the tradition: the forbidden, the best in Ukrainian literature, intellectual and sensual, innovative. The plot evolves through the complex syntax of the heroine's analysis of her own inner feelings through her past loves; the retrospection of relationships, which revives the 'story of the narration', establishes a linear sequence of collisions that turn into a conflict: man / woman. O. Zabuzhko revives the plot and intrigue, faith and universal values, tries to find connections, turns to science, religion, psychology to clarify to the reader the essence of the problems of communication in an attempt to find the truth, to come to oneself (author O. Zabuzhko / heroine Oksana).

The novel presents one narrative, the narrative instance of the author-heroine; there is a transformation of the genre through the synthesis of artistic and scientific styles. This provides a convenient plane for the probability of creating autofictionalism.

O. Zabuzhko's novel is created in keeping with postmodernism aesthetics, which the author uses as a tradition: she both opposes and imitates it. O. Zabuzhko deepens the poetic thinking on writing. Among the oppositions of postmodernism it is appropriate to determine the rejection of the image of the artistic world as chaos, the rejection of fragmentation, the denial of the variability of truth. The peculiarities of art criticism include the revival of faith, the existence of universal values, the search for 'connections', the linearity of the plot, the trust in the meta-narrative, where science and religion are explanatory systems of knowledge. O. Zabuzhko revives 'history', which is presented as an evolutionary process. The heroine Oksana is actively involved in modern realities, the time of the events depicted in the novel is the present of the late 90s of the twentieth century, which in the work is linear, consistent, evolutionary, historical, in the earthly space.

The biographemes in the novel can be documentary material that is necessary for the analysis of other works of the writer, as it highlights the subtexts and allows to better understand the views and aesthetic techniques of O. Zabuzhko.

Autofictionalism is manifested in the combination of the empirical author O. Zabuzhko and the explicit author in the image of the main character Oksana, who is not identified with the real author. The biographical fiction of *Field Studies in Ukrainian Sex* is only an imitation of the biography of the real author O. Zabuzhko, who is the heroine Oksana. There is a certain indecision in the narrative, which demonstrates the angle of view in Oksana's story from her inner perspective, which is the focus of her worldview. O. Zabuzhko invents Ukrainian authenticity and difference to interpret 'own' and 'foreign'. The novel shows an orientation to the 'connection' of the work with reality, which makes its impact on the community possible. Oksana tries to know and understand the man she loves too much, herself, and the modern world around her. And although the writer addresses 'ladies and gentlemen'/the reader, the complex syntax of the work demonstrates her desire to prove how cool she is, which subconsciously shows that O. Zabuzhko is oriented towards herself, writes for herself, tells herself. She is her leading reader, not 'ladies and gentlemen'. And this is good, and let 'ladies and gentlemen' catch up if they want to understand such a wonderful narratologist. Euripides said that he came to teach the people, not to learn from the people. So, let's learn from our best contemporaries, and be grateful for having them.

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Papers

Persida Lazarević Di Giacomo

Il paratesto come pretesto: l'autobiografia di Pavle Solarić

This paper analyzes the autobiography of Pavle Solarić (1779-1821), friend and closest collaborator of Dositej Obradović. The work was actually configured as part of a paratext, being the preface to Solarić's own translation of *Von der Einsamkeit* (1773; it. transl. *Saggio sopra la solitudine*, 1804), a work by German physician and philosopher Johann Georg Ritter von Zimmermann. While Zimmermann addresses the concepts of loneliness and sociability, Solarić describes his own understanding of friendship, relationships and loneliness, and he does so by interweaving the narrative with autobiographical data. He dwells in particular on his country of origin and his family, but also writes about his desire to pursue his studies and face existence as a hermit. In the course of the narrative he often refers, in more or less explicit forms, to Obradović, his constant point of reference. This is what emerges, for example, when he proposes to live according to models of asceticism and holiness, when he aspires to visit major centers of study (but unlike Obradović he prefers Serbian ones, such as Sremski Karlovci), when he rails against superstition, when he admits that he too harbors prejudices against his fellow man, when he gives authors precise instructions on how to address Serbian readers, or when he launches the idea of converting monasteries into schools and monks into teachers. The narrative of his life ends in January 1809, at the time when his translation of Zimmerman's text came out. It is thus an autobiography that projects its author into the future since from that year onward Solarić began to publish his theories in the field of philology. More than a pretext for autobiography, this paratext is a pretext for the popularization of his philological project.

Circa 24.000 battute spazi esclusi, si direbbe oggi. Più o meno dodici cartelle. Questa l'estensione dell'autobiografia di Pavle Solarić (1779-1821), amico e più stretto collaboratore di Dositej Obradović (1739/42-1811), il principale illuminista serbo. Solarić nacque a Velika Pisanica, nei pressi di Bjelovar (Croazia), in una famiglia di sacerdoti. Studente liceale a Zagabria e a Sremski Karlovci, nel 1779 iniziò a frequentare l'Accademia Reale delle Scienze di Zagabria completando la sua formazione nel 1803. In seguito si recò in Italia, prima a Padova, poi a Venezia, dove trovò lavoro come correttore presso la tipografia di Pano Teodosio dedicandosi anche alla letteratura e alle scienze. Sempre a Venezia, nel 1804, diede alle stampe il primo libro di

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geografia in lingua serba (in realtà si trattava della traduzione dal tedesco di un testo di Adam Christian Gaspari), che ebbe grande risonanza nella cultura serba dell'epoca. Tra le sue opere più importanti si annoverano: *Ključić u moje zemljeopisanije* (1804), *Pominak književski* (1810), *Bukvar slavenski triazbučni* (1812). Non riuscì tuttavia a portare a termine il suo lavoro principale, *Jeroglifika serbska*. Nel 1818 fece pubblicare a Buda *Mezimac* di Dositej Obradović, con un'ampia prefazione. Morì a Venezia tre anni dopo.

Un testo, quello di Solarić, che nel titolo evita accuratamente le parole *život*/*žitije*, o in alternativa *životopisanije*, come invece voleva la tradizione serba, e che in compenso si fa notare per la presenza di *Predislovije*, cioè "prefazione". In effetti era la prefazione che Solarić aveva scritto per la sua traduzione dal tedesco di *Von der Einsamkeit*, l'opera del medico, filosofo e naturalista svizzero Johann Georg Ritter von Zimmermann (1728-1795). Il nome di Zimmermann, in realtà, si lega a quattro testi: il primo è *Von der Erfahrung in der Arzneiwissenschaft* (Sull'esperienza nella medicina) del 1764, dedicato all'esperienza e all'osservazione empirica in rapporto al pregiudizio, mentre gli altri danno vita a un trittico sulla solitudine: *Betrachtungen über die Einsamkeit* (Considerazioni sulla solitudine) del 1756, *Von der Einsamkeit* (Della solitudine) del 1773 e *Über die Einsamkeit* (Sulla solitudine) del 1784-1785. I titoli mettono in luce l'evoluzione della speculazione filosofica di Zimmermann su questo tema (Dehrmann 2020) ma anche la diversa modalità di approccio: così nel primo testo, *Betrachtungen über die Einsamkeit*, raccolta di scritti di carattere morale, filosofico e religioso in forma di aforisma – alcuni poetici, altri metaforici –, Zimmermann avvia una riflessione sulla sua esperienza di solitudine e amicizia con se stesso. Il secondo testo, *Von der Einsamkeit*, tradotto da Solarić, è più sistematico del primo e racchiude due argomenti che saranno fondamentali per *Über die Einsamkeit*: il primo è la ricerca degli impulsi naturali che orientano l'uomo alternativamente verso la società e verso la solitudine, con echi della teoria di Anthony Ashley-Cooper, conte di Shaftesbury (1671-1713), il cui pensiero influenzò Leibniz, Voltaire, Diderot, Lessing, Herder (Fowler et al. 1911: 765), ma anche due scozzesi come Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), professore di filosofia morale a Glasgow, e David Hume. L'altro nodo è rappresentato dalla critica

all'ascetismo monacale, mossa in particolare contro il pietismo (cfr. Bergmann, Hippler 2017; Bound Alberti 2019; Domeracki 2022: 28).

La terza opera, di portata monumentale, si compone di quattro volumi. Il testo muove da alcune interpretazioni della solitudine, intesa come disposizione dello spirito e momento in cui l'anima si abbandona alla riflessione. Quando si prova piacere per la condizione di isolamento e silenzio, oppure quando con il pensiero ci si distoglie da tutto ciò che ci circonda, è in quell'istante che si è soli. Ma tale definizione presuppone due forme di solitudine sensibilmente diverse: da un lato vi è la solitudine nello spazio, quando l'individuo si ritrova solo nella sua dimensione fisica, calato in un altrove remoto, lontano dai suoi cari, pur continuando a mantenere il contatto con il mondo naturale. Era l'esperienza vissuta dallo stesso Zimmermann sulle Alpi Bernesi, oppure il sentimento che prova un pastore immerso nella natura, ambiente che più gli è congeniale. Di contro vi è la solitudine interiore, che si manifesta ogni volta che l'uomo si astrae dalle relazioni sociali e dalla realtà dei sensi: è il caso dei monaci chiusi nei loro monasteri, oppure degli studiosi che spendono una vita intera votandosi alla ricerca. Dal testo si evince come Zimmermann propendesse per la prima forma di solitudine. Di esse aveva già fatto cenno in *Betrachtungen*, dove menziona per la prima volta Shaftesbury. In proposito Zimmermann scrive: "Einsamkeit ist eine Lage der Seele, in der sie sich ihren eigenen Vorstellungen überläßt. In Genusse wirklicher Absonderung und großer Stille, oder auch nur durch Wegwendung der Gedanken von dem, was uns umgiebt, sind wir einsam" (Zimmermann 1785: 3). Nessun monaco solitario, nessun eremita, osserva Shaftesbury, è veramente solo. La stessa considerazione vale per il saggio, ma quanti sono i saggi nel mondo? È sempre Shaftesbury ad affermare:

> We can be sure that no reclusive religionist, votary, or hermit was ever truly *by himself*. And thus, since neither lover, author, mystic, or conjurer (who are the only claimants) can truly or justly be entitled to a share in this self-conversation, it remains that the only person who is entitled is the man of sense, the sage, or philosopher (Cooper 2017: 5).

La citazione prefigura in modo compiuto la differenza tra "solitudine sociale" e il solipsismo teorizzato da Shaftesbury, espressione visibile della corrispondenza tra solipsismo e ogni forma non autentica di solitudine. La solitudine autentica, invece, è prerogativa dei saggi, gli unici a trarre beneficio dalla rinuncia alle cose del mondo, primo passo per ambire a quella condizione che consente di osservarsi dentro. È il concetto di *nosce te ipsum* (γνῶθι σαυτόν), nodo centrale dei suoi diari già nel 1753, nonché asse referenziale di un altro testo di Zimmermann, *Von der Diät für die Seele* (Della dieta dell'anima), del 1764. Qui la figura del filosofo e quella del medico si fondono (Zenker 2007; Rydberg 2021), dal momento che Zimmermann era in grado di applicare il suo sapere a beneficio degli altri solo dopo aver compiuto l'analisi su di sé, anche se questo modo di procedere lo allontana da Shaftesbury. Per quest'ultimo, infatti, la filosofia si identifica principalmente con una terapia, come emerge dai suoi diari intitolati *Askemata*, scritti tra il 1698 e il 1707. L'uomo è prima di tutto un paziente e solo in un secondo tempo diviene il medico di se stesso.

Fedele a questo impianto teorico Solarić inizia la sua prefazione-autobiografia al libro di Zimmermann. Confessa di essere portato, come ogni uomo, all'amicizia, anche se già da fanciullo tendeva a evitare la compagnia e prediligeva la solitudine, quella particolare forma di solitudine che si prova anche quando si è circondati dalle persone (Solarić 2019: 342). In questa occasione fa esplicito riferimento ad Alexander Pope, citato da un'edizione francese: "* Pope, Essai sur l'Homme (Lyon, 1761). Epit. IV. P. 171". Si tratta dell'opera *Essai sur l'homme, Nouvellement traduit de l'Anglois, Avec des Notes critiques; et un Discours sur la philosophie angloise*, dove a pagina 71 vi è un passo ripreso da Solarić e tradotto in serbo ("Онај који бјежи, онај ненавиди људе, или иште удивитеља, или жели пријатеља."): "Celui qui évite, celui qui hait l'humanité, ou cherche un admirateur, ou veut un ami" (Pope 1761: 71). L'opera originale di Pope è pubblicata a Dublino nel 1733 con il titolo *An Essay on Man: In Epistles to a Friend*. Contenuta nel testo *Epistle IV. Of the Nature and State of Man with respect to Happiness*, la citazione in inglese è: "Who most to shun or hate Mankind pretend, / Seek and Admirer, or would fix a Friend" (Pope 1733: 41).

Nel passo citato Solarić (2019: 342) afferma di non disprezzare il suo prossimo, anche se talvolta doveva evitare la gente per una serie di circostanze che lo riguardavano da vicino: posizione sociale, fede, paese d'origine, famiglia, carattere. In un momento di difficoltà della sua vita, senza dubbio più critico di quelli che aveva dovuto affrontare Dositej Obradović in giovinezza, Solarić era stato affascinato dai luoghi remoti. Sollecitato dalla fantasia e dalla lettura degli *žitija*, si era proposto di intraprendere una vita ascetica. Gli *žitija* (agiografie) sono il genere letterario con più attestazioni nella letteratura medievale serba. Trattano di sovrani e di capi religiosi, di santi, re o arcivescovi, tutti rigorosamente inseriti in una cornice storica e considerati nella loro dimensione spirituale. Ma se nelle agiografie bizantine il sostrato storico è meno marcato perché a prendere il sopravvento sono le visioni e i miracoli, nelle agiografie serbe la narrazione dei fatti occupa un posto di primo piano, mentre l'aura di leggenda viene dopo e soltanto a conferma di quanto esposto (Trifunović 1964; Trifunović 1990; Juhas-Georgievska 2018).

Solarić ritratta da subito le sue posizioni. Intuisce infatti che aspirando alla vita ascetica potrebbe peccare di presunzione, giacché lo *žitije* presenta una duplice morale, incarnata ora dal santo inteso nella sua individualità ora come modello per gli altri. Di qui la ragione per cui Solarić evita di soffermarsi sui risvolti soggettivi e al contrario accentua gli aspetti in cui i lettori non hanno difficoltà a riconoscersi e a identificarsi. Di conseguenza lo *žitije* appare fitto di luoghi comuni. Se Solarić da un lato definisce il suo racconto *žitije*, dall'altro il lettore può accorgersi, a partire dal passo successivo, che tale voce assume una diversa accezione, come sinonimo di *autobiografia*, che all'epoca di Solarić si alternava indistintamente alla parola che alla lettera significa "biografia del santo". Vi sono infatti altre attestazioni di questo uso, come ad esempio *Žitije Petra Velikog* (Venezia 1772) di Zaharije Orfelin, *Žitije Svjatih Serbskih Prosvetitelja Simeona i Savi* (Vienna 1794), *Žitije svjatago i pravednago Josifa prekrasnago* (Venezia 1804) di Vikentije Rakić, e ancora *Žitije Teodora Pavlovića* (Novi Sad 1857) di Konstantin Peičić. In realtà, secondo lo stesso Solarić, il racconto potrebbe essere letto come uno *žitije*, ma non è quella l'intenzione dell'autore che, oltre a non volere mettere in rilievo la sua persona, non si considera "eletto" e tanto meno una figura esemplare. Piuttosto

Solarić desidera cimentarsi nel *žizneopisanije*, la descrizione della propria vita. Descrizione che non dovrebbe tradursi in un modello inarrivabile perché, come insiste Solarić, in quelle pagine egli mette a nudo alcune debolezze per farne partecipi i lettori visti quasi come complici, giacché tali debolezze sono comuni tra i serbi. In questo senso Solarić si propone di accompagnare i lettori nei meandri dell'esistenza umana per metterli in guardia dai pericoli più frequenti (Solarić 2019: 341). E tutto questo è possibile, come egli ripete, in forma di autonarrazione, perché gli esempi tratti dalla realtà quotidiana sono più efficaci di quelli che fanno leva sull'astrazione o la teoria.

Ha così inizio il racconto della sua vita, a metà strada tra agiografia e autobiografia, e come ogni autobiografia presenta i tratti peculiari del genere, tanto più palesi nel modo in cui è affrontato il rapporto verità-finzione letteraria (Grdinić 2003: 668). Solarić, al pari di Obradović, osserva la sua esistenza dalla prospettiva del presente. Quando nel gennaio 1809 firma a Venezia la prefazione è molto giovane, poco più che trentenne, mentre Obradović pubblicava la prima parte della sua autobiografia, *Život i priključenija* (1783), a 44 anni. Nella narrazione inserisce episodi della propria vita seppur contestualizzati, come se questo suo procedere rispondesse a un piano prestabilito. Nonostante tutto, la narrazione di Solarić non è solo un'esposizione di fatti vissuti, ma è anche la testimonianza diretta di come vedeva e interpretava questi fatti in un preciso periodo storico, perché, come ogni autobiografia, il presente dell'autore incide sulla comprensione e l'interpretazione del proprio passato. E per l'amico di Obradović, nonché suo più stretto collaboratore, il passato non può che avere inizio da stesse premesse. Pertanto, se la premessa del pellegrinaggio di Obradović consisteva nell'adeguarsi ai modelli proposti dalla cultura e dalla scienza nell'intento di imparare cose nuove, tale considerazione vale anche per Solarić (2019: 342), che si prefiggeva, come lui stesso racconta, di visitare tutti i centri di studio serbi. Eppure la vita lo mette di fronte a una diversa realtà, cosicché di tutti i maestri conosciuti ne apprezza solo tre, mentre a uno non può che rivolgere biasimo. Di nessuno di costoro, in quel passo, fa il nome, ma nelle pagine successive dichiara di avere trascorso quegli anni "senza genitore, senza mentore, senza guida", proprio quando sentiva la necessità di un punto di rife-

rimento. Più avanti (Solarić 2019: 350) citerà un suo caro maestro e amico di Karlovci, Andrej Volný[1].

In quel passo Solarić riporta qualche dato biografico: ricevette la prima educazione, per la verità alquanto trascurata, nella casa paterna di Velika Pisanica, tra Virovitica e Bjelovar (Croazia), mentre per ciò che concerne la formazione successiva non poteva lamentarsi (Solarić 2019: 342). Aveva avuto infatti la fortuna di apprendere la "nostra" scrittura (si riferisce con tutta evidenza all'alfabeto cirillico), il tedesco e il latino, insieme a tante altre materie che stimolarono la sua curiosità. L'autobiografia fu per lui l'occasione di riportare qualche dato circa la storia della sua famiglia: il bisnonno era *vojvoda* e insieme a un fratello con lo stesso titolo e a un terzo fratello, sacerdote, si era stabilito in quel villaggio nella prima metà del secolo precedente. In seguito Solarić indugia nella descrizione delle vicende del nonno Paun, adottato dall'archimandrita Nikifor Popovič che gli aveva lasciato manoscritti e libri in greco e in latino portati dalla Russia. È lo stesso Solarić a confermare che nella casa paterna le muse lo "accarezzavano". Segue il ricordo del padre, autore di una "Guida per la conoscenza della Terra e dei popoli" in lingua slava, breve testo che secondo il progetto iniziale avrebbe dovuto essere più esteso.

Se da un lato il suo spirito aveva di che nutrirsi, dall'altro Solarić ammette di provare interesse anche per la superstizione, così radicata nelle famiglie del tempo. Come lui stesso racconta, era venuto molto presto a conoscenza di alcuni episodi curiosi che voleva approfondire. L'ostinazione ebbe la meglio, "они различни многотаинствени словеса смисал" (Solarić 2019: 343), e in breve riuscì a scoprire il significato delle espressioni misteriose con cui anziani, stregoni e fattucchiere accompagnavano i loro gesti durante gli incantesimi. Aveva raccolto formule magiche per ogni occasione e quando il padre lo venne a sapere ne fu turbato, ignorando che Pavle desiderava solo pubblicare questo materiale (Solarić 2019: 343-344). Si trattava di espressioni ora ridicole, ora orribili e grottesche, ora licenziose. Si era anche reso conto del legame che correva con i miti dell'antichità greco-romana: a testimoniarlo erano

[1] Andrej Rafael Volný (1759-1827), botanico e mineralogista slovacco, fu anche professore e direttore del ginnasio di Sremski Karlovci (Petrović 1991: 112-118).

alcuni racconti slavi nei quali *Vesta*, *Vještaja*, *Sivila* o *Vila* altro non erano che nomi greci o latini neppure troppo dissimulati. Muovendo da tali premesse lasciò la casa natia per viaggiare tra diverse genti e conoscere nuove superstizioni: "Овако сам отишао од дома међу друге људе, и међу нова забабонства" (Solarić 2019: 344). Un secondo richiamo a Obradović, peraltro implicito, si coglie quando Solarić ammette che già nella giovinezza non era vittima delle superstizioni, così diffuse tra gli anziani e le popolazioni arretrate. Ma tutto ciò bastava – si domanda – a fare di lui un non-superstizioso? Forse fu dopo l'incontro a Padova nel 1803 (Solarić 2019: 325; Pavić 1979: 116; Lazarević Di Giacomo 2013) con Obradović e con il fisico Atanasije Stojković (1773-1832), il quale nella sua *Fisika* (1801-1803) stigmatizzava la superstizione presso i serbi, che Solarić sentì il dovere morale di affrontare una questione così delicata, soprattutto se in rapporto con l'onnipresente tradizione popolare. Ancora giovane aveva compreso che le superstizioni erano di diversa natura e alcune non venivano considerate tali dalla gente comune, bensì annoverate tra le abitudini e i rituali della vita quotidiana. Solarić affronta allora il concetto di libertà dello spirito e intuisce che seguire l'esempio dei saggi era un impegno meno gravoso che rinunciare alle usanze dettate dalla superstizione. In proposito si rifà al libro del teologo e scrittore tedesco Karl Friedrich Bahrdt (1741-1792), *Ueber Preßfreiheit und deren Grenzen. Ein Wort für Regenten und Schriftsteller*, del 1794, seconda edizione del volume *Ueber Preßfreyheit und deren Gränzen. Zur Beherzigung der Regenten, Censoren und Schriftsteller*, pubblicato nel 1787. Il passo che Solarić cita e traduce in serbo recita:

> Und endlich ist es psichologisch gewiß, daß im Alter frisch angepflanzte Ideen das Triebwerk nicht haben können, was Ideen haben, die in der Kindheit eingeprägt worden, und in der Seele gleichsam vermachsen. – Man muß sich daraus die oft misgedeutete Erscheinung erklären, daß Leute noch auf ihrem Sterbebette ihre Aufklärung ängstlich verlassen, und ihre Zuflucht wieder zum alten Glauben an die Autorität genommen haben (Bahrdt 1794: 16).

In nota Solarić sottolinea che il libro di Bahrdt andrebbe tradot-

to a uso dei lettori serbi. In particolare gli era sembrata rivelatrice l'affermazione dello scrittore tedesco, quando sosteneva che le idee appena formate in età avanzata non possono avere la medesima forza propulsiva che hanno le idee che si imprimono nella mente durante l'infanzia e che, per così dire, scaturiscono dall'anima. Ciò spiega il fenomeno, spesso male interpretato, secondo cui gli individui, anche in punto di morte, abbandonano con timore l'"illuminazione" e tornano a rifugiarsi nel dogma dell'autorità.
A questo punto Solarić riprende la sua argomentazione rimarcando che il sapere più grande consiste nel conoscere se stessi, trasposizione del *nosce te ipsum* che era l'asse referenziale di *Von der Diät für die Seele* di Zimmermann. Apprendere dai libri, prosegue Solarić, era il metodo di gran lunga più efficace, di qui la ragione del suo amore appassionato per le opere a stampa: "и отуда превелика охота моја к чтенију" (Solarić 2019: 345). Del resto era venuto a sapere che alcune pubblicazioni erano invise non solo alla religione, e quindi fatte oggetto di anatema, ma anche agli stessi governi. Tutto ciò lo aveva condizionato al punto che quando gli capitò tra le mani un volume in grande formato scritto "nella parlata croata" ("хорватским нарјечјем списану књигу"), ossia in alfabeto latino, non si trattenne dal gettarlo in una stufa, perché già dalla copertina lo aveva giudicato blasfemo. Eppure, ammetterà a distanza di tempo, ignorava gli argomenti trattati: poteva essere un libro utile ("могла је бити полезна књига"), ma questa sua considerazione giungeva troppo tardi. Il passo testuale sul pregiudizio riprendeva quello formulato da Obradović anni prima in occasione dell'incontro degli uniati a Zagabria, quando al colmo dello spavento era fuggito dalla città. Più tardi Obradović avrebbe commentato:

> Anche ora, quando ripenso a quella vicenda, mi fa orrore quanto sia terribile il pregiudizio! Quegli stessi ragazzi, miei coetanei, che poco prima avevo guardato con indicibile gioia, come se fossero cari fratelli e parenti, saputo che erano uniati, mi apparvero diversi, come fossero terribili nemici che desideravano e invocavano la mia rovina (Obradović 2007: 142).

Solarić si rifà di nuovo a Obradović e alla sua autobiografia, quando racconta che a sedici anni non sapeva bene il tedesco,

anzi conosceva più il latino che la lingua di Zimmermann. Il serbo, cioè "Jezik naš", gli era familiare nella parlata popolare, ma la lingua letteraria si rivelava ostica, perché non era stata appresa dai libri. Unica eccezione era l'autobiografia di Obradović, che ebbe occasione di leggere, come ricorda, solo più tardi (Solarić 2019: 346). Era venuto a sapere del libro di Zimmermann grazie a un amico che aveva una buona conoscenza del tedesco: solo per tale motivo aveva osato sfogliare la pubblicazione, peraltro proibita. Zimmermann aveva infatti criticato e poi sfidato l'ideale cristiano dell'eremita che vive in un isolamento totale, sostenuto da ideali come solitudine e ritiro. Non a caso faceva riferimento al libro autobiografico di Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, pubblicato postumo nel 1782, dove lo scrittore ginevrino consegnava un'immagine di sé come di colui che aveva rinunciato alle lusinghe del mondo per dedicarsi all'esplorazione del proprio io. Due anni dopo Zimmermann, commentando quel libro nella seconda parte del suo *Über die Einsamkeit*, sosteneva di coglier-vi riverberi del carattere profondamente malinconico di Rousseau. Riallacciandosi a Petrarca, Zimmermann nella sua opera del 1756 aveva dato risalto all'aspetto terapeutico della solitudine, assimilata a un ritiro, anche se ritiro produttivo e non sterile isolamento dalla società. Segue, da parte di Solarić, una lunga digressione sui libri messi al bando e sui popoli: a suo dire anche presso i serbi circolavano libri proibiti o di dubbia utilità, mentre gli autori avrebbero dovuto dedicarsi ad argomenti più validi per la collettività (Solarić 2019: 347).

Rispetto a Obradović, che cercava le risposte ai suoi interrogativi al di fuori dell'ambiente culturale e religioso serbo, Solarić operò in senso opposto: suggestionato dalla spiritualità del Sinai o del Monte Athos, aveva saputo che a Sremski Karlovci, all'epoca sede della Chiesa ortodossa serba nei territori sottoposti alla monarchia asburgica, era vissuto in solitudine alla metà del Settecento, non lontano dal monastero del Fruška Gora un uomo singolare. La gente del luogo lo avvicinava e lo colmava di favori, mentre i cattolici lo osteggiavano. Viveva come un santo e compiva piccoli miracoli, tanto da ricordare a Solarić un eremita conosciuto nell'infanzia e che aveva visitato la sua casa. Da tutti era chiamato il Santo Giovanni, camminava lungo i vigneti e non chiedeva a nessuno ospitalità per la notte, nemmeno durante gli inverni più rigidi. Era

solito raccontare storie stravaganti che la gente ascoltava con curiosità. Si aggirava per le strade seminudo e aveva unghie lunghissime. Si faceva notare per il suo carattere e si rifiutava di rispondere alle domande stolte. Dal canto suo Solarić non identificava in questi personaggi curiosi il modello canonico dell'eremita, anzi, li scartava, sostenendo che l'unico monaco serbo, "пустињическу пештеру – пустињика Сербина", era in realtà lo storico, teologo, scrittore e poeta Jovan Rajić[2].

Solarić si sofferma su Sremska Mitrovica, l'antica Sirmio, dove aveva potuto osservare lo stuolo di pellegrini che faceva sembrare la città una sorta di Gerusalemme. È a Sirmio – non in Russia, e neppure a Vienna, Parigi o Londra, come nel caso di Obradović –, che Solarić va alla ricerca del sapere, anche se ammette di non aver trovato condizioni migliori o peggiori dei luoghi visitati in precedenza, dal момента che la gente è la stessa ovunque: "Ja сам, по неким малим училиштам, и триљетном пребиванију у једном јавном воспиталишту, дошао у Срем за науком: нашао ништа више него грјешне, боље и горе, људе као и код нас" (Solarić 2019: 351).

Proprio come Obradović, scrive di avere soggiornato nei monasteri serbi anche per due mesi, per poi capire che non si sarebbe potuto trattenere lì per sempre: "но не вјековати" (Solarić 2019: 349). Anche in queste parole si coglie un esplicito richiamo a Obradović, più evidente quando la sua guida nel monastero lo esorta ad abbandonare la vita monacale e a intraprendere la strada dello studio:

> Levati dalla testa deserti, grotte e santificazioni: di questo oggi le persone ragionevoli si burlano. Al giorno d'oggi chi si spaccia per santo o è un truffatore o un visionario. Ricerca e desidera il più possibile lo studio; non c'è vita peggiore di quella dello sfaccendato e dell'ozioso. Per quanto mi è stato dato di conoscerti, se tu non ti impegnerai nello studio, ti pentirai di esserti fatto monaco; tu non sei fatto altro che per i libri (Obradović 2007: 118).

[2] Jovan Rajić (1726-1801) è noto alla cultura serba soprattutto per la sua *Istorija raznih slovenskih narodov, najpače Bolgar, Horvatov i Serbov* (Storia dei diversi popoli slavi, specialmente Bulgari, Croati e Serbi) del 1794. Per un periodo Rajić soggiornò presso il Monte Athos e lì consultò preziosi documenti inediti, necessari per la stesura della sua opera storica.

Segue la raffigurazione della grotta degli eremiti ("peštera"), attraverso un procedimento narrativo insolito per Solarić, i cui scritti scarseggiano della descrizione di ambienti chiusi. È un passo breve, eppure testimonia che la sua fonte d'ispirazione non erano tanto gli *žitija* (Solarić 2019: 351), quanto la grotta dei Cimmeri, la spelonca dell'"ignaro sonno", con un rimando al libro XI delle *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio. Se da un lato Solarić provava ammirazione per gli eremiti, dall'altro, proprio come Obradović, condannava i monasteri e i monaci, tanto da voler trasformare i luoghi di ritiro spirituale in scuole e convertire i monaci in maestri, e tutto ciò per un solo fine: il bene comune, ossia quella "opšta polza" tanto cara a Obradović (Lazarević Di Giacomo 2011). Ed è con queste note che si chiude (Solarić 2019: 351) l'autobiografia di Solarić, autore che sostiene di aver vissuto molte avventure al punto che ricorre, per il titolo della sua breve opera, alla voce *priključenija*, con un evidente richiamo all'autobiografia di Obradović. Anche Obradović aveva voluto scrivere qualcosa di utile per i serbi, come confessa nella *Lettera a Haralampije* (1783), destinata a un sacerdote della comunità serba di Trieste: "Il mio libro sarà dunque dedicato a chiunque comprenda la nostra lingua e con cuore giusto e puro desideri illuminare la propria mente e migliorare la propria natura" (Obradović 2007: 257). Quanto segue è un lungo discorso sull'illuminazione e su cosa fosse utile per i serbi, intercalato da riferimenti circa la comune origine di serbi e slavi dai Sarmati, un tema caro a Solarić e presente in molti dei suoi scritti. Il messaggio è esplicito: non bisogna temere i "libri liberi", dipende tutto dall'uso che se ne fa (Solarić 2019: 354), e sia i serbi sia gli altri slavi, in quanto discendenti dei Sarmati, sapranno usufruire degnamente del sapere. Palese il rimando, per l'ennesima volta sulla scia di Obradović, al valore dell'istruzione e dell'educazione, così come alla formazione dei giovani e alla pubblicazione dei libri: grande sarà la sua stima nei confronti di chi saprà dedicarsi al proprio popolo componendo qualcosa di utile e buono nella sua stessa lingua.

Solarić termina la prefazione – dunque l'autobiografia – con la frase con cui Zimmermann aveva concluso la prefazione all'edizione del 1773 della sua opera e cioè: "Ma in tutti i miei scritti vi si trova d'incorreggibile certo difetto, sul quale, si tosto ch' essi comparvero al pubblico,

dalla mia gioventù fino a questo momento piombarono costantemente addosso dal Sud al Nord le maledizioni del mondo. Questo difetto è appunto il mio amore per la verità" (Zimmermann 1804). Conscio dei propri limiti e degli errori commessi, Solarić si dice pronto a rimediare, ma intende in primo luogo far sapere ai lettori che ha parlato di temi concreti e reali, e sempre con spirito sincero. Alla fine di questa sua autobiografia "paratestuale", proprio perché mimetizzata da prefazione, la verità torna a galla. Quella verità tanto cara a Solarić in tutti i suoi scritti. Non ci si deve dunque meravigliare se la frase ricorrente anche nel suo manoscritto incompiuto sull'origine degli slavi dal titolo *Roda slavenskoga početak, razmnoženije, porodi i izrodi* (v. Lazarević Di Giacomo 2020), sia proprio: "Ella è una verità storica...". Perché nel racconto che Solarić fa di sé compie uno sforzo notevole per una duplice finalità: innanzitutto seguire le orme di Obradović, cosa che in queste poche pagine avviene di continuo e secondo più prospettive. L'altra finalità, tratto saliente del testo, è che l'autore non può non essere sincero con se stesso e neppure può tradire il filologo che è in lui. Dopo la partenza di Obradović per la Serbia, avvenuta una sera di giugno del 1806, dove in un'osteria di Trieste si era dato appuntamento con i suoi più fedeli collaboratori, Solarić si era assunto l'impegno di proseguire il cammino propugnato dal "Socrate serbo", cioè dare alle stampe quei libri che avrebbero potuto elevare il suo popolo. Che fossero il frutto di una traduzione fedele o un semplice adattamento, tutto ciò non aveva importanza. Piuttosto, quei testi occorreva pubblicarli senza indugio. Solarić tenne fede alla promessa e le traduzioni cui si dedicò si confermano tali, non adattamenti come quelle cui mise mano Obradović. Ma questa autobiografia *sui generis* permette anche di seguire la profonda metamorfosi avvenuta in Solarić, da seguace e collaboratore di Obradović a filologo per eccellenza, depositario di saperi e dotato di grandi capacità interpretative. E poco importa se negli anni a seguire alcune delle sue ipotesi sull'origine degli slavi non accolsero il favore dei più importanti studiosi, ma furono al centro di critiche. Solarić aveva fatto del suo meglio per divulgare con passione al mondo intero la genesi del suo popolo.

Perché è proprio quando lavora a questa breve autobiografia che Solarić plasma la sua identità. È vero che scrive a distanza di tempo rispetto alle vicende della

sua vita che precedono di molto il 1809, anno di pubblicazione. Ed è altrettanto vero che nessuno può confermare questi eventi, se non i suoi scritti. È la sua attività ad avvalorare questa operazione di "true writing". Nel momento in cui scrive avviene in lui un cambiamento, la sua vita assume una direzione inedita e l'autobiografia prende forma prima ancora di essere un progetto di scrittura. L'anno successivo sarebbero usciti a Venezia il catalogo dei libri della casa editrice Teodosio, *Pominak knjižeski*, e il *Dialoghista illirico-italiano* di Vikentije Rakić con la sua *Jeroglifika srbska*, due testi che fanno il punto delle ricerche filologiche di Solarić nel campo della storia, della cultura e della lingua degli slavi. Diventano perciò irrilevanti le interazioni del personaggio letterario Solarić con altre figure di questo racconto, se così si può chiamare. Non occorre un raffronto di dati per accertare se quanto è esposto corrisponde alla realtà. Senza trascurare che nella storia letteraria serba non sono molti i dati su Solarić e la sua opera (Andrić 1902: 105).

L'autobiografia si segnala in ogni caso per un aspetto inconfutabile: viene prima di un testo sulla solitudine e insiste proprio su questo messaggio. Solarić si conferma in questo modo una figura a sé nella letteratura serba (Andrić 1902: 104), l'icona dello studioso che vive del suo lavoro, ma ancor prima un filologo nel vero senso del termine. L'autobiografia appare per certi versi anacronistica: l'autore procede a passi levati, sorvola sul suo passato e ha lo sguardo costantemente rivolto in avanti. È il "non-detto" la vera cifra di questa autonarrazione che anticipa parte delle ricerche. Più che una autobiografia che ripercorre il vissuto è una promessa *in fieri* che l'autore fa di fronte al suo popolo, la presa di coscienza di una personalità incline alla vita solitaria e tanto più salda perché sostenuta dalle verità con cui vuole illuminare il mondo intero.

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Materials and Discussions

Peter Flew

Greshniki

This creative text details the author's impressions of people and events that took place in Russia in 2003. It recalls 'Greshniki', a nightclub in St Petersburg that hosted gay rights organisations and offered a space for people on the margins to meet. Names and descriptive details have been changed to protect identities.

* * *

Later, I would think of 'Greshniki' as the cradle of our lives. It was shortly after the millennium, a time when gay life existed in the half-light of Peter's 'abstract and intentional' city. A whisper between two worlds, it murmured in the fading courtyard at dusk, and on the street corner at dawn. 'Greshniki', or 'Sinners', was a threshold in between, blending night into day. There, you recognised the men you encountered fleetingly outside. Those men who stood behind you on the escalators. Who ate their meal politely in the restaurant alone. Whose glances seared as you fixed on your book. However, in 'Greshniki', these inchoate figures took bolder form. In that damp building by the Griboedov canal, gay men searched for others and themselves too. As a man of nineteen, I made my own relationships behind its vast steel doors. I drew close to those men from Vasilievskii island and far-flung Krasnosel'skii. They shared with me the loose threads of faith and sexuality across the divide. With one, I explored further than small-town England had allowed. Writing at a distance, twenty years on, I understand that we danced with the shadows and were the captives of our unconscious hinterlands. 'Greshniki' brought our fractured selves together before we lapsed into lives apart.

(i) Day

I first entered 'Greshniki' on a Saturday afternoon in the spring of 2003. It was the venue for 'Kryl'ia' [Wings], a Russian gay rights organisation. My landlady smiled quizzically as I left for the city centre. Although Natal'ia was friendly and caring, we danced gingerly around the questions of romance. The silence that surrounded my inner life in England had stalked me to her kitchen. When pushed, I made up a girlfriend. I returned the conversation frequently to her dream of a holiday in Prague. Getting out of Natal'ia's flat meant a modicum of fresh air. My reasons for being in Russia were opaque. There was a desire to learn the

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language, to 'understand' the culture, but also a naïve search for connection, a place called home. I had discovered 'Kryl'ia' in an internet café as I searched for ways to join the faint dots of my adolescent experience. As loneliness enveloped me, I looked to 'Kryl'ia' to overcome my sense of estrangement, which had been magnified by St Petersburg.

From *marshrutka* to metro, the anonymous tower blocks of Prospekt Zhukova were swapped for classical facades. Despite the receding winter, the canal by 'Greshniki' remained frozen. Next door, the Kazan' Cathedral looked lumpen and grey. Just like the gay pub in my faded seaside town, I had to knock to be let in. As I waited, a familiar sense of isolation bred inside. A pair of eyes glared from a hatch in the door before I was shown upstairs. Alexander Kukharskii, the founder of 'Kryl'ia', met me in the corridor. In his late fifties, he had once been a university professor; his sexuality had strangled his career. With warmth and curiosity, he showed me to a seat where a small group drank tea in silence. The room was sticky with beer, its dusky light filtered through painted glass. As we waited, a young man with long hair entered. He scanned the assembled group before sitting by my side. Kukharskii welcomed us before another attendee moved forward to read a paper on literature. The man with long hair noticed my confusion. Guessing a linguistic barrier, he interpreted scraps of the proceedings. Regardless, I failed to make sense of the talk. The meeting felt formal, even academic. I did not appreciate Russia's tradition of the circle (*kruzhok*), nor the significance of gathering in that way. In Bristol, I had gone to Old Market Street to discuss condoms and medication. In 'Greshniki', it was poetry of the Silver Age.

I sat with my interpreter friend afterwards in a coffee shop on Nevskii. Misha laughed at my incomprehension as we watched the pedestrians tramping by. Why had I come to Russia, how had I found 'Greshniki'? I had no neat answer for him. 'Kryl'ia' was the only place Misha came to meet gay men in Petersburg. Although he was a regular, he told me he preferred to observe rather than lead the charge. In fact, his passions lay elsewhere. He was twenty-seven and worked in the education department at the Hermitage, where he was an expert on religious art. He spoke ecstatically about the paintings. For him, they were icons, gateways to transcendence not experienced elsewhere. He invited me to join his training programme before our second coffee was ordered. The offer was generous, but one I struggled to accept immediately. Rather than commit, I left an empty pause as our drinks were served.

Natal'ia stared archly as she passed the phone to me the next day. Misha had called and he invited me for tea that afternoon. He proposed going to the flat where he lived with his mother. Despite my reservations, I agreed to go. Misha was concerned I would get lost; he came all the way to Kirovskii zavod to collect me. His English was precise, and he articulated words in a staccato over the rolling noise of the metro. Conversation with Misha dwelt on religious and cultural themes. That day, on the escalator of Vasileostrovskaia station, we talked about homosexual men in Russian history. Meanwhile, the man behind us was eavesdropping. He interjected to confirm that Gogol' was most certainly gay. He flashed a grin as he passed us at the exit turnstile. Even Misha was shocked that a stranger could intrude on such a 'delicate' matter. I noticed quickly how gay men in St Petersburg were attuned to risk. What seemed innocent could quickly turn into trouble. I recognised it as the pervasive fear of the classroom, a feeling that I thought I would escape in my move from home.

Tea was grander than I had anticipated. His mother shifted plates of salad around a large mahogany table. There was little room to spare for the glasses of sweet wine she wanted to set down. Although she spoke little English, we only talked after she left the lounge. He directed me to the food; once or twice, he briefly touched my hand. Misha had never discussed his sexuality with his mother, though the question had lingered between them since he was a child. His awareness had developed at a young age. He recalled running his fingers over the huge granite atlantes of the New Hermitage as his mother lifted him to the stone. He was mesmerised by the veins on the enormous feet. They seemed to pulse as each toe arched to resist the pressure from above. From the vantage of adulthood, he saw that as the moment that augured something new, a knowledge that would test his faith. For me, it was seeing a lone man with his bike in Patterdale. Something stirred as I saw him leaning against the dry-stone wall from the back window of the family car. These were silent moments, when question marks were traced, and another world came into view.

My time with Misha was spent mostly walking the lines of Vasil'evskii, where conversion could flow. Beyond a momentary touch of the shoulder, or a brush of the hands, we kept physically apart. On these walks, we frequently returned to the topic of religion. I shared Misha's childhood immersion in Christianity. He grew up in Orthodoxy, while I was formed in English nonconformism. Curiously, we had both toyed with monasticism in our youthful devotion. While the Baptist Church had

little outlet for eremitic prayer, Misha went to the Orthodox seminary. There he hoped to submerge, or struggle against, his homosexuality. However, he was expelled when an affair with a fellow seminarian was revealed. The matter was handled discreetly, and his departure was made to look like his choice. When friends and family asked what had happened, he claimed it was a matter of religious conscience. Shortly after, he converted to Catholicism. It was then that he embraced the religious art of the West. He described the Hermitage as his cocoon and told me how he prayed in silence before Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son*. The only vestige of his Orthodoxy was his long hair. However, in the context of 'Kryl'ia', and the gathering social winds, it seemed to signify transgression rather than obedience.

Misha asked several times if I had thought more about his programme, but I felt conflicted. I struggled to separate an act of kindness from feeling corralled. There was no common language that would simultaneously make me feel safe and give Misha the connection he desired. I let the gaps between the calls lengthen, before letting the phone remain in Natal'ia's hand. It was the inarticulate withdrawal of an inexperienced young man. I sometimes think about that first afternoon tea on the island and the photo his mother showed me that day. It was of her son kneeling before John Paul II, whom Misha had met in Poland the year before. A hesitant smile was traced on his lips as the pontiff's hands lay on his head. He looked at total peace. His mother glanced between her son and the image with an all-encompassing pride. Perhaps there, under the pope's hands, amid the worlds Misha occupied, he found a moment of feeling whole. I did not attend another meeting of 'Kryl'ia' and would return only to 'Greshniki' at night. Some weeks later, I inadvertently saw Misha leading his students around the Hermitage. We both broke into flushed smiles, before continuing our separate ways.

(ii) Night

It was late spring; the snow had thawed. After weeks sat in Natal'ia's kitchen, I was longing for some excited pleasure, the thrill of a cavernous beat. From up high, I could trace the dusty tracks that lead to the trolleybus. I had been fearful of going out at night. Now I could no longer supress my instinct. 'Greshniki' was the only place I thought to venture in my search. I sat alone on Nevskii and picked at salmon *bliny* while sipping a beer. I mustered my courage. In Bristol, the few forays to the clubs of Frogmore Street had felt thrilling. It had been an adrenaline rush to wave at my schoolfriends as they passed by. However, I had

been left unmoored by St Petersburg. I was unsure about what to do, how to behave. As I approached the entrance of 'Greshniki', a multitude of scenarios unravelled. What had been anonymous in the light of day, seemed disconcerting as the night drew near.
A pair of eyes glared through the small grate; the wait to enter was interminable. Inside, 'Greshniki' felt less a portal to liberation, than a break from the storm. Compared to my earlier visit, it seemed uncluttered. There were no cups and saucers lying around, no idling dust motes in the air. Instead, a profound darkness shrouded the bar. The only light came from the strobes, which were punctuated by bodies walking through the beams. The atmosphere seemed heavy, underscored by the convulsive music. The only place I could sit was on the seating wrapped around a rostrum on the dance floor. I rested there awhile and observed the room filling up. The majority were lone men looking hard into their beers. Every so often, they paused to flash their eyes across the room; I searched for a momentary glance. In this thick mood, the music made me feel comatose. However, that feeling of somnambulance was soon broken. As I swept the space before me, I was kicked in the head by a dancer twisting above on the rostrum. Alone in his movements, he carried on circling. I felt my head for blood, but only my dignity had been bruised. However, while most looked away, I was met by a hesitant smile. After I returned to the room with a fresh beer, I saw it again. Slowly, I was drawn into its orbit.
Pavel spoke little English and so I tried to speak Russian. In the dark of the club, I learnt he was a year older and studying history at the university. On the metro ride home, he told me he shared a room with his mother; they lived further south in Krasnosel'skii. That morning, as the day broke across the suburbs, the sky curled with dark reds against the deep blue. Something promising emerged in the silence between our questions. I felt at ease, and we swapped numbers before I left the trolleybus. Natal'ia was alert to the speed with which I retrieved the handset later that day. She grinned as she passed over the phone; the blush on my face compounded the confusion. Over a few short phrases, I agreed to meet Pavel that afternoon.
It was a bright day on Nevskii, the kind that retains something of the winter. I could see Pavel in the distance wearing a leather jacket to break the chill. He greeted me with a shy glance, and we searched each other as if to detect the remains of our first encounter. Our footsteps soon fell into a regular pattern, and we explored the streets toward the river. The conversation was hesitant, the stillness punctuated by the

odd question. We established reference points – 'do you like Elton John?', 'have you heard of Zemfira?' – before we lapsed into a studied reserve. He pointed to different statues and took me to his favourite cathedral. The incense from the morning remained in the air, vespers was yet to begin. I lit a candle, the first in an Orthodox church. Despite the linguistic distance, there was something reassuring about being with him. Only St Petersburg intruded on this calm. By the New Hermitage, two lads cadged a couple of cigarettes. They had no obvious malign intent but looked at us with derision. We paused to smoke as we waited for them to move away. Above us, the atlantes struggled to shoulder all the weight. From the moment Pavel lit my first cigarette, something flickered into life.

Shortly after, I went to his communal flat. It was 2003 and these *kommunalki* continued to exist. While my area was dominated by 90s high-rises, his was peppered with stubby blocks from an earlier age. Even today, those southern suburbs still dominate the Petersburg of my mind. The bathroom and kitchen were shared, while his room was divided by a linen sheet. It was a sunny afternoon, and we sat with his neighbours drinking beer. A huge German Pointer called Dan loped around and munched on slices of sausage. I was a curiosity at the kitchen table. Bogdan, who lived down the hall, made playful jokes at my expense; his girlfriend, giggled mischievously. Neither asked how I had met Pavel, but they understood enough from the ellipses in our conversation. This Russia was welcoming, friendly, almost open. It was not the heaviness of the street, but the intimacy of home. Drink flowed; we laughed. Even Pavel's mother, whose skin was pale and careworn, found a moment to smile. She smoked incessantly and sparred playfully with her son. That night, she slept in a neighbour's bed, while Pavel and I settled on the sofa in their room.

As the dry months beckoned, several weeks were spent in that flat. It was a hazy summer that followed the shifting sun over the kitchen table. We travelled rarely to the centre and did not return to 'Greshniki'. Instead, we watched TV, drank beer, and prepared *pel'meni* at home. Behind the dusty curtain, the sexual embrace occurred in the daily rhythm. We ignored the constant hum of the *kommunalka* as we touched each other in tender silence. These were new experiences for me, like nothing I had explored at home. In that small pocket of St Petersburg, we learnt to move a little more freely in the world. After the bright mornings entangled together, we would walk on the scrubland between our homes. Once or twice, we made it as far as Prospekt Zhu-

kova; Natal'ia smiled as she sat us down for dinner. Later, we sometimes entered a neighbourhood church. Pavel's faith was easier, more experiential. His was a religion of icons and candlelight. We drew close as we murmured our prayers in the dusky warmth. It was not my faith, but I discovered something in the words. Meanwhile, a looming despondency gathered. I had no prospect of being able to stay in Russia. Even if it was possible, Pavel questioned whether we could withstand the city. Yet while he hoped to leave, he was not able to settle abroad. As my departure drew near, our romance peaked with an almost breathless desperation before it shrugged into its conclusion. On the escalator down to the metro, we whispered half-heartedly, 'What will I do without you?'.

On the evening before I left St Petersburg, Pavel gave me a family icon. Initially, I refused the gift, but his mother pressed it into my hands. It was a depiction of Tikhon Kaluzhskii stood in the hollow of a tree, where he was said to have lived in quiet contemplation. The icon was of a type found in villages across Russia: late nineteenth century, ten by eight centimetres, painted on tin. Having passed it down the generations, they now wanted me to take it to England. I accepted the gift and left the next day. Years passed before I heard from Pavel again. Despite a two-year sojourn in Spain, he had remained attached to St Petersburg and decided to return. At one point he taught history in a school, later he worked in real estate. His mother died in 2014. I told him the icon of Tikhon remained on my bookshelf; he said he was glad it stood in my home. Despite his reassurances, I felt it was not mine to keep. One day, far in the distant future, I will return it to him.

(iii) 'Greshniki'

In his short story *The Reservoir* [Vodoem, 1989], Evgenii Popov depicts the ghostly vision of two skeletons on a raft in the water. They are the spectres of two gay men. As they grip one another, they softly sing the refrain of a well-known pop song: 'There's no need to be sad, life goes on'. Before death, these men had lived in the half-light. Only as ghosts did the locals of the reservoir understand they were gay. I did not go behind 'Greshniki''s doors again. It closed for the last time in 2008. Perhaps now, all these years later, things are different, but I am not so sure. In Moscow, last summer, young gay men gathered for techno parties and were visible in the parks on the river. Yet those I met all wanted to leave. Berlin was a popular choice. Since 2022, that seems even more remote. I wonder too, what has happened to that older genera-

tion of men who went to 'Greshniki'. The toll of being compartmentalised leaves a lifetime of scars; I can trace their outline as middle age draws near. Did the men of 'Greshniki' slide further into the margins, or did they manage to escape? Or are they like Popov's skeletons, living between two worlds, longing for a lasting embrace?

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Connor Doak, Callum Doyle

Interview with Evgeny Pisemskiy: LGBTQ+ Activist

Evgeny Pisemskiy is an LGBTQ+ activist from Russia, where was the director of an LGBTQ+ organization that was declared a foreign agent. He had to flee Russia and now lives in the UK where he continues his activism supporting the LGBTQ+ community in Russia and abroad. The interview below was conducted in July 2022.

Interview by Connor Doak and Callum Doyle. Translation by Callum Doyle and Matilda Hicklin.

* * *

Callum: Why, when, and how did you become an activist?

Evgeny: It's a very long story. It all started when I went to a HIV organization. In 2000 I found out that I was HIV positive. Back then there was no internet or really any sort of information on HIV. And for a while I lived with the belief that in just a few years I would die. Then, just as the internet was becoming popular, I got chatting with other HIV positive people and they told me about a peer support group for people living with HIV, where they would meet up and socialize. Although I found it absolutely terrifying, I decided to attend these meetings. The story of my activism began the very moment I arrived there. For around six months, I listened and watched these people. They seemed very strange to me, because I believed I was going to die whilst they had all sorts of life plans. I found it all a little odd. But I then came to realize that HIV wouldn't kill me. In fact, it was a source of strength. Through this organization, it was possible to learn about HIV and help other people living with it.

Connor: Could you say a bit more about this sense of hope? What prompted this sudden desire to carry on living?

Evgeny: Well, first and foremost, I saw people who weren't going to die. They had children. They were planning to study at university and mapping out their careers. More generally, I also now had access to information on HIV. I found out that it was no longer a deadly disease and there were HIV medications, although these weren't available yet in

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Russia. But it was possible to get this medication and live my life to the fullest. I remember that the story of Greg Louganis really inspired me. He was a three-time champion of Olympic diving, openly gay and openly HIV positive. I read his story about how he had already lived with HIV for around 15 years: he wasn't going to die and he was an openly gay HIV positive man. This was a real-life example that life with HIV was possible. The combination of all these experiences truly changed my life. I used to go to the AIDS centres, which were these special medical institutions for people living with HIV. It was this separate healthcare system that people with HIV could go to for treatment. Of course, activism had been around for a long time. In the UK, HIV patients were treated through the NHS, but Russia devised a whole separate system for HIV patients due to the huge amount of discrimination and stigma. Doctors believed that HIV positive people would be safer if they were separate and that's why they established this divided healthcare system. But we were talking about activism, and it was this story of Louganis, an openly gay and openly HIV positive man, that had a positive impact on me.

Connor: Did you ever get a chance to meet Louganis in person?

Evgeny: In fact, I did, many years later. It just so happens that in my life I always tend to meet the people I want to meet. At some point, I was given Elton John's book *Love is the Cure* as a gift. The person who gave it to me said, 'Zhenya, I hope you read this in English and end up meeting him one day because he's hugely inspiring and did a lot to stop the AIDS epidemic.' I've met Elton John four times and he signed his book for me. And since I always end up meeting the people I want to meet, I also met Greg Louganis. He came to Russia, I think, in 2018 and he was making a film about his life. The organizers of the film festival invited me, and I was so ecstatic that I was going to meet the person whose story had motivated and inspired me. I have a great story about our meeting. In his film, Greg Louganis gives one of his Olympic medals to his trainer. Back then one of the NGOs in Russia had invited me to take part in a half-marathon that would include people living with HIV, and this event was going to demonstrate that people living with HIV are just as healthy as everyone else and can do anything they want to. I essentially trained for four months completely from scratch, and I ran the half marathon and finished with a good time. So, at this meeting I gave

away my own medal, too, as a kind of symbol of my achievements. Everyone there was on cloud nine. It was awesome.

Connor: Could you tell us more about the peer support group? What did this group offer you that the government or doctors couldn't?

Evgeny: Well, human beings are extremely social creatures. It's very important for people to have examples of others, just like how it's important to feel safe and feel like you belong. Every peer support group is effectively founded upon some sort of mutual assistance. What I mean by this is that someone really understands another's problems because they have gone through similar things themselves and therefore they know the best way to help. The group I was part of was called Positive and its founder was Nikolai Nedzel'skii, who has now sadly passed away. I'd say that he was the most famous HIV activist in Russia, and he raised a whole generation of Russian activists. For a long time at the start of the AIDS epidemic he interned and studied in the USA. He was very close friends with one LGBTQ+ and HIV activist, Cleve Jones, who created the AIDS Quilt movement and was an associate of Harvey Milk. Nikolai was a very important person in my life and, above all, he was the first openly gay person I ever saw. In a nutshell, I was surrounded by people whom I trusted, and I felt safe.

Connor: And, from there, what led you to activism? How did it happen?

Evgeny: If I'm being honest, HIV dramatically changed my life. I had really always wanted to be a doctor but because I was bad at Russian I failed to get into medical school twice. I failed my Russian exam so I went to study at a technical college. First a vocational school, then a technical college and then an institute. HIV meant that I started to focus on healthcare issues and I began to be involved in what I had wanted to from the start. HIV shaped my life in many ways. Firstly, I sometimes joke that I'm a victim of propaganda, but in a good way. Going to the organization and receiving help for my HIV was my turning point. I was infected with HIV through drug use, not sex, and when I went to this gay organization, it was essentially that: a gay organization. I saw gay people in the flesh and, apart from the fact that I was going through a process after finding out about my HIV status, another very important process started within me. I started to accept my sexuality. I

saw myself initially as bisexual, and then after some time I realized that I was gay and wasn't bisexual at all.

Essentially, HIV was, for me, a kind of trigger that set my life on an entirely different course. To start with, I was able to start working in the field that I wanted to be in, and after half a year in the organization there was training for volunteers. It was very serious training, there was stiff competition to get in, there were exams, and a large percentage of people failed. To be honest, it was the first time I encountered such a high standard of care. The way it works is that the organization invites you to be a volunteer and then provides you with lots of resources. But if you don't pass the exams, or get the answers wrong, then they simply won't let you be a volunteer.

I remember how stressed everyone was. I remember how many people cried when they didn't make it. Thank God, I passed the exam and for about three years I worked as a volunteer on the HIV helpline. The organization had a site, which was quite well known, called aids.ru, but unfortunately it no longer exists. This site inspired me to make Parni Plus (Guys Plus), a website and media organization for the LGBTQ+ community. Essentially, I copied the model that Nikolai had taken from America and told us about. I saw how it could be used to inform and teach others and I used this to create my own organization. I saw it as an epidemic of people exchanging their skills to help one another, and I think I managed to do the same. It works as follows: one person gives information to another person, and this continues creating an ever-growing movement. After I started working as a volunteer, they began to notice my efforts. And after a while, they offered me a job and I had to accept. At that time I had been working as an engineer but I didn't particularly enjoy it. They offered me a position working for the magazine *Steps* [Shagi], a journal for HIV positive people. And there was another magazine *Round Table* [Kruglyi Stol] for HIV specialists. I worked extensively in the sphere of HIV and was kind of becoming a specialist. I was also studying a lot and after a while I started to work on my own projects on sex work in Moscow. At that time there were more than 100,000 sex workers in Moscow, working on the streets. It was very easy to go to certain places by car and pick a girl and pay for services.

Connor: Remind us, what year was this?

Evgeny: I think it was the early 2000s, maybe around 2003, 2005, 2006. I was working in one of the largest HIV organizations and I had lots of opportunities to learn, and so I invested in myself.

Connor: And tell us more about your own organization, Parni Plus, and how it was founded?

Evgeny: To get there, let me say a bit more about my volunteering and my job. As I said, in the best way possible, I was a victim of propaganda. I started to work in a group in which there were openly gay people, and it really helped me to accept my own sexual orientation. And after a while, I found a husband, and my work helped me do this. If I recall correctly, our first date was when I invited him to see me at work, at my volunteering job. It made a big impression on him because it was a very cool organization. I invited him and he was very interested in it. Well, regarding my organizations, the one that was registered was Phoenix Plus. Parni Plus is one of Phoenix's projects. We founded Phoenix Plus on 6 June 2006: 06/06/06. I'm not joking, it's really six-six-six. We ended up founding it because our whole team in the previous organization had been sacked. It was awful. My husband and I had just bought an apartment in Orel.

We stayed in Orel, and I was interested in seeing what it would be like to live in a small city. It was there that I founded the organization. At first, I created a peer support group for people with HIV. And as I've already said, with all this experience I already had, I was able to draw on it and develop the organization in this provincial town. We quickly registered and became the leading organization in our region. In Russia we have federal districts, and we were the leading organization in our district, which included Moscow and 16 regions. We got started up pretty fast. We created a network of mutual assistance services in Orel, which consisted of a self-help group, consultations, social support, and working with the AIDS centre. We started to implement the same plan across all the regions. We went to every city and figured out how we would work with the AIDS centres and hold seminars for people with HIV. Then we invited the most dynamic people to come to Orel for training seminars. We taught them, assisted them in registering organizations and helped them to get their initial funding. I worked on this for around three years. This job was probably my first achievement which I was extremely proud of. There's an award in HIV services that's

called the Red Ribbon Award, a kind of Oscar for working with HIV/AIDS.

Connor: Is it a global award?

Evgeny: Yes, it is a UN Development Award. UNDP established this award, but I can't remember how the nomination works. But at that time around 600 organizations from all over the world had submitted applications for the award. We were included in this 600 and only ten won the award. We were the first Russian organization to win the award, and this really mobilized communities affected by HIV. It was an extremely touching moment. I have another story that I'd love to tell you. The first time I went abroad was to Thailand. Every two years they hold an enormous global HIV conference, and I was invited. It turned out to be the most popular conference they had ever held, with 40,000 people in attendance. I really didn't expect that the application would be accepted. I went to the conference, but I felt like a spare part.

Connor: Explain what you mean by that.

Evgeny: I just didn't feel like a part of the community. To me it was a sort of trauma, you know. It really affected me because I went to this conference and saw 45,000 people and I thought they were so awesome; they were all chatting to each other about their cool projects. It was very inspiring. But I didn't feel like I belonged to this group.

Connor: Why not?

Evgeny: I didn't feel as though I had any sort of great things to offer. Back then I didn't have any of my own projects. I was a hired specialist, and there was also a language barrier. But most importantly, I was just a rookie, new to it all. After all, this was a conference filled with specialists from all over the world. Basically, I felt hurt somehow: I don't know how to describe it. 'Hurt' isn't quite the right word. But I just wanted to become a part of this group. Two years passed, and then we received this prize. My co-workers opened the conference, which was in Mexico that year. I sat in this massive hall of 20,000 people and I cried because I felt this tremendous honour.

Connor: How did you feel in that moment?

Evgeny: I felt that I was part of this huge community offering help, and that we couldn't be doing anything better. It's really inspiring when what you do gets noticed. You start to acquaint yourself with other organizations and you understand the importance of the things you are doing.

Connor: When you first set up the organization, did you have issues with the Russian government or did that come later? How did this state-sponsored homophobia develop?

Evgeny: We got set up in 2006 and the problems first started to arise in 2014.

Connor: Up until that point, did the financing come from the government?

Evgeny: Yes, there was government funding. Generally, I'd say that in Russia, when the government doesn't get involved in your business, it's a very good thing. For a long time, they didn't bother us and even helped us a little bit. They gave us some dump of a building and we repaired it. We set up an office there and the rent was cheap. It was under Medvedev that this much-vaunted nationwide healthcare project began. During this time, we received government funding, which was of course absolutely great.

However, at that time, we weren't positioned as specifically as a gay organization. And then – it must have been around 2014 – our board got together when we found ourselves in a rather unpleasant situation, but this was completely normal for organizations involved in this line of work. We had we helped lots of organizations to get set up and had supported them financially. After some time, they started to criticize us, saying that we don't do such and such, and so on. Essentially, we realized that we had achieved what we wanted in this area and we made the decision that we would rebrand and start to work with gay people, with HIV positive gay people.

Connor: So, if I understand correctly, on the one hand your organization actively decided to work with specifically gay people, but at the

same time the government was becoming stricter towards LGBTQ+ people.

Evgeny: Absolutely right. And I have to say that every action creates a reaction. If the law had never come about, maybe we would have never rebranded.

Others might have done the opposite, became more homophobic in line with the government, and distance themselves from the LGBTQ+ community.

And that's how it turned out. Unfortunately, most organizations working with gay people began to conceal their work and not show it for what it really was. This even happened to purely gay organizations, who now made out that they were working with everybody. As an activist, this repulses me. I think that if you work in this area, you don't only work to survive but you also need to somehow embody your mission. And I believe that in non-profit organizations people don't work for money. So, when you start compromising yourself for the sake of the government, it means that you have completely failed your mission. One of the missions of NGOs is to change the government so that it is more aware of the community your NGO represents. Well, there are different strategies. Some people conform. On the contrary, our mission is precisely what drives us, and we need to step up our work in this respect.

Connor: In 2013, the Russian Federation adopted the so-called 'anti-gay law', against the 'propaganda of non-traditional relationships'. How did Russia reach this point?

Evgeny: In fact, I think that the research shows that attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people were becoming more accepting overall. Every year there was a small improvement, with more people having positive attitudes towards gay people.

Connor: Up until 2013?

Evgeny: Around that time, there were many significant historical changes, related to Putin's attempt to set limits on civil society. This issue is closely linked to homophobia. Putin had a very simple way to

strengthen his position in the public eye. Even though attitudes towards gay people had improved, they were still generally negative. Putin's use of homophobia helped him to mobilize his electorate and strengthen his position with the public. And that's why I think this began. I'm not really an analyst....

Connor: We aren't asking for you to offer the perspective of an analyst. But you lived through this time, and you saw with your own eyes as a person, organizer, and activist how public opinion changed. Do you think some base level of hostility towards LGBTQ+ people exists in Russian society? Is it a government creation or did it exist already before this point?

Evgeny: Of course, it already existed and there is a considerable history here: homosexuality had been illegal. This story cannot be erased from Russian history. You could say that in the beginning of the USSR, attitudes towards homosexuality were rather progressive. I don't know, I don't feel as though I am an expert in this area. In general, homosexuality was accepted during the 1920s. And I believe that some activists came to visit Russia. Then, around 1933, homosexuality was made illegal as part of the criminal code, and this brought with it other opportunities for repression. This story is well-established. I think a similar thing happened in Fascist Germany. It's a familiar story, one of the oldest tricks in the book. Do you want to quickly mobilize a society? Do you want to build a platform based on opposition to LGBTQ+ people? Here, you can start with the gays.

Connor: This new wave of homophobia coincides with the annexation of Crimea and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In your opinion, is there a connection between foreign policy and state-sponsored homophobia in Putin's Russia?

Evgeny: Of course, there absolutely is. The decriminalization of sex between men was not an achievement of the Russian LGBTQ+ community, even though LGBTQ+ activists had been working on this. They themselves said that it was because it was very important for Russia in the 1990s to be part of the Council of Europe and abolishing the anti-sodomy law was just one of the required conditions to join. Therefore, unlike in the USA and most European countries where LGBTQ+ activists reached this point independently, Russian activists didn't. Rather,

the abolition was presented as some sort of gift for Russian society since it was an essential requirement to be a part of Europe. I also want to talk about the link between homophobia, state-sponsored homophobia, and the events in Crimea. I think that for a long time Putin wanted to make Russia part of Europe. Even now I still can't decide if he really is homophobic, or if he's a pragmatic politician wielding homophobia as an instrument in his fight for power. I personally… Well, I can't recall everything that he has said, as it varies a lot at different points in time. I myself, as an LGBTQ+ activist, can't say that he has said any nice things, but he has generally defended basic human rights and said that all people are entitled to equal rights, including gay people.

Therefore, I can't say whether Putin is homophobic or not. I just don't know. I do know that he is an experienced politician and a very pragmatic one. If there wasn't this war, I could easily see him meeting Sir Elton John, who's desperate to meet him. If they did, Elton John would tell him, very pleasantly and naively, that accepting gay people is worthwhile, and there's no harm in it. And then Putin would do some sort of PR act and say, 'Really!? Go on then, let's abolish the law. We must get closer to European values.' I wholeheartedly believe this because, at the end of the day, I see Putin as a professional politician. With the situation in Crimea, it was easy to see how public opinion was being capitalized on. Russia is distancing itself from European values, those common global values that condemn the invasion of another country. And Russia is distancing itself from LGBTQ+ rights, which are bound up with European values. Clearly, homophobia is one of Putin's instruments used to gain power.

Connor: Could you now tell us a bit about how all of this affected your organization, and about how you left Russia?

Evgeny: We lived in a time when all the changes that happened were barely noticeable. They were like screws being tightened very slowly. Putin did this perfectly: if it is done too abruptly, it can cause everyone to riot. But when it's done gradually, tightening its grasp from different angles, there is no single moment where someone wakes up and realizes what's going on. No one speaks out and says, 'This isn't on, you just can't do this. Let's all go out on the street and protest.' So, in terms of everything that happened with my organization, all the changes hap-

pened gradually over time. It all started with an inspection from the Office of the Public Prosecutor and the Ministry of Justice. They were legally allowed to inspect our organization. The Prosecutor's Office could invent any kind of pretext to inspect us. The crux of these inspections was always the same: they would recommend that we change our constitution. And, of course, to frighten us.

Back then in 2014 some organizations were already considered foreign agents. It was common knowledge that any organization that held European values could potentially be considered a foreign agent. This meant that every inspection they advised us to change something in our constitution. They said that they understood that according to our constitution we could engage in public protest, and we were in receipt of foreign funding. Together, these indicators implied we were a foreign agent. We agreed to change the constitution according to what they wanted, but they kept tightening the screws on us. Unfortunately, as it happened, our constitution does not hold as much significance as those of Western organizations. In Russia it's perfectly acceptable to write a constitution which contains nothing of substance and can be easily twisted. Therefore, we changed everything, and basically made our constitution spineless with nothing concrete in it. It worked for a while.

Of course, among other things, those politicians who were inciting hatred against LGBTQ+ people heavily influenced what happened to our organization. I think that one clear example of hatred being stirred up was the death of one guy, Vladislav Tornovoi. He was just drinking with his friends and somehow one of them found out he was gay, and they killed him. It was an extremely brutal murder; they beat him with a stone to the head and did other awful things to his body. And since we were providing direct services to homosexual people, we saw that people were becoming more and more scared to seek help. In general, I had seen this for a long time regarding healthcare. This propaganda law and the statements of the politicians really hindered our work. I think this was when I realized that this was now the next chapter in the story of the organization, when we started to associate ourselves with LGBTQ+ organizations and position ourselves as one. We developed an agenda that is linked to human rights, because it had become clear that the most important part of our work was not only giving out condoms and lube or telling people how to defend themselves and how to live with HIV.

Rather, it became clear that if we didn't change this legislation, and if we didn't combat this so-called propaganda law then all our work would be for nothing. Because people who need help, who fear going to medical establishments and being tested for HIV, stigmatize themselves. Our work was altogether much more important than just giving people condoms. We needed to protest and counteract this legislation and the statements of politicians. So essentially this political homophobia completely changed what our organization was about. The more government pressure on LGBTQ+ people, the more we focused on the issue of reducing discrimination of any kind. Our work, which revolved around changing the situation in Russia, is what got us recognized as a foreign agent. We are a healthcare and sexual healthcare organization. One way or another this is directly linked to politics, and we were always engaged in some form of politics. So, I guess that was the indication to the government that we were receiving foreign money and were influencing politics. Of course, we said to them that we are involved in healthcare and not in politics. But to be honest, we were involved in politics. Gay organizations all over the world are engaged in politics because unfortunately gay issues are still political ones.

Connor: Please tell us about your decision to leave Russia.

Evgeny: Well, we should begin the story by saying that I'm a workaholic and I love my job. At this point of my life, work was really starting to eat up my life and became the largest and most meaningful part of it. It had become important than my family and even more important than my relationship with myself. My job was paramount to me. Despite being with my husband for ten years, we talked about how I wanted to leave the country; not to get away from the bad stuff, but more to try something new. Although in part it was because everything was getting worse in some way or another.

What happened next is an extremely sad story. I played an awful prank on my husband. Here's what happened. It began when some people decided to start an art project. More specifically, they wrote a short letter, about three or four paragraphs. It was from supposedly the housing bureau and addressed to the residents of a block of flats. The letter said: 'In relation to the law regarding homosexual propaganda, we ask you to be careful with your children as there are homosexuals living in our

building. Please be vigilant. We are going to have preventative talks with them but keep your guard up.' So that was the gist of the letter, and it was written in that sort of language that is very convincing. Even as an LGBTQ+ activist, I read it and thought maybe it was true, you know?

But then I realized that it was absolutely ridiculous. So I decided to joke about it, and I went on the internet and printed out a copy of this letter to hang on our door. I stuck it on our door and took a photograph of it. I went to the shops, and when I got back, I showed it to my husband and said: 'Look what's on all the front doors.' When he read it, I saw fear in his eyes, and he said to me: 'Did you take this photo?' Then I saw that my prank wasn't funny at all. You can't imagine how scary it is to see fear in the eyes of the person that you love most in the entire world. He was in a state of extreme fear and panic. All he said to me was: 'Did you take this picture?' It was such a painful gut-wrenching feeling, and I thought to myself that while my husband isn't an activist, we are on the same side. However, he knows how I live my life, and he is more clued up than other LGBTQ+ people. But despite all this, he was, and is, terrified. For me this was a turning point. I realized that I didn't want him to experience fear, or me to experience fear. But the problem was that he didn't want to leave, and he has never been very decisive. Yet I feel that any sane person, any LGBTQ+ person, should simply get up and leave the country.

For me, I lived in my own world, where work had become the most important thing. Therefore, I kept saying to myself, 'Look, I've got this interesting project at the moment, once it finishes, then I'll leave, because there will be no more work.' However, my workload only increased. The projects spark your interest, and you become like a drug addict. You're a work in progress yourself, and you want to complete more and more projects. The situation worsens and you want to change it. Nothing seems that dangerous yet. That's exactly how it worked for many years. And it worked well like that. For me, an extremely important episode in my life, just as important as accepting my HIV status and my sexuality, was this emotional burnout I experienced. It was when my work ran me down and I started to turn to alcohol and then drugs. I soon gathered that I was destroying myself. Since I had already had drug problems, I understood my situation quickly enough and sought help. I knew where to go and, broadly speaking, there was no issue

finding help. I went to the psychologist, and to this day I still speak with him. I think that he helped me to learn how to look after myself and how to think about my own safety, because I had never thought about this before. Maybe it was just my Russian happy-go-lucky attitude, or thinking that whatever will be, will be. Like: 'They've not killed you yet, so it's all ok.' This element of my safety was tied up with how we had recently been classified as a foreign agent, and the thought that they would shut us down and persecution would follow.

Therefore, I had already started to learn a new language. I thought that I'd go to Germany, and so I started to learn German. But then because of Covid I wasn't able to get a German visa. The plan was that I would only leave as a last resort. In that, I needed to be prepared and learn a language and have a visa for when things became dangerous. At any moment, I would be able to take my things and leave. This was also a very important period in my life since I had grown apart somewhat from my husband, who didn't want to even talk about the possibility of leaving. Once I realized that I didn't mind being alone, I could start to prepare myself. Then, as it so happens, a journalist came to my work who was an immigrant in the UK and had sought asylum from Belarus. In actual fact, I left for the UK just when the Russian government started to contact, threaten, and ask my co-workers to sign a document that indicated that I was involved in the inappropriate use of funds. It was a document connecting me to financial fraud. One of my co-workers phoned me and she said that she had met with the authorities, and they asked a lot of questions about me and intimidated her, saying she would have problems if she didn't comply. Basically, she signed a document that testified against me, and said that she was extremely worried for herself and for me.

Then the same thing happened with another co-worker. He said that he had also met with the authorities, and they had terrified him as well. He didn't tell them anything, but he was scared. This phone call really frightened me. I had just managed to pick up the phone as he rang me whilst we were getting ready to go on holiday, and we already had plane tickets booked. We were going to Egypt. Over the period of three hours, I decided that I needed to leave Russia. Then, a couple of days later, they visited my house and the organization, in order to leave a summons requesting me.

There was another moment which made leaving an easy decision. On the one hand, my work with my organization concerns sexual health, and that was more or less safe. On the other hand, my work with the website concerned LGBTQ+ rights. Due to the so-called propaganda law, I had to try to differentiate between the two, because the site would draw attention to the organization, and this was why we were labelled foreign agents in the end. As the chief editor of the website, I was threatened constantly. This started with letters, but then my mailbox was defaced, and the danger felt very close to home. At moments like this, you have to come face to face with reality. So, there were lots of events that coincided at this time.

I could even say that my last year in Russia felt like I was in some sort of film. Everything that happened doesn't really happen in real life, but rather in a Hollywood film. In 2018, the British government, through the embassy in Russia, had a grant programme which supported NGOs. Our volunteer wrote an application for the support and development of one of our projects which was based on Russian LGBTQ+ history. We wrote an application, but it wasn't successful, and we forgot all about it. But in 2022, this story resurfaced in an article in the Russian state media. This article claimed that the UK was financing organizations that were undermining the sovereignty of the Russian Federation. The applications of several organizations were published by the state media, and mine was on the list. I guess it was some sort of cyber attack where they took all this information which was meant to be private and published it. After this, we began to receive threats again. There were threats from all sides, and I didn't know who or what I should be most scared of.

Connor: Could you tell us about the psychological impacts of all these threats?

Evgeny: Well, I can divide this into two parts. Firstly, I was just emotionally burnt out and essentially, I started to self-destruct. I mentally couldn't deal with it all. When you work and have to deal with constant setbacks, and in the background there are threats and other complications which you ignore, everything really starts to take its toll. I simply didn't realize this. Luckily, I was experienced in social support and un-

derstood that I was in trouble. I quickly got help and was already in the process of seeing a psychologist. I then started to really see all these threats which hadn't worried me before. Over the next year, or eighteen months, I started to feel afraid, because suddenly my psychologist made me appreciate that these threats were real. You simply get used to the fact that this danger is the backdrop of your life, and you never think about any of it seriously.

Connor: And how do you feel now that you're living in England?

Evgeny: Of course, it was a very difficult step for me. Deciding to leave that is. I love Russia. I wish I could love Russia. Russia is a massive European country with huge potential. Although now I'm saying 'I love my country,' it seems to me that I can only say that in the past tense. Maybe, maybe...

Connor: Some people think that their country no longer exists. That is, the Russia they once knew.

Evgeny: I would probably agree with this idea. I'll explain why. I've already decided to leave and now, I don't have to put up with it anymore. I could've still stayed, risked everything, and continued my work. Maybe they would've put me in jail? Maybe I would've received some sort of fine? They are just threats. It doesn't happen overnight. Putin drags things out. I simply realized that I want to live for myself. I understood that my youthful hopes of change and optimism weren't going to happen in the next ten years. There was this realization that it'll never happen. Even if Putin goes, nothing will change because it takes a long time to alter opinions in Russia. For me, taking my leave from Russia was like some kind of moral right.

Callum: What does the future hold for you?

Evgeny: Yesterday I spoke with my friend, a very, very famous LGBTQ+ activist called Timofei Sozaev. He asked me how I was, and I replied that I was 10 out of 10. He said, 'You really are euphoric, aren't you?' When I came to England, I kind of knew that European values put people and their welfare first, and this was similar to my own beliefs, and the community work that I did in Russia. Here in the UK I became a client, receiving support rather than giving it, and I gained an under-

standing of the structure of the government. I realized I didn't have any fear of the future. I know that if I study to get a job, everything will turn out ok. So, when you ask me what the future holds, I don't even know myself. I just know everything will be ok. What happens in the future depends on me. Maybe I could start to do academic work? Maybe I will go pick apples. It's not important. What's important is that I am already here, in a safe environment. There's a government that defends my basic human rights and social rights, and I'll pay taxes and live in this state of harmony.

Connor: Is there anything else you would like to say?

Evgeny: Just about the idea of mutual self-help. If someone helps me, I really want to help them too. It gives me enormous pleasure. Besides the fact I enjoy helping, it's a very smart strategy as it helps with self-improvement. When you help people, then they help you and you learn something. It works very well. As soon as I arrived in the UK, it became very important for me to surround myself with people who are going through, or have already been through, the asylum process, or have moved here for their own reasons. Now I find myself involved in some sort of process which I'm not enjoying very much. My friends and I have created a chat where we message and help each other out, as the system for helping migrants in UK is very complicated and there is lots of information to deal with. You need to have someone who's also just arrived in the UK. Our group has already met up several times. We've met in person and we raise money to help each other. We've decided we want to create a migrant organization, and if I'm honest, I already have some experience with developing communities in Russia. I was never able to do it properly. Now I realize that I have the experience: from my activism and from my self-care, in that I should put myself first. I am surrounded by lots of friends, which is very important.

Connor: That's great.

Evgeny: We decided to create an organization called Queerdom. Maybe it will be a continuation of my work, I don't know. What I do know is that in Russia I dealt a lot with people who weren't ready to seek help. It is quite a different society from the UK, and over there people find it a lot more difficult to seek help. When you're working with the gay community, it's often awkward when you try to help and be welcoming.

People haven't yet realized that they need the support. It is a completely different kind of work. I think that if I was employed in the UK as a social worker, I would be an asset, because I didn't only provide assistance in Russia, but I also made people who needed help realize that they needed it. I don't know. I feel as though it's hard to explain.

Connor: I understand.

Evgeny: I've realized from talking with other immigrants that they need communication. Seeing these people as clients, not friends, has made me realize this. I never felt anything similar in Russia. People just need to meet once a week, chat a little and help one another. The life I'm leading now is awesome. Thank you.

Connor: Thank you so much, we have been chatting for almost two hours.

Dmitri N. Shalin

Introduction to Grigorii Konovalov's Letters

Grigory Ivanovich Konovalov (1908-1987), Soviet-era writer who won the 1969 Maxim Gorky Prize, graduated from the Perm Pedagogical Institute, studied at the Institute of Red Professors, and taught at the Ulyanovsk Pedagogical Institute. He is best known for his novels *University* and *Origins*, as well as his service as a secretary of the USSR Writers Union. Little is known about his formative years as a writer and reaction to the political purges of the Stalin's era. The present selection from Konovalov's letters sheds light on Konovalov's attitude toward Russian classics, his literary sensibilities and professional aspirations in the late 1930's when he enrolled as a graduate student at the Moscow Institute of History, Philosophy, and Literature. At the time, Konovalov served as docent at the Leo Tolstoy Memorial Estate in Yasnaya Poiana and worked on his first novel *Ilya Kozharov*. The letters are addressed to Evgenia Gutman (1919-2016), the 19-year-old student from Leningrad who worked at the same time as a guide at the Tolstoy Museum. As one can gather from Evgenia Gutman's diary and Konovalov's letters, the two became romantically involved, with the marriage proposal entertained and turned down by the undergraduate of the Herzen Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad. I hope to publish separately the diary of Evgenia Gutman-Shalina regarding this riveting story. Here, the readers are offered a selection of Grigory's letters where he discusses his work on the novel and the literary world of that era and offers a surprisingly frank assessment of Maxim Gorky's death.

I wish to thank Vera Miranda, graduate student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, for her assistance with transcribing the letters.

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Григорий Коновалов

Письма к Евгении Гутман, 1938–1939

Женя!

Несколько часов тому назад я прибыл в Ясную Поляну. После ужасного шума, какого-то бестолкового железного грохота, пыли и вони Москвы я почувствовал себя здесь леким и ясным будто, переболев тяжело, я начал выздоравливать. Я не доехал до башен, соскочил с телеги и, цепляясь за жилистую акацию влез на кручу к беседке С.А. Отсюда когда-то ты провожала меня в М[оскву], наказывая привезти *Florentinische Nächte* и… колбасу. Тут в суматохе я увидел когда-то впервые тебя с парнем (Миша) и по-настоящему почувствовал боль и зависть.

Много много других чувств и воспоминаний будят эти места: и пруд, заросший зеленой плесенью, и аллеи, и серебристые гигантские тополя, и сумерки, и яркая звезда, загоревшаяся на мглистом вечернем небе. За эти дни тут сильно все изменилось. Лес облетает до времени, спаленный набегами южного степного зноя, а в имении тишина и пустота. Все казалось мне, что вот-вот увижу тебя в твоем розовом пестром сарафане, услышу твой голос за палисадником или увижу тебя на террасе в углу, поджавшую по-азиатски под себя ноги, обвитую вьющимся [*нрзб.*].

Пусто. Тополь над нашей узкой скамейкой раздет донага. Вечером я сидел на скамейке, смотрел на мелькающих бабочек перед фонарем большого дома. Мне стало очень грустно. Никогда так сильно не хотел я видеть тебя, как в этот вечер.

Ходил ли я по двору или по аллее, озаренной полной сухменной луной, я чувствовал тебя. Кажется, все жило тобой, а ты уехала, будто умерла, и все оделось печально-тревожными красками и напоминает о тебе. Знакомые предметы вдруг обрели какую-то тревожащую меня силу. Дорожки, лес, окно твое, теперь темное, будто в доме вымерли все и некому света зажечь, пруд, вода в котором потемнела и похолодела, скамейка, где сидели с тобой и говорили путанным языком, усложняя дело — все будит в сердце невнятную тоску, точно я вернулся в родной дом свой после войны и не нашел ни матери, ни жены с детьми. Ты унесла что-то дорогое, бесконечно родное мне.

Что будет, того не миновать. Благодарю судьбу за то, что свела она меня с тобой, а еще больше за то, что свела она именно в Ясной Поляне.

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Прости, что я распространяюсь только о себе. Снова всплывают образы вчерашних дней. То вижу костер на поляне за Воронкой, чую запах дубового томленного листа, слышу шипение сырой земли у огня и треск сучьев, вижу тебя, озаренную огнем с левой щеки и вспоминаю Виктора, который обманулся, увидав ямочку только на одной правой, затемненной щеке.
То видится ночь и дорога на могилу, и я у столба, и ты на поляне на сухой гривке канавы. Неужели после этого возможно другое?
То Воронка или пруд, и я учу тебя плавать, а ты бултыхаешь ногами, смешно по-ребячьему морщишь губы и блестишь глазами.
И кукушкины слезы, и горбатый старик с веселыми глазами цвета голубенького льна, и старая ива у Воронки, удивившая тебя своим ростом, и бурные тихие ночи — все мило мне благодаря тому, что ты жила здесь.
Распространился, безумная голова! Тебе надо знать, что тут делается, а не эти элегии.
Приедут сюда писатели, утром. Будет обед и ужин. Но об этом не хочется писать. Эгоизм? Возможно. Мне не здоровится. Простыл. Какая глупость.
Пиши на Москву.
Привет матери и брату, хотя его не знаю.
Ну пока, скоро увидимся.
Г.

9/IX-38 г.
Ясная Поляна

В Москве буду проездом 13-15.

Женя!
Все дни занимался то устройством юбилея, то писанием и институтскими делами. И сквозь эти дела и мысли, сквозь образы, воскрешенные памятью, обогретые сердцем, я видел ясно тебя и думал о тебе. И казалось часто, что потому только и возникают эти образы и делаются эти дела, что присутствуешь тут среди дел и творчества ты. Так иногда, идя по шумной, грохочущей улице, глядя на дома, людей с их то заботливыми, то смеющимися лицами, даже разговаривая с ними, ты проносишь в себе какую-то звучащую в далеке твоего сердца мысль, думу. Так в музыкальном произведении пробивается через хаос звуков, отдельных партий основной мотив. Он то звучит совсем над ухом, как шмель теплым майским вечером, то тихо тихо, будто река зимой подо льдом, то

совсем замирает, но всегда ты видишь и чувствуешь этот звук. И кажется, будто вертится все вокруг него, и потому, что он есть.
Ты и есть в моей жизни этот то удаляющийся, то близко звучащий мотив. Я аналитик, ты так меня называла. Я хотел бы подвергнуть анализу все, чтобы познать явление и не трепетать перед ним. Но странно! Чем больше познаю я тебя, тем сильнее сознается радость этого творения. И кажется, что не я первым явился на свет, а любовь моя к тебе.
Бывают минуты полного самоотречения от самого себя ради тебя. Кажется, снова мне: я хочу быть с тем то и тем то, и соглашусь на это. Так я люблю *тебя, а не себя*. Я сидел дома вчера (16/IX) писал новую большую вещь, а не ту повесть об эгоизме. Мне принесли твое письмо. Прочитал, и захотелось увидеть тебя немедля! Пустыми показались все разговоры наши в тесных домах и комнатах. Пусть бы на одном метре земли или в тамбуре вагона, как это было на Ленинградском вокзале, пусть где угодно только бы видеть тебя.
Зачем ты спрашиваешь, когда я приеду в Ленинград? Хоть сейчас! Сдерживаю себя, засадил писать. Все идет хорошо. Написал 60 стр. Вчера за утро 10 стр.
В Ясную Поляну приезжал специально ко мне из журнала *Молодая Гвардия* человек. Просил роман печатать в их журнале. Просит в альманах под XXI и издательство. Будет издаваться одновременно и в одном из журналов и в Госиздате.
Вряд ли придется работать в Ясной Поляне, мне дали в инст[иту]те нагрузку партийную [применительно к начальному?]. А их 850 человек.
Буду писать и писать. Настроение рабочее. Жаль нет тебя рядом. Я тебе не описал празднество в Ясной Поляне. Ничего особенного. Писатели были, артисты. Много ели, замучили толстого повара там его. Ни одного дельного выступления с их стороны. Слушал скрипку в Чепыже под дубами. Не могу при людях слушать музыку, особенно Чайковского. Ушел в лес и проявил свои чувства.
Очень жалею, что не получил твое первое письмо. Какое бы оно ни было, оно дорого мне. Не грусти, не хандри. Работай. Впереди у нас жизнь. Будем смотреть и Я. П. и [*нрзб.*] и Алтай и Сев[ерное] море. И новые чувства и радости ждут нас. Поцелую я тебя в твои груди и твои губы.
Привет матери. Скажи, что я очень скучаю по ее борщу.
Григорий

17/IX-1938
Жду писем

Женя!
Ты ведешь себя плохо, поэтому и захворала. Если будешь хворать, я тебя накажу тем, что умру. Это поветрие какое-то. Я также два дня болел проклятым же гриппом. Вчера было плохо, болела голова, но думалось очень хорошо, писал план первой части романа. Все ясно теперь. Ложась спать, решил раньше встать и работать. Но утром еле поднялся — как избитый. Грипп. Сегодня не писал, как не бился, и хотелось работать, а не было сил. Занялся чтением учебника по истории ВКП(б). Советую почитать. Интересная книга. Какая досада, что не могу работать. Это худшее наказание человеку. Раз оба захворали, давай выздоравливать вместе. Даю тебе слово, что я буду совершенно здоров в то время, когда ты будешь читать это письмо. Хочется пожурить тебя за хворь, но жалко. Лучше я подойду к тебе, легонько возьму за твою тонкую кисть, другую руку положу на горячий лоб твой, тебе станет хорошо. Прислушайся как течет моя кровь, какие-то волны, катятся, переливаются в твою руку и голову, и от этого делается легко, немного томно и хорошо. Оставь заботы об институте, забудь на минуту всех, представь себе жаркий полдень, залитую солнцем поляну от Воронки до березовой рощи. Вот мы идем с купания по березовой, заросшей травой, аллее. Моя рука лежит на твоем правом плече, ты держишь ее своей рукой. Мы идем в тени мимо колодца, оставшегося вправо. И легкая истома разливается по всему телу. На любимой скамейке Льва Николаевича мы садимся. Ты легла и кладешь голову свою на колени мои. Тогда такие же умиротворяющие волны шли от тебя ко мне и обратно.
Скорей выздоравливай, береги себя. Мы увидимся скоро. Тогда поговорим обо всем и о моем романе. Я не живу им, он меня уже не задевает, я думаю и работаю над другим. Отрывки из нового я читал тебе. Лучше я прочту тебе его, чем рассказывать о нем в письме. Вчера понял, что роман будет о 3-х семьях, из которых одна должна быть семьей царя Николая II. Имею два варианта романа (в голове тебя!). 1-й три поколения одной семьи 1905-1936г. 2-й три поколения писательских семей. Они проходят через войну 1914-1917 г., через две революции. Если осуществить первый вариант, то будет нечто [вроде] *Дела Артамоновых*, если второй, то *Война и Мир*.

Сама знаешь, что первый легче писать; его могу закончить в один год.
Второй же требует много труда, зато даст много условий и материала для проникновения в глубины души человека. Первый захватывает все мое внимание, тогда как второй требует огромного напряжения души. Вчера, когда я начинал болеть, открылись вдруг тайны судеб моих героев второго варианта. Это было потрясающее явление. Лучше об этом не говорить, а думать и живописать. О задуманном можно говорить много, потому что оно затмит все содержание моей жизни на протяжении 3-5 лет. Виктор говорит, что так долго нельзя писать сейчас. Подумаю. Плуг уже пущен в землю глубоко. Смогут ли кони моих творческих сил тащить его на такой глубине – увижу. А мельче пахать не хочется. К чему? Разве нельзя пройти какие-то 40-50 лет, кот. еще суждено прожить мне, занимаясь другим делом? Нет, все самообман! Мыслить живо, конкретно, т.е. "художественно" — это такое свойство моей головы. Не писать, — значит сознательно засорить источник радости. Чушь все это. Буду писать. А какой вариант, еще подумаю...
А ты дольше отдыхай, не горячись, а то как молодая лошадь, плечи обожжешь. Если бы ты была близ меня, не болела бы. Верно, верно.
Матери передай привет и благодарность за то, что она ухаживала за тобой. Это все равно, что она за мной ухаживала.
Смотри же не болей. Пока всего хорошего.
Жму руку. Целовать, сама знаешь, нельзя, – грипп!

Г.К.

21/IX – 38

Женя!
В Ясной нашел твое письмо ("дикое"). Сколько мятежности! Очень рад, что оно, вопреки твоим заклинаниям не попадать мне в руки, все-таки попало мне.
Тут красота неописуемая. Вчера — 26 — я вместе с новым уч. Секретарем Сашей Нелисовым и товарищем моим авиаинженером 1-го ранга Костей сделали чудесную прогулку. Мы набрали полные карманы картофеля и яблок и отправились вечером в лес. Мы прошли мимо могилы Л.Н., вышли почти к купальне Толстых и расположились у леса. Справа поле, тонувшее в темноте, ниже Воронка, задернутая туманом. Небо чистое и звездное. Разожгли костер под старым пнем, зажгли пни, кот. мы выворачивали руками.

Когда погорели угли, мы побросали в жар картошку, рядом с огнем разложили яблоки. Запахло очень вкусно яблоками и поспевшей в огне картошкой. Так аппетитно и вкусно мы еще никогда не ели. У нас была соль и хлеб! Какие рассказы рассказывали мне мои друзья! Как я жалел, что не было тебя тут! Мы долго ели, беседовали, потом рыли, как звери, землю руками и засыпали костер. Потом отыскивали в небе Сириус, полярные звезды, стожары и другие. Лес и трава покрылись росой, когда мы возвращались домой.
Мы думали, что времени уже часа 2 ночи. Но как, векуя, мы ошиблись. С веранды в диком винограднике вышел в тулупе Иван Васильевич — сторож и своим чуть сипловатым, но приветливым голосом сказал, что времени только 10 часов.
Живу я теперь в деревянном домишке рядом с дом музеем. Шум липы и сада слышен мне. Лес, как одурел, когда нужно падать листве, он зеленеет, видимо недавно прошедшие дожди омолодили его.
Сейчас приступаю к писанию романа. Заголовок нашел ему *Битва*. Может быть, изменю.
Получила ли ты сборник рассказов? Пиши сюда на Ясную Поляну. Тут я буду до 5-го октября, потом поеду в Москву. А там может в Ленинград. Вот тогда-то я расскажу тебе все, все.
Вечером на закате солнца ходил смотрел нашу маленькую поляну за садом. Там все еще хорошо.
Привет матери.
А тебе..., Григорий.
Обнимаю тебя.
27/IX-38г.
Ясная Поляна.

PS. Посылаю листок клена и цветок.
В 6 часов с товарищами едем (вдвоем и на телеге) по всем границам заповедника. Хочешь? Сейчас 4 часа, ждем тебя до 6. Хорошо?
Шучу, а жаль, что без тебя. Сегодня говорил по делу с женой Корз. Она рассказала, что запрещала сыну гулять с девушкой и тут же повеселела: “Это вам с женой можно было ходить, вы вот жених и невеста, а мой сын простофиля. Эту девушку я не любила, она хитрая и готова была женить сына моего на себе”. Она (Корз.) советует жениться на тебе. Каково?

Женя!

Не знаю, сумею ли я рассказать тебе то, что нужно и необходимо? Настроение у меня отшельническое, ушел от мира и замыслов. Еще вчера голова моя была занята образами вновь задуманного произведения: люди любили, ревновали, мучились, каялись, расстреливали и умирали, то есть делали то, то они всегда делают. Я замышлял огромные планы. А сегодня опустела голова моя, будто лист, ободранный осенним ветром. Умерли все мысли и все желания. И жалким и ничтожным я кажусь себе, точно заяц, окруженный со всех сторон водой. Где же дед Мазай, спаситель зайцев? Настроения эти улеглись на дно души сами собой так же, как они сами собой и возникли.

С романом что-то не того. Всем нравится, но не печатают. Надоело. Хочу взять от них его, еще раз доработать и, завернув в папку, положить в шкаф. Если это подлинное художественное произведение, то оно будет живо и через 30–40 лет, когда потомки мои после смерти моей покажут его свету. Если он умрет через 10 лет, то жалеть о таком хилом создании не стоит.

В писании и писателе две стороны: потребность мыслить в образной форме и чтение результатов этого мышления (произведение) народом. Последнее не удается мне пока. Будем жить первым, так как не писать я не могу, не мыслить тоже не могу, а что касается общения с народом, став необходимее, то тут придется потуже подпоясаться и все. Люди, которые решают вопрос: нужно ли для народа печатать то или иное произведение, судят прямо-таки удивительно. Одному нравится то, не нравится другое, а другому совсем наоборот. Творится полный невежественный произвол, вкусовщина. Да если бы Лев Николаевич попал им сейчас, то Максим Горький может быть не вышел бы в свет. У Льва Николаевича начали бы вытягивать все его рассуждения, редактировать его стиль, а о Горьком бы сказали: нет сюжета. Раньше тоже было также, как и сейчас: произведение выходило, одни его разносили в пух и прах, другие хвалили. Представь себе, что если бы людям, которые разносили Горького или Толстого, было поручено решать вопрос: печатать или нет, они бы не печатали. Ведь с этой точки подойти к Достоевскому, то *Братья Карамазовы* его никогда бы не увидели света.

Мне так все это надоело, опротивело, что я бросил думать о романе. Зато невольно подумал о себе и тебе. Я и прежде считал и говорил, что я не достоин тебя. Это я знал и прежде, когда думал о себе, что я кое-что могу создать, и какой-то мнимый талант хоть

чуточку оправдает мои притязания на твою любовь. Теперь же когда туман развеялся, я оказался голым дураком, посредственностью самой обыкновенной, теперь я абсолютно не имею право на тебя, ни морального, ни какого бы то ни было. Если поставить рядом со мной молодого человека лет 23–25 ничем не замечательного, то я, конечно, уступлю ему тебя, хотя бы потому, что я уже пожил, он нет.

Я и прежде говорил, что не стою тебя. А теперь я не только думами это понимаю, но и сердцем, всеми чувствами.

Разве нельзя обмануться в людях, если они сами в себе обманываются. Так и ты обманулась во мне. Я тебя благодарю бесконечно за то, что ты не согласилась тогда на мое предложение. Если бы тогда случилось это, то я бы сейчас застрелился без всякого колебания, потому что чувствовать себя мерзавцем и негодяем невозможно.

Я знаю, как пойдет моя жизнь. Очень скучно. Нет! Я не буду так жить: ходить читать лекции студентам, не буду насиловать себя.

Я буду мыслить. Я знаю, что буду несчастлив в быту, буду скорее всего одинок, но это-то и хорошо. Пока не забьют меня гробовой доской, не потеряю надежды стать властителем дум. Путь этот тяжел. Сплошные неудачи. Лучше одному терпеть их, это легче. А то будет идти с тобой человек, а ты все будешь думать: он жертвует своей жизнью ради меня. Сознание этого будет тяготить меня ужасно. Я не представляю себе любимого человека, страдающего вместе со мной, я не хочу, чтобы он видел, как забываются радости и честь, я хочу, чтобы он только радовался.

Мне тяжело сейчас, ты сама это понимаешь. Поэтому приехать я не могу. И тут все опротивело в Москве тоже. Поверь. Завтра уеду в Ясную.

Прощай, Женечка, мне очень тяжело. Жаловаться мне также стыдно.

Г. К.

P S. Твою карточку отдал увеличить, будет готова 11/XI.38г. – это будет огромный портрет. Раму закажу в Ясной из яблоневого дерева. Когда все сделаю, вышлю тебе и портрет и карточку. Тебе захочется написать мне. Не горячись, обдумай лучше все, тогда пиши. Ты увидишь, что я прав. С моей стороны было бы очень эгоистично и жестоко тянуть тебя с собой по этим рытвинам жизни. Ты имеешь право жить счастливой и хорошей жизнью.

Еще раз прощай. ГИК

18/X-38

Привет матери.

Женя!

...Опять пишу тебе, не дождавшись ответа на первые два письма. Сидим сейчас в деревянном доме – я, товарищ мой Нелюсов и сторож Иван Васильич. На дворе туманная мгла затопила деревья. Я вышел на крыльцо. Дождя нет, но с голых ветвей лип каплет. Это мокрый туман осел на деревьях и течет на влажную землю. Вернулся в теплую избу. Бородатый Иван Васильич и Нелюсов сидят за столом. На полу лежит кобель Набат, черная спина и желтое брюхо. Мы выпиваем портвейн. Мы очень много говорим и особенно о... тебе, Женя. Я скучаю по тебе, лелею всякую мелочь о тебе. [Люблю] тебя так крепко, что малейшая неприятность, даже предчувствие глупое доводит меня до волнений, кажется, что я буду несчастлив. Но сейчас об этом думать не хочу. Одно хочу сейчас: видеть тебя, слышать твой голос, эх, черт возьми, подойти к тебе на веранде, обвитой диким виноградом, (а ты сидишь на полочке) обнять тебя. Эх, Женя, Женя, я совсем одурел. Что делать мне? Заверь меня, иначе я умру. Все, что делаю я сейчас, все для тебя.

Ночь. Тишина. Я с тобой. Где же мне провести праздник? Ты ли будешь у меня или я поеду к тебе? Этот вопрос я задал тебе в том письме, жду ответа.

Милая моя, дай поцелую тебя, как на узкой скамейке. Имею ли я на это право сейчас, а? Твой до гроба. Ведь совсем одурел! Да?

Г. Ясная поляна. 27/-X 38

Женя!

Сейчас получил твое краткое письмо, бросил все и снялся с Ясной и поплыл в Москву. Сейчас жду поезда, а они — поезда, — как на грех, проходят мимо и мест нет и нет. В Москве буду 30 и 31. Необходимо присутствовать на комсомольском собрании. Будут выбирать комитет, а я партийный, прикрепленный к тому самому Литфонду. Надо поэтому быть на собрании. А там поеду к тебе. Сразу же поеду. К черту все сроки, еду и никаких. Если не вовремя приеду — извини. Но поеду.

Я не могу передать тебе всей радости, охватившей меня при получении твоего письма. Будь что будет. Сейчас встретимся. На эту поездку к тебе возлагаю все свои надежды. Все будет зависеть от

тебя. Везу тебе кое-что. Эти дни буду жить, как в лихорадке, ожидая поездки к тебе.
А тут осень, кругом тускло, унылое небо глупо лежит над черными траурными пашнями, над голым мертвым лесом, а кругом лиловый печальный горизонт. Люди утихомиренные с холодеющей кровью. Как видеть тебя хочу, просто невозможно сказать.
Боюсь оторвать тебя от учебы. Ты не получила, верно, два запоздалых моих письма с карточками. Прости, что я выслал тебе такую уйму самого себя.
А вот и билет куплен [...]
До свидания. Целую.
Привет матери.
29/X-38 Г.К.
Тула, вокзал

13/XI
Милая моя невестушка!
Наверно думаешь бог знает что. Как же не думать, ведь твой шалопай уехал 8-го и до сего дня не пишет ни строчки?! Не писал тебе потому, что думал все о тебе. Когда мало и редко думаешь о человеке, то всякий раз, как только вспоминаешь о нем, тут же решаешь: ага, нужно написать. Напишешь и забудешь о нем до следующего письма. А я так много и постоянно думаю о тебе, беседую мысленно с тобой, ложусь спать и вижу тебя, твои глаза, твои волосы, твое лицо и улыбку этого лица, что я не знаю: писать тебе или не нужно. Право, так много хочется сказать, что и не знаешь с чего начать. Ты советовала мне писать конкретно. Ну, вот слушай. Вчера говорили с Виктором Ю. У него ужасная путаница в голове. Человек умный, а не читает. Считает, что не в этом дело. Все писатели думали и старались делать одно и то же: счастье народа, смысл жизни и т. д. Как же можно решать эти вопросы одному сейчас, не зная во имя чего жили, боролись, погибали лучшие люди прошлого? Он наговорил кучу глупостей, из которой я понял одну дешевенькую и пошленькую идейку: человечеству нужно вернуться к звериному образу жизни, т. е. к какому-то выдуманному новому коллективному капитализму. Такая чушь возмутила и меня и моего товарища. Или В. несерьезно думал над жизнью, или он из тех пошляков, которые путают цели народа и свои личные мелочные гаденькие интересы и похотливые побужденьица.

Мы разбили его вдрызг. Я сказал ему, что он малообразованный мальчишка, объявивший a priori, что нечему учиться ему.
Он ушел совершенно убитый, сказав, что он оторвался от настоящей жизни, от народа и его интересов. Посмотрим, что будет дальше.
Сегодня прочитал в рукописи рассказ Теодора Ойзермана[1], о кот[ором] я тебе говорил. Насколько умно выступал он с критикой моего рассказа, настолько, даже больше, плохо написал он свой рассказ. Такая мертвая выгодность, такая бледная малокровная выдумка, что диву даешься: неужели человек писал добровольно, не из-под палки. Нет глупее человека доброго, взявшегося играть роль сатирика.
Писать еще есть кое о чем, но я пережду. Ведь ты просила писать мало. Не так ли? А, Женя? Ну, пока, всего. Расти большая и учись лучше.
Привет матери и брату.

14/X
Вчера закончил письмо к тебе, а сегодня ночью чуть не умер. Хорошо, что не услал письмо. Дело в том, что я отравился какой-то дрянью и ночью ужасно страдал. Хорошо, что был со мной друг Александр Федорович Нелюсов. Он проснулся, услыхав мои стоны. Зажег свет и испугался: я бледный лежал на полу. Он пощупал мою голову и грудь: они были холодны, как у мертвеца. Сердце у меня прямо замирало. Потом меня сорвало и я, совершенно обессилев, уснул только под утро. Целый день лежал дома. Скука. Читал Чехова. Пишет правду, но эта правда убивает человека, принижает его, не поднимает на борьбу. Вообще то ругать человека, трунить над ним, издеваться над его личной душой легкое и неблагородное дело. Человеку нужно внушать веру в себя, в свое будущее. Что человек мелок, жалок — это и до Чехова было известно. Писатель он, разумеется, талантливый и вовсе не нуждается в моем признании. Мне только кажется, что современная литература должна окрылять человека. Это вовсе не означает, что нужно расшаркиваться перед узколобым, толстозадым мещанином. Литература должна помогать человечеству избавиться от

[1] Theodor Ilych Oizerman (1914-1983), Soviet philosopher, historian and literary critic.

вчерашнего дня, т. е. от сил и привычек рабского общества, должна научить человека чувствовать хозяином земли.
Лежал и все придумывал каой-нибудь смешной сюжет. Не получается. Жаль.
Ты, верно, в обиде на меня? Не сердись. Я — весь твой, я с тобой.
Как плохо, что не умею писать стихов.
С прив[етом]. Г К.
15/X

Любезная моя Женя!
Сейчас вернулся из ин-та с собрания и нашел дома письмо. Вся усталость исчезла, равнодушие тоже начинает пропадать. Эти дни все ждал от тебя письма и, наконец, вот оно. Мне кажется, что я не стою такой теплой ласки. Пошутил. Сегодня редактировали с Белкиной *Илью Кожарова*. И вдруг на меня напала такая неудовлетворенность романом, что я еле-еле выдержал до 4 часов. Вот думаю над ним. Все, от строчки до строчки, ложь, выдумка, холодная рационалистическая галиматья. И все эти 4 года работы над ним сплошной обман не только самого себя, но и людей, так как я им сумел внушить, будто это писание суть художественное произведение. Заблуждение. Нет в этом романе ни одного слова правдоподобного. Все голая фантазия. Я не сказал этих мыслей Б. [Белкиной]. Пусть работает с увлечением. Нет, теперь бы я под страхом смерти не стал бы так писать. Такое отвращение охватило меня к этой выдумке, что я и не знаю: хватит ли силы и терпения доредактировать его до конца.
Сейчас как никогда хочется мне, чтобы ты прочитала эту скуку. Если такими же темпами пойдет работа, то я вышлю тебе экземпляр, уже исправленный числа 10 декабря. Или лучше в каникулы прочитаешь? Мне очень хочется знать твое мнение прежде, чем управлюсь сдать его в производство. Но я боюсь отнимать у тебя 3 дня времени на прочтение этого суррогата, а время тебе очень и очень нужно сейчас для зачетов. Ведь сама же пишешь, что запустила учебу. Я, наверное, не ошибусь, если скажу, что ты не меньше моего заинтересована в том, чтобы роман был хорошим. Ведь ты теперь вроде соавтора у меня!
В эти трудные минуты я ни разу ни к кому не обратился за советом, а почему-то потянуло к тебе. И твое мнение для меня будет окончательным, но не потому, что я считаю тебя очень уж иску-

шенной в жизни и литературе, а потому что ты и я одно и то же. Не так ли? А?

Что я еще делаю. Вчера вдруг захотелось писать тот роман, отрывки из которого я читал тебе в Ясной. Причем захотелось писать как-то по-новому. Сел за стол и начал писать. Пока будто ничего получается. Но сегодня подумалось: очень уж залез глубоко в историю. Надо бы о сегодняшнем живее писать. Как видишь, Женя, я переживаю нечто вроде осени или весны: не то дождь, не то снег, и такое сумбурное настроение. Буду писать только тогда, когда очень уж необходимо будет.

Скоро придет (завтра) Виктор и прочитает свой рассказ. А 18 я ездил с Бителем и молодыми писателями на дачу М. Горького. Огромный с колоннами дом на берегу Москвы-реки в 50 км от Москвы. Этот дом был Морозова (промышленника)[2]. Говорят, когда М. Горький женился на Андреевой,[3] Морозов, узнав это, застрелился в Париже. Он любил ее. Горький не хотел поселяться в этот дом, но его поселили, окружили негодяи – Ягода[4] и его сволочь и тут убили его. Жутко в этом доме. Огромные комнаты гостиного типа, совершенно не обжитые. Наверху жил праведник Максим Горький, а внизу бандит Крючков (секретарь его) спаивал сына Макса,[5] а Ягода и другие дегенераты пьянствовали, распутничали с женой Макса и убивали великого человеколюбца. Горький был проницательный, но враги знали одну его слабость — религиозное преклонение перед трудом, созидательной силой человека. Поэтому они действовали наверняка.

Авербах — этот сучий хвост, изолгавшийся до печенок, хвалил Ягоду, а Ягода его.

— Знаете, Ал. Макс., — скажет, бывало, Авербах,[6] — а Генрих Генрихович [Григорьевич – *ред.*] (Ягода) сегодня заболел гриппом.

— Что вы? Как?

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[2] Savva Timofeevich Morozov (1862-1905), Russian merchant, entrepreneur, and philanthropist.

[3] Maria Fedorovna Andreeva (1868-1953), common-law wife of Maxim Gorky.

[4] Genrikh Grigorievich Yagoda (1981-1938), head of Internal Affairs Department in the Soviet Government, arrested in 1937 on charges of anti-state activities and executed in 1938.

[5] Maksim Alekseevich Peshkov (1897-1934), son of Maksim Gorky from his first wife Ekaterina Pavlovna Peshkova.

[6] Leopold Leonidovich Averbakh (1903-1937), Soviet literary critic and editor who was tried and executed on the order of Stalin.

— Ночью переоделся и ходил по Москве и, увидав старую старушку — [*нрзб.*], он перенес ее на руках через улицу и дал ей денег и заразился от нее гриппом.
Горький в слезы. Не стану расписывать всей глупости, подлости и змеиной хитрости, которую применяли эти подлизы, чтобы отравить Горького. Характерно, что когда попытались сделать фотовыставку о жизни Горького, то получилась не жизнь, а фотовыставка на тему: как убивали Горького.
Увидимся — расскажу.
Первая жена А.М. Екатерина Павловна [Пешкова – *ред.*] напоила нас чаем. Я пригласил ее в Ясную. Обещалась приехать. Звала в гости еще. Поедем с тобой зимой или летом, когда лучше.
Видишь, как разошелся я, удержу нет. Дождусь ли я тебя? Так хочется видеть мою черноглазенькую! Кажется загнал бы сейчас последние пожитки, чтобы выслать тебе денег на дорогу, чтобы ты приехала хотя бы на 1-2 дня. Занимайся. Не волнуйся, не волнуй мать и брата. Хорошо, что это не случилось. Но мы бы не пропали даже в том случае, если это и было бы. Не так ли? А?
Сейчас уже 1 час ночи. Давай поцелуемся на сон грядущий.
Твой Г.
Привет матери и брату.
25/XI-38 г.
Кажется я, как Берг, только о себе и написал. Извини.

Что с тобой случилось, милая моя говорунья?
На письмо мое не отвечаешь, не заболела ли? Или так занята экзаменами? Или забыла меня, мнительного дурака, “продолговатого” дурака, как ты обзывала меня в Ясной. Каждый день жду письма, а его нет и нет. Или наступившие холода заморозили тебя. Или я напугал тебя своим письмом, в котором малость чернил себя. Горе с тобой. А тут еще сам я занемог, что-то раскис. Такая слабость, просто грех один. В последнее время жил плохо, питался не систематически, а кое-как. Готовлюсь к экзаменам. 30000 страниц надо перечитать. Лето то, сама знаешь, чем занимался. А теперь читаю и читаю, даже дневник некогда писать. Жалко. Сколько мыслей, образов просятся на бумагу.
Вчера просматривал конец — смерть Ильи Кожарова. Сделал одну вставку. Вряд ли пропустят. Работа с Белкиной подходит к концу. Видимо раньше 5-10 января ты не получишь роман с машинки. А у нас страшные холода и нет снегу. Голые камни накалились до того,

что сделались сизыми. Чего еще тебе писать, Женя? Жду каникулы. Тогда-то уж увидимся и поговорим. А как ты будешь Новый 1939 год встречать? Без меня?!
Передай привет матери и брату.
Всего доброго. Г.
Я читал Бунина *Исход* — страшная сила таланта. Кажется, что лучше его никто не писал на русском языке.
ГК.

18/XII- 38 года

Женя!
Получил твое письмо и очень удивился что не получила моего первого. Оно очень верное во всех отношениях. Я писал тебе в нем о том, что если ты хочешь, сообщу адрес моей бывшей жены. И что она так разделает меня в твоих глазах что ты тотчас же разлюбишь меня. Хочешь?
Письмо твое мне не понравилось. Извини. Сам не знаю, чем не понравилось. В Ясной я больше не работаю. Поэтому в зимние каникулы вряд ли поедем туда. К тому же я сейчас так обезденежил, что нужно будет в каникулы работать.
Я очень тоскую по сыну. Тебе это чувство еще непонятно. Это тяжелое, ужасное чувство. Каникулами поеду увидеться с ним. Во чтобы то ни стало поеду.
Письмо твое — какой-то холодный принудительный отчет о своих делах. Извини меня Женя, но это так. Если просто судить по этому письму, то ты не любишь меня, и переписка со мной для тебя неприятный труд.
Вот тебе в назидание эта короткая писулька.
Так-то вот,
Привет Г.К.
25/XII-38

Не стыдно тебе, упрямая девчонка? Не совестно тебе молчать? А? Обиделась на мое письмо? А не подумала: как он там теперь, написав это письмо? Эх ты, Женя! Я болен вот уже 6 дней. Началось с пустяка: ангина. Осложнение. Теперь лежу. Будто и нет особенной хвори, а таю, силы покидают меня. И ты молчишь. Опять гордость, да? А не подумала, что я все же старше тебя, что ты, кажется, могла бы отбросить свою гордость? Не подумала, легкомысленная!

Вот сдал на суд нечестивых *Илью Кожарова* — и пусто на душе! Будто обокрали… Сегодня писал новый роман, но устал. Чертова болезнь.
Как жалко, что тебя нет тут.
12 зовут в еврейский театр, где будет встреча с Михоэлсом. Не знаю, пойду ли. Плохо чувствую себя.
Опять не напишешь, да???
Знаю, бог правду видит! Моя кровь [*нрзб.*] на тебя по господу богу.
Дай твою ручку. Моя горячая. Ведь у меня жар.
Привет тебе. Г.К.
11/1-39

17/1-39г.
Женя!
…Ах, да пока расскажу тебе о *И*[*лье*] *К*[*ожарове*]. Работа закончилась. Печатают на машинке. Как напечатают, пошлю тебе один экземпляр. Будут читать и еще раз читать другие редактора. У меня все больше появляется желание писать и не печатать. Пусть после смерти печатают. Это, право, такое унизительное дело. Поставили к руководству из[дательст]вом людей с малокровной мыслью, трусов, и чего же ждать от них?
Хвалить хвалят, а все еще оглядываются: как бы чего не было. Каждый предлагает свои концовки. Одни говорят Кожаров (герой) должен жить, а другие: пусть умрет. Я же сказал: если вы так твердо знаете, что должен делать герой, то пишите сами романы. Больше чем уверен, что если бы *Война и мир* были написаны сейчас, то их бы не напечатали бы в таком своеобразном виде. Редактора предложили бы выкинуть все рассуждения, изменить стиль и т. д. Ужасная уравниловка идет. И все хлопочут, суетятся, пока не замусолят вещь до того, что она станет, как и все, т. е. стандартной! Причем все это делается с такой тупой самоуверенностью, точно только им, редакторам, поручил бог искусства все тайны творчества.
И[*лья*] *К*[*ожаров*] выйдет, конечно, но обстрижен, обмыт и т. д. Особенно будут ныть цензоры. Даже мой редактор Б[елкина] выбрасывает такие куски, что окончательно повергает меня в отчаяние. То ей кажется: пессимизм. А современный герой должен, как идиотик, улыбаться и смеяться во всю рожу. Как измельчала мысль, как опошлилось понимание поэзии. Но видимо без этой

бани я не могу печататься. Буду терпеть. Терпение победит. Только подняться бы на ноги, а тогда буду спорить.
Вот вчера читали рассказ *Калмыцкий брод*. Уж как не хвалили! И гением называли, и чего только не говорили. А рассказ-то этот написан мной еще в 1934 году, а в прошлом году его забраковал журнал *Кр*[*асная*] *Новь*. А тут вдруг — гений. Нет никакой охоты писать для печати. Все равно я не верю, что буду печататься в своем естественном виде. А после парикмахерской обработки не хочу. Били, снимали этих перестраховщиков, а они всюду. Да и трудно избавиться от них, ибо перестраховщик — это прежде всего трусость, низость, страх за свою шкуру, это служака, казенный Угрюм-Бурчеев. Какое ему дело до Сов. литературы? Он интересуется ей не больше, чем другим ведомством, которое дает ему заработок для продолжения племени крючкотворов и малокровно мыслящих людей. Ну, хватит. Пользы от этой ругани никому нет.
Женя, приготовься к восприятию моего откровения. У меня ведь не один сын, а два. Вот написал эти слова и остолбенел. Все кончено. Теперь ты с презрением от меня отвернешься. Пусть, что будет. Зато теперь все до самого основания рассказано. Не стану сейчас вдаваться в подробности о том, почему я сразу не сказал тебе об этом. Подлость натуры моей? Боязнь, что ты не полюбишь меня? Все может быть. А больше всего гадкое малодушие. Я виноват перед тобой, и поэтому не могу ни оправдываться, ни просить прощения, ни умолять, ничего не могу. Все будет зависеть от тебя. И какое бы ты решение ни приняла, я все оправдаю, ибо все будет правда. Будешь презирать меня, — я молчу, я виноват, все твои поступки и решения для меня убедительны. Говорить о том, что меня ждет после того, как ты порвешь со мной все, я не буду. Трусливых пакостников не жалеют. Их отбрасывают, как слизь. Вот и все. Это и мешало мне писать тебе, любить тебя честно и глубоко. Теперь я тебя люблю настоящей человеческой чистой любовью. И сейчас вот, в эту минуту — я стал другим человеком, и что бы ты там не решила, я буду любить тебя и помнить о тебе. Так хочется видеть тебя! Но я знаю, что ты, наверно, даже письма не напишешь мне.
Прости меня, Женя. Где бы я ни был, что бы я ни делал — я любил и буду любить тебя.
С прив[етом]. Г.К.
1/II-39 года

4/II-39 г.

Вот как убедился, что ты не приедешь, стало немилосердно скушно. В столовой продолжают отравлять компотами. Видишь, какую глупость пишу. Ксения Ив. принесла мне картошку. Пеку в печке и ем. Очень вкусно. Послал бы тебе одну, да думаю, что ты уже закормлена в доме отдыха. Ведь ты была там?
Скушно. Снова небо мутное. Снег да снег. Ветер и буран. Под окном лает Пират, просит хлеба. Он совсем стал худым и старым. У него до жути грустные тоскливые косые глаза, вялые вислые уши. Хозяин забыл о нем, увлекшись Ксюшей.
Еду домой. А что там ждет меня? Письма от тебя, конечно, нет. Как представлю себе, что нужно писать доклад аспирантский — сразу зубы ломит. XIX в. сдал. Весной сдам XX и весь кандидатский минимум долой! В этом году должен дать противный доклад, а в следующем диссертацию. Тут всего гора. Лучше переписывать что-нибудь, как Акакий Акакиевич, чем слепнуть над ученой работой. Какой я ученый? Я даже не могу принимать вид ученого “мужа”, как это делают мои сверстники.
6/II-39 г.

Милая моя Женя!
Я безумный дурак. Приехал домой из Ясной и воскрес я — твое письмо вернуло мне жизнь. Я многое переживаю сейчас, но ничего не могу сказать. Ах, как бы хотел я сейчас снова обмыть твои ноги в Яснополянском пруду! Боже мой, я бы обнял твои ноги и замер от счастья. Мелкий, как видишь, я человек. Женя, Женя, прости мне безумие мое. Неужели ты хотела быть со мной?? Как я томился, ожидая тебя в Ясной поляне. Если бы ты явилась, я бы задушил тебя от счастья. Дурак! Что это такое?
И вот не дожидаясь ответа на мое письмо, пишу тебе. Милая, приезжай хоть на один день: иначе я умру.
Нет, нет, как хочешь, так и действуй. Учись, учись, моя, черт бы тебя побрал, черноглазая злюка. Ты извела меня. Я тебя когда-нибудь удушу от радости. Вру. Я буду на тебя просто смотреть и быть счастливым. Я буду тихим и податливым. Хочешь — убью я себя ради твоего желания. Слушай-ка, или я дурак или сошел с ума. Но мне так захотелось видеть тебя и целовать тебя, что я места себе не нахожу. Довольно. Век то ведь практический сейчас. Пишу тебе, а самому хочется бежать к тебе сейчас же.
Если еще такая тоска по тебе продлится месяц, то ищи меня в доме сумасшедших.

Твой дурак и все что угодно Григорий.
7/II-39 года.

Женя!
Вчера приехал из Ясной Алекс. [Алексей Нелюсов] и привез твое письмо. А я то думал: почему она молчит. Так хочется видеть тебя, что просто говорить нет сил. А как видеть? Сейчас нет возможности поехать к тебе. Вот разве спустя дней 10, тогда. Сейчас иду в Госиздат, где будут обсуждать *Илью*. Что скажут? Напишу.
Пришел с этого собрания в час ночи. Что? Высказались еще не все, но и эти уничтожили совсем. Роман — выдумка, очень шумная. Больше писать нечего.
С прив[етом]. Г.К.
15/III-39г.

Женя!
Получил твое письмо. Спасибо. Я понимаю твое желание видеть меня или читать мои письма. Но ни того, ни другого не получается. Ехать к тебе не имею никакой возможности. Говорить же о том, что хочется видеть тебя — бесполезно, только одно расстройство! Писать о том, что меня волнует — не поднимаются руки. Молчать иногда полезнее для здоровья. Роман разбирали, но еще не кончили разбирать. Некоторые с непонятным мне ожесточением уничтожали меня, будто я чем-то оскорбил. Не хочется распространяться на эту тему. Скучно. Сколько вкусов, столько оценок. Вопрос печати *И*[*льи*] *К*[*ожарова*] решит заведующий современной прозой т. Резник.[7] Он читает сейчас. Скажет свое мнение числа 23–25 марта. А мнение бригады для него необязательно. Высказалась только половина членов бригады, а другая половина и Бабель будут высказываться на следующем занятии. Тогда и я буду говорить. Конечно, роман имеет недостатки, но он — художественное произведение — это я знаю.
Ты утешаешь меня тем, что Гоголь начал с *Ганца Кюхельгартена*, Некрасов с *Мечты и звуков* и т.д. Милая, все это верно, но они начинали в твоем возрасте, а не таким дядей, как я! В этом все дело. Если б я знал, что проживу 100–120 лет, тогда бы я не отчаивался, а вдруг я умру скоро и ничего-то не сумел. Разве это не горько?

[7] Yakov Lazarevich Reznik (1912-1988), Soviet prose writer, journalist, and editor.

Громов, Чкалов – покорили воздух, Стаханов — открыл новую эру человеческого труда, Шолохов поставил замечательный памятник нашей эпохи (*Тихий Дон*), Соболев — академик, доктор математических наук в 29 лет, Буся Гольдштейн — мировой скрипач, лейтенант Злой бил японцев на Хасане, а я... Что я сделал? Измарал несколько тетрадей, обманул надежды и свои и близких дорогих мне людей, проедал народные деньги — стипендию, но ничего не сделал!!!

Пишу тебе письмо и слушаю по радио концерт из Большого театра для делегатов XVIII съезда партии. Вот много товарищей. Я и от них отстал. Все сожрал мой пустой замысел — роман. Съел меня, мою энергию. Если бы я работал над собой в другом плане — тяжело, пусть..., я бы давно освободил свою старую мать от тяжкой необходимости добывать себе хлеб насущный. А я все еще живу выдумками. Впрочем, хватит.

Как твое здоровье?

Ты не обижайся, если я буду молчать долго или замолчу совсем, не буду писать тебе. Я пересматриваю всю свою путаную жизнь.

Ну, будь здорова.

Г. Коновалов

29 марта 1939 года

Право, я достоин не только презрения, но и сожаления.

Г.К.

Женя!

Тяжело стало молчать. Не писал, но все думал о тебе. Иной раз плакал — так жалко было тебя. С 9 апреля по 23 апр. был в Ясной. Невозможно передать всей силы природы в этот момент: снег стаял, Воронка разлилась. В лесу жарко, идет пар от земли из-под листвы. Тогда уж распустились почки тополя, бузины, яблоня набухла и так пахла. Я проводил там курсы экскурсоводов — читал им лекции по литературе. На утренней и вечерней заре ходил на охоту с Пиратом. Снова обошел все те места, где мы с тобой бывали. И вот уехал. Хотел к тебе на май поехать, но не пустили из института. 29 и 30 дежурил в парткоме. Послал тебе телеграмму, но ты не приехала. А зря. Впрочем, я знал, что ты не приедешь.

Сейчас сижу и перерабатываю *Илью* К[*ожарова*]. Так [тошно? *ред.*], что ужас! Все же в этом месяце побываю у тебя. Впрочем, я ведь не знаю, как ты меня примешь! Ведь ты обиделась на мое последнее письмо. Прости. Ведь я не знаю, почему это так получилось. Вот жду

из Ясной телеграмму. Как зацветут яблони, они дадут мне телеграмму: зацвели. И я выезжаю принимать экзамены у моих учеников.
Ах, Женя, не хочется сдавать самому-то экзамен. Это последний. Тогда только диссертация и все.
Ну, пока. Не сердись на меня, дурака.
С приветом. Г. Коновалов.
6/V-39 г.
Пиши. А?

Женя!
Поздравляю с окончанием третьего курса. Сейчас просматривал твои письма и плакал над ними. Замирает сердце.
Был в Ясной весной, когда тепло. Потом, когда цвели яблони и пели соловьи. Потом 17 июня, цвели жасмин и розы. Угар от их томного запаха стоит в усадьбе. Такая сочная зелень! Помнишь или нет близ пруда серебристый тополь? Такой здоровый? Мы еще смотрели на него в дождь, когда я вернулся летом из Москвы с колбасами и т.п.? 18 июня в этот тополь ударила гроза и отломала у него огромную ветку. Но он устоял, только страшно кричал-скрипел.
Я сдаю 26 последний экзамен. Последний в жизни. И остаюсь писать диссертацию *Сказки и короткие рассказы Л. Н. Толстого*. На это дают год.
1 или 2-го еду посмотреть сына в Пермь, потом к брату на Южный Урал на озеро Тургояк, потом к матери в Оренбургские степи, потом в Таганрог к товарищу.
Верно, я тебя так обидел *тем* письмом? Не отвечаешь мне. Писал тебе, давал телеграмму — молчишь. Теперь уж и не смею просить.
Привет матери и брату.
С приветом Г.К.
25/VI-39 года

Giuseppina Larocca

Андрей Тарковский, Джузеппина Ларокка

“Отец стал художником, вернее, родился поэтом, потому что родился в семье поэтов”

Джузеппина Ларокка беседует с Андреем Андреевичем Тарковским

Предисловие

В 2022 году исполнилось 90 лет со дня рождения Андрея Тарковского, гения мирового кинематографа, режиссера, сумевшего создать новую форму кино, сформировавшего представление о вневременной красоте. Есть много причин, делающих его личность и творчество великими, по сей день исследователи посвящают многочисленные исследования творчеству гения. Предлагаемое ниже интервью с сыном режиссера Андреем Андреевичем Тарковским, президентом Международного Института Андрея Тарковского во Флоренции, освещает некоторые важные аспекты биографии и творчества синеаста. Прежде всего, для понимания значения и особенностей поэтики Тарковского необходимо поместить автора в русскую культурную систему координат, в особенности в литературную систему так называемого модернизма, эту традицию глубокого и порой бурного поиска истины, традицию, на которую Тарковский в значительной степени опирается. Своеобразие кадров, завораживающая поэтичность образов в фильмах Тарковского, несомненно, напоминают некоторые отличительные черты культуры 10-х гг. с особым вниманием к философии Павла Флоренского, к его идее иконы, а также ко всей поэзии не столько символистов — прежде всего Вячеслава Иванова — сколько акмеистов — от Мандельштама до Анны Ахматовой.

С детства будущий режиссер рос в очень оживленной литературной среде, в которой поэзия была верным спутником и где, как писал Осип Мандельштам, “около литературы бывают свидетели, как бы

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домочадцы ее" (Мандельштам 2002: 85). Отец Арсений, а также мать Андрея Мария — молодые поэты, которые познакомились на Брюсовских курсах в Москве в 1920-х годах и сформировались на волне богатого и изобильного Серебряного века, несмотря на социальные и политические потрясения 1917 года. Арсений — "талантливый юноша, многообещающий" (Дейч 1999: 22), исследователь, переводчик, любитель слова, находящийся в постоянном поиске литературного пути, по-символистски восстанавливающего выразительность слова и одновременно усиливающего его чистоту и простоту, характерные для акмеистической традиции. Этот путь сближает Арсения Тарковского с Борисом Пастернаком, одним из его любимых авторов, у которого он заимствует многие черты, например — концепцию природы; идею же лаконичности, а также "иллюзию метафоричности" (Виноградов 1976: 406) Арсений перенимает у Анны Ахматовой.

Некоторые постоянные темы в творчестве Арсения Тарковского — как ранних лет, так и зрелого периода — сливаются в творчестве Андрея, и биографическая связь между отцом и сыном становится источником творчества: культ памяти, осознание того, что поэт — единственный выразитель пространства и времени в видении жизни, в котором прошлого и будущего не существует, ведь есть только опыт певца, как греческого рапсода, дарующего толпе поэтический дар, преодолевающий любую границу времени и пространства. Это измерение можно найти в фильмах Андрея: это или вневременное измерение или такое присутствие времени, когда кажется, что оно хоть и существует, но является второстепенным (как в *Андрее Рублеве* или *Ностальгии*, в которых время, кажется, имеет свое собственное точное значение). Другой элемент поэтики Арсения, приветствуемый Андреем в постоянном диалоге отца и сына, — это природа, изображаемая во всех ее элементах, постоянно вызывающая в памяти стихи Пастернака: огонь, вода и все ее вариации наполняются символическим значением, антропоморфизируются, описываются как настроения творения. Природа как бы становится местом, где конфликты примиряются сами собой, приобретая черты новой шеллинговской природы.

Одним из наиболее ощутимых моментов встречи отца и сына является, несомненно, фильм *Зеркало*, впервые показанный в российских кинотеатрах в 1974 году. Четвертый фильм Тарковского, фильм, по словам Андрея Тарковского, автобиографический, несмотря на то, что "каждый фильм Тарковского автобиографичен".

Уникальность *Зеркала* состоит именно в той тесной связи, которая устанавливается между поэзией и образом благодаря встрече Арсения и Андрея: сочетание, которое в *Зеркале* можно определить как желанное, непосредственное, своеобразное, поскольку присутствие Арсения конкретно и постоянно. Тут речь идет не только о закадровом голосе поэта, читающем собственные стихи и сопровождающим образы, но и о поэтичности его слов, придающей содержание изображенной Андреем природе. Арсений – путеводная звезда для молодого Андрея, и он сам в этом признается. В фильме-интервью 1983 года Донателле Бальиво, редактору RAI в 1980-х гг., Тарковский вспоминает своего отца и заявляет:

> Мой отец, конечно, сейчас самый большой поэт, вне всяких сомнений, русский поэт с огромной лирической интонацией, с огромным духовным зарядом своей поэзии, поэт в чистом виде, поэт для которого самым главным является его внутренняя духовная концепция жизни, духовный долг по отношению к своей земле, к родине и к своей роли. (Baglivo 1983)

Лирическая интонация и духовный заряд поэзии превращаются Тарковским в кино, образы, намеки и делают их автора выразителем духа серебряного века, в том "позднем модернизме" (Livak 2018: 126-127), который в литературе выражен в первую очередь авторами-эмигрантами.

Вселенная Тарковского многогранна, чарующа, она способна возобновить отношения между личностью и космосом в постоянном синтезе искусства и творчества, в котором слово, поэзия и литература, безусловно, представляют собой бесспорный эпицентр. Так поэзия становится вечной, как стихи Живаго. Ведь на вопрос: "Вы считаете себя бессмертным?" Тарковский ответил: "Да, это точно!" (Baglivo 1983).

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Дж. Л.: Среди работ Андрея Тарковского *Зеркало* (1974) считается фильмом, наиболее отражающим отношения Арсения и Андрея, хотя здесь присутствует также и мать Андрея, центрального персонажа фильма. Цитаты, голос твоего деда за кадром, его стихи, роль Марии Вишняковой, сыгранная Маргаритой Тереховой, — элементы, на которые и сегодня указывают кинокритики как на очевидно биографические. Этот биографический пласт прослеживается на разных уровнях во всем творчестве Тарковского, в том числе в произведении *тамиздата Запечатленное время* (в интернете можно найти многие 'издания' на русском, но ты сейчас готовишь официальное русское издание) и *Мартирологе*, текстах менее известных, чем фильмы, но все же не менее важных. С твоей точки зрения, какие элементы поэтики Арсения Тарковского отразились как в кинематографическом творчестве, так и в дневниках и очерках твоего отца, и какие аспекты, связанные с Марией Вишняковой, проступают в его поэтике?

А.А.Т: *Зеркало* — автобиографический фильм, но каждый фильм Тарковского автобиографичен. *Зеркало* наверно единственный фильм, задуманный и сделанный как автобиография режиссера. Сама идея сценария и воспоминаний Тарковского о детстве была воспринята негативно некоторыми его коллегами, например, оператором Вадимом Юсовым, с которым он работал. Юсов отказался снимать *Зеркало*, потому что считал, что позиция автора очень индивидуалистская и нескромная.
По моему мнению *Зеркало* — фильм, посвященный матери, это фильм о матери. Человеческие отношения, любовь к родителям, всё выражено в одной фигуре матери, ибо мать для отца фигура фундаментальная, как он сам говорил: "Без нее я бы не стал режиссером". Она принесла себя в жертву ради своих детей, она их вырастила, из-за детей она больше не писала. Мария Вишнякова познакомилась с Арсением в 30-е гг. на Брюсовских курсах литературы в Москве, оба были очень молодыми (им было около двадцати лет) литераторами, оба были поэтами. Когда Арсений писал стихи, первым цензором всегда была жена, она говорила какое слово выбрать и какое лучше не употреблять. Поэтому она явилась ключевой фигурой и в творчестве Арсения. В 1932-1933 г. дедушка уходит из семьи, оставляя Марию, которая заботится о детях. Тогда она сжигает всё, что писала,

всё своё литературное наследие. Всю свою жизнь после этого она посвятила детям, работая корректором в типографии, и больше она никогда не писала. У нее был очень сильный характер, и отец любил ее, поэтому *Зеркало* является в основном гимном матери, любви, глубоких духовных связей, родственных нитей, отношения же с Арсением были более сложными. Отец всегда стремился к Арсению, но как он сам говорит в фильме *Кино как молитва* (2019 г.), "я очень любил отца, я хотел быть с ним, но никогда бы с ним жить не стал". В фильме, таким образом, выражаются, с одной стороны, конфликт брошенного ребенка, а с другой, любовь к творчеству отца, к его поэтическому языку, к его поэтическому видению. И в каждом фильме Арсений присутствует каким-то образом, Андрей часто цитирует его стихи, поэтическое мировоззрение пронизывает его фильмы. Я уверен, что отец стал художником, вернее, родился поэтом, потому что родился в семье поэтов. *Зеркало* самый сложный фильм с точки зрения художественной образности: не существует определенного сценария, он построен на эпизодах, складывающихся в определенную мозаику из времени, из воспоминаний, абсолютно разорванных между собой. Отца критиковали именно за то, что здесь не просматривается логическая мысль, логические цепочки, но мысль существует, несмотря на то, что цепочка не логическая, а эмоциональная: представляется история жизни человека и когда человек воспоминает свое прошлое, он никогда не думает логически о том, каким было его прошлое. Это происходит у каждого из нас: когда воспоминаем, мы видим своё детство, давние воспоминания перемешиваются с недавними, с воспоминаниями родителей, они построены на эмоциональном уровне. Это можно назвать поэмой, кинопоэмой, поэтическим произведением, однако в *Зеркале* присутствует канва и на сознательном, не только на поэтическом уровне. В истории драматургии нет подобного опыта. Если мы говорим об Арсении и литературном образовании отца, его видении мира, мы не должны путать кино с поэзией, с литературой, это абсолютно два разных языка. В творчестве отца можно, конечно, найти мироощущение Арсения как всю чувствительность русского серебряного века, недаром любимый поэт Тарковского, кроме Арсения – Пастернак, хотя самым любимым поэтом всегда был Пушкин. К этому классическому литературному представлению мира и использованию языка Андрей еще добавил своё видение, он нашел свой язык, свой киноязык, своё личное поэтическое восприятие окружающего. *Зеркало*, таким образом, это вообще попытка высказаться, осознать

себя через воспоминания, через фигуру матери, отца, но и одновременно попытка признаться им в чем-то. Те невысказанные вещи, которые в жизни он не смог высказать, он выразил в своём фильме: “У меня всегда была проблема высказаться, в семье даже, признаться в любви к своим родственникам”.

Дж. Л.: Еще одна постоянная тема в фильмах и текстах Тарковского — изображение детей и детства. Можно вспомнить не только Ивана из *Иванова детства* (1962), не только ребенка из *Жертвоприношения* (1986), но также многочисленные наблюдения, которые мы находим в *Запечатленном времени*. Многие подчеркивали интеллектуальный долг Тарковского по отношению к Достоевскому, но Толстой, вероятно, является наиболее прямым источником, переработанным для создания образа ребенка. В *Запечатленном времени* Тарковский пишет, что поэт — человек с детским воображением и психологией, что его мировосприятие остается непосредственным, как бы ни было глубоко его мировоззрение. Какое представление о детстве имел Тарковский и к чему, на твой взгляд, относятся его литературные, художественные и кинематографические отсылки?

А.А.Т: Что касается образа ребенка, он основывается в творчестве моего отца на личном опыте и на личных переживаниях. Его детство было прекрасным, несмотря на голод, на семейные сложности, несмотря на войну, которую отец пережил очень тяжело, и естественно всё это выразилось в его творчестве, это было буквально воспроизведено в кадрах *Зеркала*. Я не думаю, что отец строил свои образы ребенка на основе каких-то литературных источников. Это было прямое переложение собственной судьбы, собственных воспоминаний. Естественно, его культурный багаж, литературные произведения, которые он читал, были переработаны, пережиты его личным опытом. Фигура ребенка чистая, еще не неиспорченная и неопороченная в человеке и в его судьбе, и к этому стремится каждый человек: мы живем и всегда вспоминаем наше детство как лучший период жизни, мы всегда стремимся туда вернуться, но это невозможно. В литературе, в поэзии это всегда описывается как золотой век, когда еще отсутствует время, понятие времени, для ребенка жизнь бесконечна, он ощущает себя вечным. Отец говорит, что “у ребенка непосредственное восприятие мира” и что его фильмы “нужно смотреть глазами ребенка”. Это значит, что его фильмы надо воспринимать и смотреть как любое произведение искусства,

в первую очередь эмоционально. Первая встреча — это не интеллектуальный анализ, а непосредственный эмоциональный контакт, сопереживание, катарсис, единение автора и зрителя, в этом случае, — полное единение с автором дают возможность ощутить мир его глазами, открыть для себя новые горизонты глазами автора. Это то, что он всегда говорил о кино: кинематограф отличается от литературы, потому что непосредственно действует на зрителя, в нем нет языка как такового, или, точнее кино не описывает реальность посредством других изобразительных средств, оно оперирует конкретным отображением реальности. Конечно существует т.н. киноязык, связанный с монтажом и драматургией, но это уже теория и анализ, которые, по его мнению, представляют собой уже следующие шаги на пути восприятия фильма. Как он писал в своей книге *Запечатленное время*, кинематограф оперирует реальностью и временем. В кино мы видим непосредственные вещи, не их описание, они существуют реально, здесь задействованы все чувства: звук, зрение, полное погружение в реальность. Кино — очень сильное искусство, оно 'насилует' зрителя, действует на все чувства, когда он сидит один на один с экраном в темном кинозале. Для него главное в кинематографе именно создать этот мост со зрителем, эмоциональный контакт. Понял ли человек фильм, не понял — не важно, логическое осмысление приходит позже, важнее принял или не принял; это немного разные вещи. Это некое духовное единение, свойственное скорее религиозному опыту, это некое сопереживание. Чрезвычайно важно, почувствовать то, что чувствует автор. Поэтому часто фильмы Тарковского кажутся непонятными, фигура ребенка для него олицетворяет именно возможность непосредственно воспринимать, принимать или отторгать произведение искусства. Как он говорит, у ребенка еще не потеряна связь с другим миром, он еще находится в двух измерениях, в нашем материальном мире и нематериальном, он еще связан с трансцендентным. Он сам всегда чувствовал эту связь и его детские воспоминания являются решающим моментом в фильмах, например девочка в конце *Сталкера*, жена и ее монолог, который полностью переворачивает всю картину. И кстати его первые воспоминания о Сибири, его путешествие в Сибирь повлияли и сформировали его как художника. Поэтому он верил, что художник должен говорить о себе, быть очень искренним, потому что любая фальшь замечается, ее можно заметить и она отторгнет зрителя. Через честный и непосредственный рассказ о себе можно достучаться до души другого человека, поэтому фигуры,

образы, которые ему не принадлежат, он полностью исключал из своих картин.

Дж. Л.: Касаясь темы Тарковский и литература, *Мартиролог* и *Запечатленное время* представляют собой, хотя и в разных формах, непрерывный ряд размышлений и отсылок к классической русской литературе. В *Мартирологе* Тарковский пишет, что все русские гении думали о том, что их величие не может происходить из плоской, бессмысленной почвы, и, поэтому, называли свою страну Великой, а будущее мессианским. Они чувствовали, что они 'глас народа', и не хотели быть гласом вопиющего в пустыне. Он считал Пушкина вершиной литературы, но писал, что Пушкин — скромнее других авторов, лишь только потому, что «гений Пушкина — гармоничен. Гений же Толстого, Достоевского, Гоголя — гений дискомфорта, дисгармонии, воплощенный в конфликте авторов с желаемым, в их замысле» (от 16 апреля 1979 г. С. 204). Каково отношение Тарковского к классикам русской литературы? Кого он считал 'классиком' и почему? По сравнению с твоим отцом, каков твой канон русской литературы?

А. А. Т.: Здесь я согласен с отцом, поскольку действительно есть гении, которые органичны. Например, в музыке Моцарт и Бетховен, в литературе это Пушкин и Толстой. Когда читаешь Достоевского, в нем страсть, конфликт, всё горит, страница горячая: просто невозможно оторваться. Когда читаешь Пушкина, ты уже где-то там, там, где конфликт превзойден, поскольку он — совершенен. Я думаю, что отец имел в виду это, когда говорил о гармоничности Пушкине и о других авторах, а т.н. классиках, о Толстом и Гоголе. Хотя, среди его любимых авторов был именно Достоевский, о котором он постоянно пишет и говорит: "У меня всегда конфликтная ситуация с Достоевским", потому что Достоевский ближе к нашей эпохе конфликта и борьбы, вечной борьбы духа и плоти. Несмотря на это, Достоевский — единственный автор, которого отец всегда хотел реализовать в кино, но так и не успел. Однако, я думаю, что в каждом фильме Андрея Тарковского есть Достоевский, если не цитата, то направление мысли или идей Достоевского. Вообще, что касается русской философии серебряного века, всё идет от Достоевского. Поэтому Пушкин, Бах, Моцарт — это некий Парнас, который самодостаточен. Достоевский же — это конфликт. Толстой если не

затрагивать его идеологию — великий художник, он создает удивительные образы. Любимым романом отца была *Анна Каренина*: простой сюжет, он написан абсолютно идеально. Достоевский писал довольно сложно, проза Достоевского не идеальна. Поэтому, видимо, мой отец разделял их. Он говорил, что Толстой — замечательный писатель, великий писатель, более великий, чем Достоевский, но когда Толстой начинает учить, делает это догматично, он невыносим, таким образом как будто существуют два Толстых. Для отца это очень важно, потому что иногда художник, поэт, великий поэт, гений является переводчиком, через него говорит нечто другое, трансцендентное, а он всего лишь раб, он должен предварять в жизнь нечто, проводить через себя и реализовывать, но когда поэт начинает думать, что именно он является источником, тогда возникают проблемы, идеология и т.д.

Что касается меня, Достоевский это — тоже мой писатель. Пушкин же в литературе, как Бах и Моцарт в музыке — некие вечные, фигуры, которые настолько идеальны, настолько самодостаточны, что я больше идентифицирую себя например с прозой Достоевского, потому что его конфликт, его вопросы — это и мои вопросы. Вопрос бездуховности — это проблема, которая не существовала для Пушкина и Толстого, они были глубоко верующие люди, они были гармоничны, верили в Бога. Достоевский хотел верить в Бога, но не мог. По словам отца, это конфликт — желание верить и невозможность верить — конфликт современного человека, это конфликт мой, твой, это конфликт современности и проблема, связанная с этим конфликтом, возникает повсюду, особенно для современного искусства: это последствие конфликта и оторванности человека от его духовной чалы, именно поэтому Достоевский настолько современен, потому что каждый переживает до сих пор все это. Все произведения Достоевского я прочитал сразу, от его произведений нельзя оторваться. Такого у меня не было с Толстым. Толстого можно оставить, потом снова начать читать на следующий день. Достоевского нужно закончить, ты начинаешь читать и уже невозможно оторваться, поэтому ты теряешь день, ночь, два, три дня, двадцать часов чтения и так у меня было только с Достоевским. Здесь как раз отец имел в виду именно это. Если Пушкин — это нечто к чему нужно стремиться, идти, то Достоевский — это то, что мучит, болит.

Дж. Л.: А что ты предпочитаешь, прозу или поэзию?

А. А. Т.: Поэзия — конечно очень отличается от прозы. Я воспринимаю поэзию чисто эмоционально, пытаюсь понять ее глазами ребенка, как говорил мой отец. Поэзия — это там, где есть созвучие, камертон, который созвучен и мне лично, и я эту поэзию люблю. Можно понимать, например всего Пушкина, я считаю, что каждый русский человек в первую очередь должен понимать Пушкина. Он — нечто уникальное с точки зрения языка. Человек, который столько времени назад писал на русском языке, остается и по сей день настолько современным. Его можно читать, понимать на любом уровне. Мало таких поэтов. Пушкин остается уникальным.

Дж. Л.: Ты процитировал Бетховена. Какой образ композитора у тебя возникает, если ты думаешь о Достоевском и о Толстом в музыкальном плане?

А. А. Т.: Бетховен — больше Достоевский. Бах — наверное, Пушкин, также Пушкин — Моцарт. Может быть Пушкин ближе к Моцарту, поскольку они оба ушли довольно рано и, не смотря на то, что, естественно, они оба гении и создали великие произведения, их потенциал мог бы даровать человечеству еще многое. Бах умер в почетном возрасте, поэтому он достиг вершин, которые, может быть, Моцарт мог бы превзойти. Про Толстого думаю, что это не Бетховен, скорее Гайдн, но может быть кто-либо из ранних романтиков, Брамс может быть. Я очень люблю Толстого, чрезвычайно люблю его романы.

Дж. Л.: В одном из своих очерков 1932 года *Поэт и время* Марина Цветаева отмечает вслед за Рильке: "'Есть такая страна — Бог, Россия граничит с *ней*' [...] С этой страной Бог — Россия по сей день граничит. *Природная граница*, которой не сместят политики, ибо означена не церквами. [...] Россия никогда не была страной земной карты. И ехавшие отсюда ехали именно за границу: видимого. На *эту* Россию ставка поэтов. На Россию — всю, на Россию — всегда. Но и России мало". Твой отец — один из таких поэтов, о которых говорит Цветаева: в постоянном поиске России, но сознающий, что самой России недостаточно. И эта неугомонность, всегда присутствующая в русской культуре, ясно выступает в его поэтике, хотя никогда не кричит 'во весь голос'. В этом Тарковский фактически является наследником литературной традиции Серебряного века,

возможно, в поисках того синтеза символизма и акмеизма, что характерно для Бориса Пастернака. Каким, на твой взгляд, был образ России, который намеривался запечатлеть Тарковский, и каковы были его отношения с литературным наследием русского модернизма?

А. А. Т.: Андрея Тарковского много раз называли модернистом, постмодернистом. Надо понимать, что кино — это искусство, которое родилось именно в эпоху модернизма, это дитя модернизма, нового языка. Поэтому если мы говорим о кинематографе, то оно принадлежит этой эпохе, кинематограф в целом принадлежит этой эпохе, это новое молодое искусство, которое в первые годы становления, по словам отца зависело от литературы, в поисках своего собственного пути. Русская культура эсхатологична, в ней всегда присутствует ожидание конца и на реализацию этой идеи конца, стремления его достигнуть, приносится в жертву все остальное. Это противоположное видение европейскому мышлению, основанному на классической культуре, греческого и особенно римского периода, основанной на равновесии. В российской культуре равновесия не существует, все во имя конца, все во имя реализации этого конца. Примеров этого множество в литературе, в культуре, в искусстве, в политике. Мне кажется, сама революция возможна была только в России, поскольку принесено было в жертву все, во имя каких-то идеалов, которые абсолютно недостижимы. Это все последствия данного мышления, этого видения мира. В этом смысле для моего отца творчество это возможность познать через свои произведения, поиск истины, поэтому творчество никогда не было для него конечной целью, а способом познания через искусство. Искусство это тоже одна из возможностей познания помимо философии и науки. Это духовный поиск, поиск Абсолюта, который свойствен всему серебряному веку в философском смысле. Отец несомненно был хорошо знаком с философией Соловьева, Бердяева, Флоренского, которых он многократно цитировал на своих выступлениях. Здесь также важно помнить, что он был глубоко религиозным художником, может быть это не так заметно, но он был верующим человеком как и многие в серебряном веке. Поэтому в его творчестве нет постмодернизма, нет фрагментации, а есть поиск общего. Для постмодернизма становится важнее *как,* чем *что*, а для него всегда было важнее *что,* чем *как,* он пытался создать в кино — создать образ, образ мира. Его образ — это его молитва, это было выражение его

связи с высшими силами, с Богом. Если эта молитва созвучна другому человеку, тогда произведение работает, тогда это действительно становится молитвой. Не каждый способен на это. Художник вообще никто, он раб, он творит во имя высшего идеала. Это некая опять же мессианская идея, которая всегда существовала в русской культуре, поэтому он ее, по-моему, идеально выражает в своем искусстве. Он выражает это новым языком и, наверное, кроме него в кино никто это не использовал, это довольно уникальная его способность, может быть именно благодаря тому, что он был поэтом. Нет другого режиссера как Тарковский, и это даже не кино, возможно это синтез поэзии, литературы, живописи, музыки. Это уникальный и своеобразный кинематографический образ, но это не собрание разных образов, это что-то новое, это новое явление, которое, мне кажется, могло произойти только в России, только благодаря именно тому наследию, именно тем культурным и философским идеям, о которых мы говорили. Слова Бердяева: "Если я даже не способен понять истину, моя жизнь будет посвящена поискам пути". Можно полностью перенести к самопознанию Тарковского как человека, и как художника. И в этом смысле он классик, это все идет опять же именно от Достоевского, это все возвращается глубоко в русские, славянские корни. Это можно увидеть уже в его втором фильме *Андрей Рублев*. Удивительно насколько в 35 лет он уже был сформирован как художник, как личность, как творец. Это не просто история иконописца Андрея Рублева, это история России, это становление российского государства, становление, которое началось с куликовской битвы как символа освобождения и единения. Рублев олицетворяет в искусстве идею любви, соборности, исихазма, он был учеником Сергия Радонежского, основной, ключевой фигуры формирования российского государства и российской культуры. С самого начала для отца главным была попытка осмыслить себя как автора, как художника в истории своего народа. И каждый фильм его это именно такой шаг, поступок на пути самопознания.

Дж. Л.: И между этими двумя измерениями, божественным и человеческим, о которых ты говорил, всегда находится сам Рублев.

А. А. Т.: Да, и опять же Достоевский, опять те же мучения, сомнения, конечно, это постоянная борьба, потому что Рублев не просто монах, он становится художником после всех испытаний через

которые он прошел: любовь женщины, убийство, молчание. Он переживает все страсти человеческого пути и реализует идею исихазма, он осознает любовь только после того, как он все это пережил. Речь идет о земном опыте, необходимом человеку для прохождения пути. Тарковский здесь ставит главный религиозный вопрос, саму религиозную идею Христа как Бога-человека. Для Рублева это человек-Бог, это становится ясно в его споре с Феофаном Греком. Поэтому это чрезвычайно важный фильм для осмысления именно русской мысли и русской идеи.

Дж. Л.: И опять же Рублев смотрит на жизнь глазами ребенка.

А. А. Т.: Да, он абсолютно открыт и когда он говорит о любви, он цитирует письмо Петра к Коринфянам, где, если ты достиг величайшего, но любви нет в тебе, то тогда ты никто. И он это говорит ребенку, девочке, и все это очень важно. Это как раз идея исихазма, которая была очень близка отцу и он ее пронес через свои фильмы и свое творчество, через свое формирование как художника.

Дж. Л.: В *Кино как молитва*, твоем последнем фильме 2019 года, посвященном отцу, показанном в итальянских и международных кинотеатрах и представленном на многих национальных и международных фестивалях, проявляются многочисленные 'тарковские' черты: природа, тишина, забота о слове. В фильме очень бросается в глаза авторская скромность: взгляд режиссера следует за образами, наблюдает за ними, останавливается на деталях, но не поглощает их, не доминирует над ними своим присутствием. Это негромоздкое, даже почти незаметное присутствие, уступает место окружающему и рассказу самого Тарковского. Как ты работал над этим фильмом, какими принципами ты руководствовался, когда очевидно, что биографический элемент и тут играл решающую роль?

А. А. Т.: Во-первых, да, поскольку это был фильм об отце, я как автор старался оставаться в стороне, потому что главная идея фильма — это рассказ Тарковского о себе. Я хотел как можно ближе приблизить человека, зрителя к его личности, но не через призму моих личных воспоминаний, мнений других людей, интервью и т.д. Мне хотелось посадить зрителя напротив Тарковского и дать возможность услышать слова автора о самом себе, это намного важнее, чем прочитать десятки книг критиков или историков о нем. В выборе

аудиоцитат из архивов я основывался на мои личные воспоминания о нем, как об отце, о человеке. Я хотел, чтобы люди восприняли фильм, не как биографию, а как автобиографию Тарковского, но в то же самое время это и мое личное видение отца. Естественно, чем меньше там меня, тем лучше, я не хотел создавать никаких идеологических фильтров. Для меня было очень важно именно, чтобы человек проникся и возник диалог, чтобы монолог Тарковского стал бы диалогом со зрителем. И поэтому главное в фильме это именно голос, звучание. Я не хотел, чтобы он дублировался, потому что там очень важны интонации его голоса. И на этом монологе, на этой своеобразной автобиографии, на его голосе основано изображение, которое является как бы аккомпанементом его рассказа о себе. И в этом смысле я думаю, что мне удалось, по крайней мере, услышав мнение людей, которые его знали, поймать те вещи, которые люди помнили о нем, о его рассказах, о его воспоминаниях. Но и очень важно, чтобы люди, которые его не знали, многие молодые люди, кто изучает его творчество, тоже знали бы об этом.

Он говорит вещи, которые опровергают много теорий, возникших потом, построенных на отвлеченном анализе его творчества. Это цепочка домыслов обрывается, потому в них нет никакой реальной основы. Это непосредственно и есть та ценность архива, оригинального документа, тех аудиозаписей на которых строился фильм. И мне кажется, что сейчас нет таких материалов о нем, о его творчестве, которые могли бы показать его таким, каким он был. Вот это главное. Прошло много лет, многое было забыто, и начали строиться разные теории. Некоторые правильные, некоторые — нет, но это не он, то есть это идея кого-то о нем, то, что этим фильмом я хотел опровергнуть. Естественно, это фильм об отце, но это и моя биография, и мои воспоминания. Так становится понятно, что каждый фильм Тарковского это не просто фильм, это период его жизни, его биографии, его духовного поиска. Говорить о Тарковском не касаясь его фильмов, его жизни — невозможно, потому что в его жизни все очень взаимосвязано. Он был тотальным художником, жил своими работами, своими фильмами и переживал это вместе с людьми, которые были рядом, с нами, с семьей. Это все как бы некий творческий и жизненный концентрат. Эманация его сложного, таинственного внутреннего мира поэта, которая распространялась на окружающий его мир и людей. Эту атмосферу я пытался передать в фильме.

Он рассуждал на сложнейшие темы не просто в интервью, он говорил об этом за столом, за обедом, то есть это была его жизнь, его сущность. Постоянное размышление о смысле жизни, о смысле вещей, о поиске. Гениальные люди отличаются тем, что они не рассеиваются и не растрачиваются на мелочи, они постоянно сконцентрированы на одном. Особенно в кино это очень сложно, потому что, когда снимаешь фильм вокруг тебя десятки, сотни людей и оставаться постоянно сконцентрированным над своей идеей, на своем замысле очень сложно. Он был одним из тех людей, которые способны на это. Я думаю, каждый великий человек имеет эту черту — не растрачиваться на мелочи. И в жизни он был именно таким человеком.

Дж. Л.: Какие воспоминания у тебя о нем, о ваших разговорах или о ваших моментах тишины?

А. А. Т.: Мои воспоминания о нем сильно связаны с нашим домом в деревне. Это то место, которое он цитировал в каждом из своих фильмов, начиная с *Соляриса* и дальше. Тема русской природы, доме, у него вообще тесно связаны. Тему дома можно рассматривать двояко: как дом физический и метафизический. У него никогда не было дома, они с сестрой, бабушкой и мамой жили в двух комнатках, в коммуналке в центре Москвы. Он получил первую квартиру от Мосфильма в 1974 году. И поэтому, когда они с матерью купили дом в деревне, он стал его домом, любимым домом, местом отдыха, творческой концентрации, оторванности от мира, там где тишина, природа. Это место было замечательное. Я много показал его в фильме. Он никогда там не снимал, для него это было некое священное место и он боялся осквернить его съемками. Это было единственное место, которое он считал домом. И вообще это была его ‘больная тема’, поскольку раньше как такового дома у него никогда не было. Дом, где он родился, где они отдыхали в деревне Завражье у родственников, они снимали. Этого дома больше нет, его затопило плотиной на Волге несмотря на то, что сейчас там по близости воспроизвели копию этого дома. Когда он приезжал туда в поисках натуры для съемок *Зеркала*, он сказал: “Не нужно было сюда возвращаться, потому что здесь уже ничего не осталось”. И даже то, что было — под водой. И когда он говорил о доме в Мясном, повторял: “Это единственное место, если я его потеряю, у меня вообще не

будет дома”, к сожалению, и так и произошло. Он хотел построить дом в Италии, но так и не успел. Поэтому идея дома, стремление к дому, его потеря, присутствует во всех его фильмах, например, последний дом в *Жертвоприношении* он сжигает, что вполне автобиографично. И поиски дома — ностальгия по дому, становится поиском Абсолюта. Этот дом, принадлежит уже другому измерению, сфере вечности, поиск его — это поиск покаяния в духовной сфере, это место куда стремится душа человека. В *Ностальгии* это выражено довольно ясно: он говорил, что ностальгию человек может испытать и чувствовать даже в собственном доме, в своей семье, но это ностальгия о чем-то другом, о вечном, об абсолютном. Она неизлечима, это тема многих русских художников, писателей, философов, это постоянное стремление принести в жертву все, ради идеи, истины, это идея фильма *Сталкер*, это мессианская идея.

Дж. Л.: Тема дома действительно центральна во всех фильмах Тарковского. А в твоей биографии какую роль играл дом?

А. А. Т.: Для меня домом был тот же дом в деревне. Конечно, мы жили и в квартире в Москве, но это не воспринималось как настоящий дом, тот где я проводил лето. Это изолированное место, где никого не было, была полная свобода, мы жили там, окруженные природой. Я видел смену времен года, ритм жизни задавался природой. Истинное течение времени — это удивительное ощущение, никак не связанное с активной жизнью человека, а связанное именно с ритмом природы. Сейчас его невозможно воспроизвести, это был ритм моего детства. Сейчас восприятие времени полностью изменилось, ты живешь в каком-то процессе, вечном, ненатуральном движении. Для меня этот дом имеет огромное значение, даже сейчас, хотя он там, а я здесь, в Италии. Я чувствую ностальгию по определенным местам, но для меня это больше ностальгия по отцу и детству. Иногда можно, но скорее не нужно возвращаться на места своего детства.

Дж. Л.: Тема дома и родной земли также центральны в литературе первой волны эмиграции, у Цветаевой, у Бродского, например, то есть как человек может чувствовать себя дома на чужой земле, когда человек вынужден покинуть свою родину. Когда твой отец приехал во Францию, а потом в Италию, ты жил в Советском Союзе, ты не

мог встречаться с ним. Как вообще может человек жить в таком ужасном состоянии?

А. А. Т.: Да, для меня быть заложником в Москве в течении 4 лет было ужасно, это была полная изоляция. Каждый русский эмигрант — плохой эмигрант, потому что его все время мучают воспоминания, потом возникает идеализация, Солженицын например идеализировал русское прошлое, русскую историю. В каждом русском художнике эмигранте всегда чувствуется ощущение разлуки. Разрыв с родиной чрезвычайно трагичен всегда, трагичен и в судьбе моего отца. Это трагедия, невозможность жить без Родины, потом переросла в болезнь и привела отца к преждевременной кончине. Он хотел жить в Италии, он ее любил, Италия была единственная для него страна, где он чувствовал себя 'дома'. В других странах он чувствовал себя довольно плохо. Он был русским художником, несмотря на то, что он обожал иностранную литературу, от Пруста до Манна и любил западную культуру. Он понимал, что русская культура не может существовать вне других культур, Леонардо — его любимый художник, Бах — любимый композитор и здесь мы возвращаемся к идее универсальности культуры. Он понимал, что культурное наследие универсально и эти островки культуры, гении культуры, которых почитают во всем мире, должны взаимно обогащаться. Именно поэтому его выбор стала Италия, Италия эпохи Возрождения: Данте, Леонардо, Пьеро Делла Франческа, его любимые живописцы. Это измерение давало ему успокоение, вдали от родины, от родной земли и это то, что ему не хватало в России. После того, как он узнал Италию, жил, видел все это и возвращался в Россию, у него начиналась обратная ностальгия. Я ощущаю это тоже. Ощущаю больше, потому что прожил большую часть своей жизни в Италии, а не в России. Но тем не менее когда я там, у меня тоска по Италии, когда я здесь у меня тоска по России, некое подвешенное состояние, вроде между двух стульев... Иногда это тяжело, но это очень важно, поскольку когда начинаешь чувствовать и ощущать культуру разных народов, а не только твоей родной страны, это открывает горизонт, словно твоя родина расширяется до мировых границ, ты начинаешь пытаться найти некий синтез культуры. То, что, как мне кажется, пытался сделать мой отец. то есть превзойти физические границы. Если мы говорим о России, да, России становится мало, но России мало, не только потому что 'дальше Бог',

России мало, потому что существует мировая культура, без которой невозможно распознать направление, судьбу человечества в целом. Поэтому в своих фильмах отец использует так много цитат из классической мировой культуры: музыку Баха, образы Леонардо, все это дает некий тектонический, глубокий пласт истории культуры, который кино не имело, поскольку это очень молодое искусство. Все это необходимо для того, чтобы кинообраз, не остался поверхностным, слишком современным, то есть банальным. В этом смысле можно утверждать, что он русский художник, но он также принадлежит мировой культуре. Он ее хорошо знал, понимал и метаболизировал в своем творчестве, пропустив через свою русскую душу. Истина рождается в сопоставлении, во встрече, единении, мировой соборности, и он стремился к этому. Поэтому в России он казался несколько чужим, и на западе он тоже не совсем понятен: истинно русский ли он, или нет? Возможно, как и для каждого русского философа и поэта Серебряного Века, его жизненный и духовный путь, выраженный через киноискусство, это попытка обрести тот потерянный, вечный дом, землю обетованную, утраченную человеком из-за его мелочности и эгоизма.

Translations

Martina Napolitano

Evgenij Charitonov - Racconto di un ragazzo: "Come sono diventato così"

Introduzione

Evgenij Charitonov non vide mai un proprio testo pubblicato ufficialmente nel corso della sua breve vita. Nato nel 1941, morì prematuramente a soli quarant'anni, una morte che, come suggeriscono alcuni (Moss 1997: 196), può probabilmente essere almeno in parte ricondotta alla pressione esercitata negli ultimi anni su di lui dal KGB che lo sospettava della morte di un amico. Il premio Belyj, simbolo della cultura clandestina di epoca tardo-sovietica, conferitogli postumo nel 1981 poco tempo dopo la sua scomparsa, suggerisce quanto Charitonov a quarant'anni fosse un autore del tutto formato, interessante, innovativo e, non da ultimo, oggetto di un particolare culto nel mondo dell'underground.

"C'è chi dice che l'opera più grande di Charitonov fosse la sua stessa vita" (Moss 1997: 196), una vita e un'immagine di sé costruite consapevolmente nelle azioni e nelle parole: come ricorda anche Claudia Criveller in una delle poche analisi esistenti dell'opera charitonoviana[1], l'autore non temeva di descrivere se stesso come "uno dei più grandi scrittori della storia [...] dopo San Giovanni Evangelista, lo scrittore più grande, e Oscar Wilde e James Joyce" e "numerose [sono] le affermazioni sul suo genio ('Я призванный к подвигу гений', sono un genio chiamato all'atto eroico, da *Poema*)" (Criveller 2011: 126).

[1] Come annotava Criveller stessa: "Fatta eccezione per alcune memorie e per i saggi introduttivi alla prima e alla seconda edizione della raccolta di opere di Charitonov (rispettivamente *Slezy na cvetach* [Lacrime sui fiori], I-II, Moskva 1993; *Pod domašnim arestom* [Agli arresti domiciliari], Moskva 2005) non si conta che una decina di saggi dedicati all'autore, prevalentemente pubblicati in siti gay" (Criveller 2011: 119). Dal 2011 a oggi la situazione si è di poco modificata, ma da alcuni anni è in preparazione una monografia sull'autore curata da Aleksej Konakov (un estratto è uscito sul portale colta.ru nel 2019). Si segnala infine che esiste in traduzione italiana il racconto che Charitonov riteneva la sua opera prima e "veramente propria" (istinno svoe) (Konakov 2019), *Duchovka*, *Il forno*, contenuta nell'antologia *I fiori del male russi*, curata da Viktor Erofeev e tradotta da Marco Dinelli (Roma: Voland, 2001: 135-160). Proprio con questo racconto doveva aprirsi *Pod domašnim arestom* che Charitonov preparò nel 1981 raccogliendo tutte le opere scritte dal 1969 (anno di stesura di *Duchovka*) ad allora.

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Nell'autobiografismo originale e in qualche maniera mai stucchevole di Charitonov, occupa uno spazio centrale l'esperienza omosessuale dell'autore. Essa non viene presentata tanto come mero tratto biografico, seppur rivendicato nella sua dignità piena e consapevolmente scomoda: "siamo fiori", anche se "sterili e fatali" (*besplodnye gibel'nye*), e "quanto più saremo visibili, tanto più vicina sarà la fine del mondo", si legge in *Listovka* [Volantino], una sorta di "manifesto gay"[2] dell'autore (Charitonov 2005: 312, 314). L'elemento omosessuale viene tuttalpiù reso tanto un procedimento artistico (un gioco di prospettive) quanto una dimensione estetica entro i cui livelli di senso il testo si semantizza, riallacciandosi anche spesso intertestualmente ad altri testi, in primo luogo all'opera di Vasilij Rozanov. In una società come quella sovietica dove l'omosessualità (*muželožstvo*) era punita dal codice penale ed era considerata una malattia, una simile scrittura assumeva per forza di cose una sfumatura scopertamente politica. Ciononostante, va detto che Charitonov non fu mai perseguito dalle autorità esplicitamente per la propria identità sessuale, a differenza del regista Sergej Paradžanov, del poeta Gennadij Trifonov o del cantante Vadim Kozin[3].

Come molti altri artisti dell'epoca, anche Evgenij Charitonov fu a suo modo una figura tra due mondi, quello underground in quanto autore del samizdat moscovita e quello ufficiale in qualità di drammaturgo, docente di teatro, attore e regista teatrale, sebbene questa dimensione fosse da lui percepita al pari di una prigione soffocante entro cui non aveva la possibilità di trovare un proprio pubblico autentico[4].

Dopo Michail Kuzmin (1872-1936) Evgenij Charitonov è probabilmente l'autore più importante della letteratura russa gay e il racconto che segue esemplifica molto bene la capacità dell'autore di mescolare forme di narrazione estremamente esplicite in termini sessuali a un'estetica studiata e ben articolata. Come sottolinea anche Jurij Mogutin, Charitonov "non è uno 'scrittore per omosessuali'" (Mogutin 1993: 13).

Il breve testo che segue risale alla fine degli anni Settanta ed è forse il più esplicito nel raccontare in prima persona i rapporti sessuali di chi è

[2] Così lo definisce Dan Healey (2018: 101).

[3] Come spiega Dan Healey infatti, "during the late Soviet years, artists and intellectuals were prosecuted under the sodomy laws in cases that carried political significance. The Soviet authorities used the sodomy law to harass these figures and destroy their reputations" (Healey 2018: 172).

[4] Si veda anche l'introduzione di Jurij Mogutin, "Katoržnik na nive bukvy", alla raccolta delle opere di Evgenij Charitonov, *Slezy na cvetach*, pubblicata nel 1993.

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(o “diventa”, come suggerisce il titolo) *così*, *takoj*. È proprio questa la parola ricorrente della narrazione di Serëža — non a caso chiamato alternativamente attraverso la perifrasi del titolo stesso (“come sono diventato *così*”) —, una parola che ritorna più volte a distinguere quelli “così” e quelli che non sono “così”. Il testo è strutturato in una prima parte sotto forma di intervista, in cui “come sono diventato così” racconta le proprie esperienze omosessuali; nella seconda parte, invece, la prospettiva si rovescia, la voce passa all’interlocutore di Serëža (non meglio identificato) che in parte disvela quanto prima parzialmente celato (come l’ambientazione: dall’“Iž-sk” con cui si apre il racconto, si passa al toponimo disambiguato “Iževsk”, in ogni caso abbastanza intellegibile fin dall’inizio), in parte confuta quanto poco prima raccontato, suggerendo la pluralità dei punti di vista e delle percezioni.
Importante e sottolineato nella sua frequenza è l’elemento sovietico: si nominano “artisti del popolo”, “kolchoz” e “sovchoz”, “segretari del partito” e non mancano nemmeno le canoniche feste di maggio e novembre, per citare soltanto alcuni esempi. La presenza ricorrente della realtà sovietica mette in risalto consapevolmente quanto l’esperienza omosessuale sia in realtà compatibile e ben integrata ad essa. Non manca inoltre una stoccata alla chiesa, anch’essa inserita nella questione governativa attraverso l’accenno alle onorificenze conferite al patriarca Pimen (Ordine della Bandiera rossa del lavoro, 1977) e ai metropoliti Aleksij e Filaret (Ordine dell’Amicizia tra i popoli, 1979) in epoca brežneviana.
Infine, merita un commento a parte la costruzione stilistica e linguistica del testo, che riflette anche da un punto di vista grafico le peculiarità della scrittura charitonoviana. La narrazione in prima persona, che cerca di seguire il parlato, con le sue pause, le sue ripetizioni, i suoi anacoluti, la sua componente deittica, dà vita a proposizioni formate spesso da lunghe coordinate, tenute assieme da virgole che talvolta possono anche venire meno (negli elenchi, ad esempio). Compaiono invece degli spazi grafici inusuali, congeniali alla trasmissione delle pause e all’introduzione del discorso riportato. I tempi verbali, così come nel parlato, si muovono fluidamente tra passato e presente e la scelta di usare un passato prossimo nella traduzione italiana cerca di tener fede all’impianto conversativo, informale e privato della narrazione.

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Racconto di un ragazzo: "Come sono diventato così"

"Dunque, per l'8 marzo sono andato a Mosca (da Iž-sk). È lì che l'ho scoperto. No, prima c'era stata la storia con questo artista del popolo. Era venuto da noi a scuola, mi aveva chiesto di andare a posare da lui. Be', e poi ha preso a parlare di questi temi, ma in maniera così delicata e, cosa importante, erano rapporti tra maestro e allievo, mi ha fatto conoscere molte cose in fatto di arte, diceva che doveva essere questa la cosa importante per me, mentre tutte queste distrazioni sono un pantano, occorre prima di tutto studiare, diventare un artista. È stato quasi tutto pulito con lui, mi avrebbe fatto ribrezzo farci qualcosa, ha sessant'anni, lo stimavo come persona e basta. Mi ha insegnato tante cose belle. A letto in genere stavamo semplicemente distesi, semplicemente gli piaceva accarezzarmi, era rapito da me, dalla mia figura, diceva che per lui io ero tutto nella vita, figlio, moglie, amico, allievo. Lui stesso ha famiglia, una moglie e una figlia. Poi per le feste (l'8 marzo) mi ha spedito a Mosca a vedere musei, mostre, mi ha dato l'indirizzo di un suo amico, anche lui ex artista, uno con famiglia, non uno così. A Mosca dunque l'ho scoperto: all'aeroporto di Bykovo sono andato in bagno, lì sta tutto scritto, guarda in tal e talaltro buco, e lì un tizio mi ha fatto un cenno con un dito, mi ha fatto un pompino attraverso il buco".
— E come hai scoperto che si incontrano in centro?
"Proprio quel tizio me l'ha detto e mi ha proposto di vederci. Con lui non mi sono visto, ma in quei giorni mi sono visto con altri e così ho scoperto tutto questo. Bè, mi bastava comparire che tutti mi vengono subito vicini, con questo non vado, con quest'altro nemmeno, guardo un po' chi mi piace".
— In passato, da bambino, ti era già successo qualcosa di simile, forse con qualche compagno di scuola, così, in maniera infantile?
"Sì, c'era un mio amico, ci facevamo le seghe a vicenda".
— Spesso?
"Non appena non c'era nessuno ci mettevamo a farci le seghe. Ma solo seghe, null'altro".
— E di ragazze ne hai avute?
"Come no, certo".
— E come mai non ne hai una fissa?
"Ma sono tutte delle sceme, e una ragazza fissa non l'ho mai avuta, che farci, semplicemente camminarci insieme, accompagnarla in giro e parlare di non si sa che cosa, non m'interessa. Loro non puntano mica ad andare a letto, hanno più che altro bisogno semplicemente di amore e

di qualcuno che le accompagni. Poi così, casi singoli, sì, mi è anche molto piaciuto. In kolchoz con una, me ne accorsi guardando l'ora, me la sono lavorata sodo un'ora e dieci minuti, come esperimento, stavo attento, sentivo che la fine era vicina e frenavo, lei era un fiume in piena".
— Ma a te piace di più con le ragazze o con i ragazzi?
"Con le ragazze, è chiaro, lì dentro è tutto così avvolgente, piacevole, sempre umido".

Ma poco a poco raccontava di più di quei giorni a Mosca e di tutti i suoi contatti.
"In generale, a dirla tutta, non è a Mosca, a Bykovo, che è iniziato tutto; e nemmeno con l'artista. Ma quando una volta ero di passaggio a Kirov, sono andato in bagno e lì c'era la scritta passa dall'altro bagno in via tal dei tali. Ci sono andato".
— E non avevi paura, non ti ripugnava?
"Non mi conosceva nessuno in città, io non conoscevo nessuno. E la sera sarei ripartito. E lì c'era un tipo orribile, seppur giovane, occhialuto, dalle labbra carnose. E mi ha proposto di entrare con lui in un gabinetto, ce n'erano due vicini, mi ha fatto un cenno con un dito e me l'ha preso in bocca. Oh! Era ancora meglio della figa, ancora più umido. E aveva la bocca così grande, con i denti non mi graffiava, era tutto morbido. Io davvero ero in estasi. E lui era così eccitato, dice: ce l'hai così grosso! vediamoci ancora! Io dico: no non posso, oggi parto; lui dice quando torni vediamoci, ti aspetterò.Ma era così orribile, quelle labbra carnose, la bocca larga. E dunque, quando sono tornato a Iž-sk ho preso a cercare persone così".
— E dove le hai trovate?
"Sempre in quei luoghi, in stazione. Ma sono tutti così orrendi, giovani carini non ce ne sono proprio, si prendono tutti in giro, hanno tutti dei nomignoli, questa è Giulietta, quest'altra Jacqueline, una si chiamava Monaca, un tempo lavorava in chiesa, lì li ha pervertiti tutti. Quindi, torniamo all'artista del popolo. Quando è passato da noi a scuola, io sapevo già tutto questo. E ho capito subito cosa intendeva quando mi ha invitato da lui. Mentre posavo, ha preso subito a portare il discorso su questi temi. Mi sfiora oh, dice, che patrimonio che hai lì! Questo avveniva nel suo studio. Poi siamo andati in una seconda stanza, lì accanto a un divano c'era un tavolino con qualcosa da bere. Poi mi ha chiesto di stendermi con lui sul divano, mi toccava il pisello, diceva tutte le donne impazziranno, mi accarez-

zava. Ma, chiaramente, a letto lui mi repelleva, è vecchio, come persona è un'altra questione, mi ha dato molto, la nostra era più che altro un'amicizia. Chiaramente lo stimavo. Dice ah, mi darei volentieri a te, ma ho un buco stretto, non ci entra. Me lo prendeva in bocca, ma soprattutto per farmi piacere, lo prendeva poco, non riusciva a fare come quel tipo dalle labbra carnose. E diceva non raccontare mai nella vita a nessuno che vieni da me, e non raccontare che posavi. Mi ha regalato il mio ritratto, anche quello mi chiese di non mostrarlo a nessuno, poi, dice, un giorno, quando tu stesso avrai finito di studiare, sarai diventato un artista, allora lo mostrerai, io stesso dirò che questo era mio allievo, ma ora non si può, dovrei suicidarmi altrimenti, mi caccerebbero da ogni luogo, ho così tanti nemici!

Per l'8 marzo ho deciso di andare a Mosca per la prima volta, mi aveva detto di andare per musei, mi aveva dato un indirizzo dove fermarmi, e così sono finito in centro e qui la cosa più importante è stato un incontro: l'ultima sera mi si è avvicinato un certo Miša, piacente, con i baffi, mi è piaciuto subito più di tutti e siamo andati da lui. Viveva con la sorella e suo marito, non erano in casa. Siamo entrati in bagno, lì mi ha unto dietro, mi ha scopato. E lui mi è piaciuto così tanto, è stata l'unica volta in cui io stesso ho avuto persino voglia di prenderglielo in bocca. Ma non l'ho fatto! Non avevo alcuna voglia di separarmi da lui! Stranamente quella notte la sorella e il marito non sono rientrati a casa e noi abbiamo dormito tutta la notte insieme. Ma il giorno dopo avevo il volo, fino all'ultimo minuto non sono riuscito a separarmi da lui. In qualche modo sono riuscito a fare in tempo per l'aereo. Non riuscivo più a pensare ad altro, avevo solo lui nella testa. In città iniziava la primavera, giravo per la città, cercavo qualcuno che gli assomigliasse, ma non c'era nessuno. Ci scrivevamo. Aspettavo il 1 maggio per tornare di nuovo a Mosca. Ho raccontato tutto su di lui al maestro, ma lui mi diceva che non andava affatto bene, che dovevo studiare e pensare solo allo studio, mentre queste avventure erano un pantano, mi avrebbero frenato. Mi ha dissuaso, non mi ha lasciato andare a Mosca. E io ho scritto a Miša che non sarei arrivato. Da allora non ho più ricevuto lettere da lui. Ho scritto una lettera anche a quel mio amico Saša, quello con cui mi facevo le seghe durante gli anni di scuola, dobbiamo vederci, non sai che cosa ti racconterò! che cosa! come sono andato a Mosca, ti si mozzerà il fiato, vieni qui per Dio, non ti posso descrivere tutto. E così, invece di andare a Mosca da Miša per il 1 maggio, ho dato retta all'artista e me ne sono andato a casa al villaggio e mi sono visto con Saša, il mio amico di scuola. Mi ascoltava e in pratica gemeva, poi ha

preparato la banja e mi dice: fammi tutto quello che ti hanno fatto a Mosca! Ma lì me l'avevano preso in bocca, avrei forse dovuto farlo anche io a lui? Già quando eravamo piccoli il suo cazzo storto con quella punta blu mi aveva stufato. E insomma gliel'ho preso, mi è venuto quasi da vomitare. Che sia l'unica volta, mai più a nessun altro! È così rammollito, sta sempre a casa, gli piace leggere libri di storia, tutto sulla Rus', non riconosce nulla che sia occidentale, è un tale patriota, e ascolta solo musica classica, non gli piacciono i complessi, nemmeno la musica leggera, solo recentemente ha iniziato ad ascoltare qualcosa. E poi che razza di amico è, gli amici si vedono nelle difficoltà, e invece lui c'è solo quando c'è qualcosa che reputa interessante, ecco ad esempio siamo andati, quando ancora andavamo a scuola, siamo andati a un ballo, lì tutte le ragazze mi invitano a ruota e i loro ragazzi mi hanno minacciato di andarmene. Be', io non volevo mostrarmi codardo, continuo a ballare. E loro mi hanno preso in disparte e mi hanno spaccato un labbro. Allora anche Saša ha iniziato a dirmi su andiamocene da qui, non è rimasto con me, si era spaventato. Ecco che razza di amico".

Per le feste di novembre sono andato io stesso a Iževsk e ho visto tutti loro, sia l'artista del popolo che Saša, poco dopo. Mi ero messo d'accordo con Serëža ("Come sono diventato così") che invitasse Saša quando sarei arrivato. L'artista del popolo non è affatto vecchio come sembrava dal racconto di Serëža. Si era formato dopo la guerra. E il suo studio non è una cantina come mi immaginavo sempre per abitudine. Una grande sala linda, senza un granello di polvere, in un edificio nuovo. Quadri come al Palazzo della Cultura. E l'artista del popolo è tranquillo, cortese, come se il suo nome non dovesse passare alla storia. Non sarebbe poi male se un qualche nuovo gangster, venendo a rimpiazzarlo, parlasse male di lui a chi comanda, scrivesse qualcosa sul «Krokodil»[5], gli spaccasse tutto lo rovinasse e lo riducesse in miseria. Allora sì che, forse, ne uscirebbe un artista del popolo.
E per la festa è arrivato Saša. Eccoli, Serëža e Saša, vicini. Serëža, "come sono diventato così", è un vivace scapestrato piacevole, un ballerino, e i compagni dello studentato sentono che in qualche maniera lui non è così come loro e lo amano per questo, inconsapevolmente addirittura lo corteggiano. Mentre Saša è così ben abituato a stare a casa a leggere della Rus' e della Chiesa, che non fa altro. Finché qualcosa non gli cade

[5] Giornale satirico sovietico.

dal cielo. Così, quando ha saputo che veniva davvero un tipo a trovare Serëža da Mosca, allora è venuto anche lui. E aspettava di vedere cosa ne sarebbe venuto fuori. Ma lui per primo non fa il primo passo. Penso che avesse un gran batticuore. Ma non lo dava a vedere. Una volta a letto è così docile, tenero. Così magrolino, caldo, giovincello. Ogni cosa gli si facesse per lui era dolce. Mi toccava il cazzo con la mano insicura. E solo se gli mettevo io lì la mano. Ma da solo, in ogni caso, non si decideva a farlo.

La strada che gli avrei predetto sarebbe stata questa: la chiesa. Tutte le linee per lui si intrecciano lì. All'università dopotutto non è riuscito a passare la sua materia preferita, storia, perché più o meno di essa conosceva solo l'antichità russa. Che mirabile limitatezza. Che dono di amare soltanto una cosa e non guardare in altre direzioni. E che intelletto sottomesso, privo di creatività. Sa a memoria cosa è successo quando, chi si chiamava come, chi aveva quale rango. Ma questo va anche bene! ed è in qualche maniera incredibilmente piacevole. Pertanto non diventerà un teologo eretico, un Florenskij[6] nella sua superbia intellettuale. Sarà solo un bravo *batjuška* ubbidiente. Serëža dice — ma ti pare che andrà mica contro suo padre e sua madre (il padre di Saša è segretario di partito in un sovchoz, la madre è insegnante); per loro sarebbe una vergogna. Ma no, Serëža. Serve solo che Saša porti pazienza, che spieghi le cose come stanno ai suoi genitori. A prescindere dalla propaganda antireligiosa, dopotutto, la chiesa anche dal punto di vista sovietico, metti, ha i suoi riguardi, anche lì ci sono i titoli e gli avanzamenti di carriera. Brežnev, metti, prima delle feste ha conferito onorificenze al patriarca e ai metropoliti. E poi le vecchie al villaggio già da tempo dicono che Saša diventerà pope, che raccoglie libri vecchi, croci. E come gli si addirà essere pope. Ha degli occhi così espressivi, lunghe sopracciglia nere, labbra vistose; la barba gli si addirà. Dovrà impegnarsi con tutte le sue forze, andare a Zagorsk[7]. È lì la sua felicità. Tra i seminaristi certamente non può che fiorire la sodomia, come in generale avviene nella chiesa, per non parlare dell'ambito monastico. Sì, se un ragazzo si rintana in un angolo in disparte dai coetanei, non gioca con loro a giochi di lotta, se un ragazzo non sogna la guerra, automobili, ma santi celibi adornati di paramenti, questo ragazzo, come disse Rozanov, è una

[6] L'autore si riferisce evidentemente al filosofo religioso Pavel Florenskij (1882-1937).
[7] Così era chiamata Sergiev Posad dal 1930 al 1992, sede di un importante seminario ecclesiastico ortodosso.

"fanciulla-uomo", *muže-deva*. Riconosce nella loro bonarietà qualcosa di proprio ed è felice che ci sia una morale che pone tutto questo così in alto.
C'è però anche una seconda strada per Saša, non ecclesiastica.
Serëža, così come faceva con me, raccontava anche all'artista del popolo di Saša. E pure lui prese a chiedere quand'è che arriva Saša? portalo subito qui da me, dice, gli troverò un posto alla facoltà di storia, ho delle conoscenze. Da parte sua, anche Saša rimproverava Serëža: perché non apprezzi l'artista del popolo, ha di quelle conoscenze, ti aiuterà nella vita. Insomma, per l'artista del popolo Saša sarebbe stato una rivelazione. L'artista aveva così voglia di un ragazzo segreto, costante, tranquillo. E Saša si sarebbe accontentato della fedeltà al vecchio. Ma avrebbe studiato storia; poi sarebbero venute le scienze sociali, il partito; l'artista l'avrebbe fatto sposare per coprire la loro relazione, e ogni cosa sarebbe andata al suo posto, secondo il gusto mediocre dell'artista del popolo. Serëža non deve farli conoscere! Che si faccia pope. E noi sulla cartina dell'URSS segneremo una croce sul luogo in cui è in servizio il nostro giovane pope.

Volantino

"Siamo sterili fiori fatali. E come fiori dobbiamo essere raccolti in bouquet e messi in un vaso per bellezza.
La nostra questione è in qualche maniera simile a quella ebraica.
Così come, ad esempio, il loro genio, secondo la comune opinione antisemita, fiorisce più di frequente nel commercio, nel mimetismo, nel feuilleton, nella creazione priva di pathos, nel tocco mondano, nell'arte della sopravvivenza e ci sono, si può dire, degli ambiti di attività creati apposta da loro e per loro, così anche il nostro genio è fiorito, ad esempio, nell'arte più vuota e leziosa di tutte, il balletto. È chiaro che esso sia stato creato proprio da noi, che si parli letteralmente di danza e di qualsiasi canzonetta di successo o altra composizione che abbia il godimento alla sua base.
Così come il popolo ebraico deve venire deriso nelle barzellette e come nella coscienza di tutta l'umanità non-ebrea deve essere preservata saldamente l'immagine dell'ebreo-parassita perché la giudeofobia non si estingua — altrimenti cosa ostacolerebbe gli ebrei dall'occupare tutti i posti nel mondo? (e c'è chi crede che questa sarà la fine del mondo) —
così anche la nostra leggera varietà floreale con il suo polline che vola non si sa verso dove deve venire ridicolizzata e trasformata dal diretto buon senso grezzo della gente semplice in una parola volgare. Così che ai ragazzini stupidi, fintanto che l'aspirazione maschile non si sia consolidata in loro fino in fondo, non salti in mente di cedere alla debolezza di innamorarsi di loro stessi.
Giacché chiaramente, e in questo non è possibile (non possiamo) nutrire alcun dubbio, sebbene questo pensiero sia estremamente nocivo e non possa essere apertamente lasciato vagare nel mondo (per non rendere più prossima la fine del mondo, d'altra parte), ma è così: tutti voi siete degli omosessuali repressi; e giustamente, dovete una volta per tutte immaginarvi questa attività come vile e impura e in generale non immaginarvela.
Ma che tutti voi siate noi è chiaro come il sole.
Altrimenti, ditemi, come mai amate così tanto voi stessi, dunque una persona del vostro stesso sesso allo specchio? come mai gli adolescenti sono platonicamente innamorati del capetto della banda del cortile? come mai a volte i vecchi guardano sospirando i giovani, rivedendo in loro se stessi come ormai non saranno più? come mai alle Olimpiadi sottoponete i belli e giovani all'ammirazione globale? Certamente, ai vostri occhi puri tutto ciò non ha alcun disegno amoroso! E non deve

averlo! Altrimenti il mondo si polarizzerebbe nettamente, le passioni dei sessi si chiuderebbero su se stesse e giungerebbero Sodoma e Gomorra.
Noi in quanto eletti e predestinati dobbiamo essere tratteggiati con un tratto ostile, perché il nostro esempio non sia contagioso.
La nostra elezione e predestinazione sta nel fatto che viviamo di solo amore (insaziabile e infinito).
Mentre voi, dopo esservi trovati in gioventù un compagno di vita (una compagna), se anche vi guardate intorno e vi separate, e poi vi trovate con un'altra, vivete ancora in pratica all'interno del calore famigliare e siete liberi dalle quotidiane ricerche amorose, siete liberi per qualsiasi occupazione mentale o artigianale, o quantomeno per ubriacarvi.
Noi invece, i Fiori, abbiamo unioni fugaci che non sono legate né da frutti né da obblighi. Vivendo ogni ora nell'attesa di nuovi incontri, noi, le persone più vuote, fino alla morte facciamo girare dischi con canzoni d'amore e ci guardiamo intorno con occhi nervosi nell'attesa di sempre nuovi giovani voi.
Ma il fiore migliore del nostro popolo vuoto è chiamato come nessun altro a ballare la danza dell'amore impossibile e a cantarla dolcemente.
In segreto noi governiamo i gusti del mondo. Ciò che trovate bello è in parte stabilito da noi, ma voi questo non sempre lo intuite (al contrario di Rozanov). Evitando nella vita molte cose che vi eccitano, in vari secoli ed epoche noi ci siamo espressi attraverso i nostri segni, che voi avete preso per espressione di altezze ascetiche o della bellezza della decadenza che sembrava avere un significato universale.
Per non parlare del fatto che siamo noi spesso a dettarvi la moda nell'abbigliamento, sempre noi a sottoporre alla vostra ammirazione quelle donne che non sceglieresteforse di vostra sponte diretta. Se non fosse per noi, in maniera più forte tendereste nei gusti a ciò che è diretto, carnale, sanguinoso. Dando un'occhiata a noi, ma non sempre rendendovene conto, avete attribuito un significato elevato a ciò che è frivolo e inopportuno.
Ed è chiaro come il sole che proprio tutto ciò che è fragile, malizioso, tutti gli angeli caduti, tutto ciò che è fatto di perle, fiori di carta e lacrime, tutto ciò è caro a Dio; a ciò spetta il primo posto in paradiso e il bacio divino. Le migliori tra le nostre giovani creature morte Lui le farà sedere più vicino a sé. Mentre tutto ciò che è pio, normale, barbuto, tutto ciò che sulla terra viene preso a modello, il Signore, anche se gli assicurerà il proprio amore, segretamente con il cuore non l'amerà molto.

La legge occidentale permette ai nostri fiori di incontrarsi apertamente, di essere mostrati direttamente nell'arte, di avere club, riunioni e dichiarazioni di diritti: ma quali diritti? e a cosa?
Nella morale retrograda della nostra Patria Russa Sovietica c'è un disegno! Fa finta che noi non ci siamo, ma il suo Codice penale vede nella nostra esistenza floreale una violazione della Legge; perché quanto più saremo visibili, tanto più vicina sarà la Fine del Mondo".

Reviews

Liza Dimbleby

Pivovarov, Viktor. 2017. *Serye Tetradi* (Moscow: Garazh), 366 pp.
Pivovarov, Viktor. 2020. *Vliublennyi agent,* (Moscow: Garazh), 368 pp.
Pivovarov, Victor. 2021. *The Agent in Love*, trans. Andrew Bromfield (Moscow: Garage), 372 pp.
Monastyrski, Andrei. 2021. *Kashira Highway*, trans. Andrew Bromfield (Moscow: Garage), 232 pp.

That *Artists Write,* the title of the series in which these books are published, was something that went without saying for the generation of Russian unofficial artists working in 1970s Moscow. These artists not only made images but wrote and talked endlessly. They had little chance of public exhibition but there was just enough official neglect for a life of private gatherings, viewings of each other's work, poetry readings and conversation, to thrive. Artists kept extensive archives of their own work, for want of a gallery or exhibiting world.[1] As Il'ia Kabakov describes it, a relentless energy for talk rather than any one mode of artistic production distinguished the life of the time.[2] Speculation about truth in art and life, and the relation between words and image was conducted with a singular intensity.

[1] See the MANI archive at russianartarchive.net and Garage Archive Collection garagemca.org. Vadim Zakharov's website (vadimzakharov.com) was an excellent source of original documents of the movement but has been under reconstruction for some time. Sergei Letov's site is also a source of original documents https://conceptualism.letov.ru/MANI/sborniki.html [Accessed 30 December 2022]. A collection of documents from the archive was published in book form in 2011 (Monastyrskii 2011).

[2] "*U menia i u vsekh "nas" potrebnost' govorit' byla plamennaia, kak eto opisyvaetsia v literature 19-go veka*" / "*I, and all of "us" had a burning desire for talk, as in the descriptions in 19th century literature"* (Kabakov et al. 2010: 62), see also Kabakov 2010: 96.

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Moscow Conceptualism or, as Boris Groys first called it, Moscow Romantic Conceptualism (Groys 2010: 35–38) had its heyday in the 1970s.[3] The spoken and written word had great importance in the movement, in an environment where the book was synonymous with culture.[4] The pursuit of art that could be realised verbally as much as visually was not new in Russia, but this period saw an burst of improvisation with word and image not known since the decade before the revolution[5], and a hunger for the written word. As the writer Ludmila Ulitskaya recently told a Glasgow audience — at no other time in Soviet life did people read so widely and voraciously (Ulitskaya: 2017). People read whatever they could get their hands on, texts were passed on sometimes for only a night or two — they were memorised, discussed, recited and read aloud in private gatherings.

This hidden art life of 1970s Moscow is vividly evoked in both Pivovarov's autobiographical books, *Vliublennyi agent/Agent in Love* and *Serye tetradi* (The Grey Notebooks). These have been reissued and expanded by *Garage* from their first incarnations (*Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie,* 2001 and 2002), with an elegant layout and good quality colour illustration and photography. They are published for the first time in English translation, a feat that has been deftly achieved by Andrew Bromfield. Pivovarov describes an atmosphere where "some foreword or footnote in an extremely boring, strictly scholarly book becomes an event for the whole of cultural Moscow" (Pivovarov 2021: 93). He pictures for us in words and images the friendships, the playfulness, the endless talk, at tables in studio cellars and attics or private flats. Works of art were exhibited to friends and critiqued with great seriousness. In this uneasy absurd of Soviet life, small groups of restless people with a nag to create made the most of what freedoms could be realised without attracting official attention.

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[3] Kabakov dates this intense period of artistic enquiry and camaraderie as beginning in the 1960s. By the 1980s, he believed that its essential drive had been exhausted, although other archivists of the movement would argue that its work went on well up until Perestroika, if not beyond. (Kabakov et al. 2010: 216-218).

[4] In Kabakov's words, the book was synonymous with culture: "*Kniga i kul'tura byli sinonimy*" (Kabakov 2010: 94).

[5] Verbal and visual experiment drove the work of early twentieth century Futurist painters and *zaum* poets. Roman Jakobson's Dialogues (with Katerina Pomorska) emphasise this dual source for Russian artists of the period, and points out the primacy of words over images, rooting this in Slavonic religious tradition (Jakobson et al. 1983: 7-9; 152-156).

Pivovarov states that his two books should be read simultaneously — one in each hand, or with one eye on each text. *Serye Tetradi* is a polyphony composed of actual and invented texts voiced by characters who have been introduced to us in the more conventionally autobiographical narrative of *The Agent in Love.* The books take us on a journey not just through Pivovarov's work but through the physical and imaginative settings of the city from which it emerged, and which remained formative after the artist's move to Prague in 1982.

The Agent in Love is composed of three sections: *The First Life,* set in Moscow from 1951 to 1981, *The Second Life,* after the artist moved to Prague aged forty five, and *The Third Millennium*, life after 2000. The first section is the only one chaptered as a chronology. We learn of the artist's early influences, his training and work as an illustrator of children's books. This was an ideologically less risky space where formal visual experimentation was somewhat under the radar. Many unofficial artists in Soviet Russia earned their living through illustration, of scientific journals or children's literature. Pivovarov points out the high status that illustrated children's books had at the time, offering imaginative escape for the downtrodden liberal intelligentsia who avidly collected them as "one of the breathing spaces within harsh Soviet culture" (Pivovarov 2021: 91).

The spoken word was as important as the printed. Pivovarov describes his earliest inspiration as aural: listening to stories told on the radio, and realising the power of spoken words to stimulate the visual imagination in the visually impoverished surroundings of his Soviet childhood. This power of words to elicit rich imaginary scenes over visually bleak Soviet realities as well as the physical texture of the spoken word itself, the pleasure in speaking words aloud, was vital. The ear as an almost sacred channel of communication is a recurrent motif in Pivovarov's drawings and painting.

The Second Life, after the artist's emigration, unfolds more thematically as, after the shock of complete physical and artistic displacement, Pivovarov slowly evolves ways to work, and realises that the vital source of his work is Moscow, and his childhood: "Nothing except Moscow exists" (Pivovarov 2021: 166). These emerge as constant themes once the dust of rupture has settled. The city's physical presence is experienced

all the more powerfully from an enforced distance. Images came first, and then the impulse to narrate, to set down specific autobiographical stories. They were realised in *Diary of a Teenager (1986)* and *Apartment 22 (1992-1996),* in the Album genre of pictures and text that Pivovarov and Kabakov discovered "simultaneously yet separately"[6] in the early seventies. These new albums were provoked, Pivovarov says, by "the need to tell the story of my childhood more fully and in more personal terms" (Pivovarov 2021: 167).

In the deliberately pared down verbal and visual aesthetic of *Apartment 22*, the life of the communal flat where Pivovarov grew up with his mother, the scraps of dialogue and items of Soviet everyday *byt*, tools or shopping list items written out in uniform script, have a rich resonance. Everyday Russian words have phonic and even visual power, transmitting a vivid sense of time and place from the artist's displacement. In other works, words alone are enough: the series *Beautiful Actions*[7] was inspired by a facsimile of notes in Malevich's handwriting on a scrap from a school exercise book. Here as in *Apartment 22*, ordinary domestic actions are given pause, and become strangely poetic. They are a stimulus to memory, or an imagined memory, of everyday life. A 1992 exhibition in Prague, *The Unlimited Possibilities of Painting,* takes this method further — a show of images evoked entirely from written texts, which the viewer is asked to picture in their mind.

There are some historical glimpses— Vaclav Havel observed smoking nervously in the corridor of his home in November 1989, on the eve of his transformation into world hero, but mostly this is an account of the artist's thoughts about his works, the work of his Moscow contemporaries, and artists of the past. The final section of *The Agent in Love* is published here for the first time. It presents stories of works and friendships in the new century, a New Year in Prague with D. A. Prigov (with a nice colour photo), and a series of paintings, *Lemon Eaters (2005),* subtitled "*A Moscow Poem*". Here Pivovarov returns again to his childhood in the *Zamoskvorech'e* district of Moscow, mixing specific memories with memories "which could have been mine" (Pivovarov 2021: 278), in the way that the artist feels that he "recognises" specific details

[6] *Na etot vid iskusstva my odnovremenno i porozn' natolknulis' s Pivovarovoi vesnoi 1972 goda* (Kabakov 2011: 176). See also Pivovarov 2021 (Pivovarov 2021: 108-109).
[7] *Krasivye Deistviia (1989),* the title could be an echo of Andrei Monastyrskii's group *Kollektivnye Deistviia.*

from Platonov's novel *Happy Moscow,* which was written in the months approaching his birth in January 1937 (Pivovarov 2021: 164).

In a 2003 essay *Bumaga kak tekst* (*Paper as Text*) Pivovarov added a further epithet to descriptions of the Moscow conceptualist movement that was becoming a subject of renewed attention: "Moscow conceptualism is paper conceptualism" (Pivovarov 2004: 28).[8] Works made with paper, as notebooks and albums, and the use of everyday paper documents, became central to the output of both Pivovarov and his friend Il'ia Kabakov, as well as to the wider movement. The sea of paper detritus becomes an expressive ground in which the printed paper residues of a totalitarian bureaucracy: notifications, forms, receipts, declarations and requests, meet with its opposition, a personal attention which converts these residues into something intimate and human — refuse becoming a mode of refusal (Pivovarov 2004: 32-33). Pivovarov evokes the intimacy and materiality of paper (Pivovarov 2004: 24-25), something that he connects with post-war shortages and the preciousness of every piece, a time when people hand-sewed their own notebooks from whatever material they could find, and makes a connection between paper and memory — paper as a material conveyor of memory, an imprint of life, even as Pivovarov says, "my mirror" (Pivovarov 2004: 25).

Attention to paper was not new. The elder artist Vladimir Favorskii's lectures on the metaphysics of paper were influential (Pivovarov 2021: 37). In his essay Pivovarov argues that Favorskii's true heirs were not, as conventionally thought, the officially sanctioned landscape realists, but leading figures of Moscow's unofficial scene, among them Kabakov, Bulatov and Prigov. He also cites Robert Falk and the lesser known Mitia Lion as artistic influences (Pivovarov 2004: 26, 34-35). *Serye Tetradi* comprises an actual, as well as an invented paper archive, presented to the reader in the (literary) form of ten grey notebooks, as though from the artist's childhood. The title alludes to the standardised and official constraint of a Soviet post war childhood from which a full colour im-

[8] This essay (Pivovarov 2004: 24-38) was published as part of an excellent collection of Pivovarov's essays on art which was the third book of his writing to be issued by *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie.* However it is not, as far as I know, due to be reissued by *Garage*. Conceptualism has attracted many qualifiers to distinguish it from its Western European counterpart, these include romantic, lyric, warm, and emotional. Pivovarov adds to these descriptions an emphasis on its *rukopisnost' (handwrittenness)* (Pivovarov 2004: 61).

aginative invention emerges. The cheap grey exercise books are the ground for flight, for intimacy and imagination, playfulness and story-telling. This book contains invented notebooks and diaries as well as actual notes and letters from friends. Both forms reveal aspects of the artist's autobiography from the viewpoints of others, even if these are viewpoints and voices imagined by the artist.

Thus the first notebook *Inter'ery* (Interiors), contains a series of numbered descriptions of rooms, as though glimpsed through a window. These pictures in words, which include evocations of actual pictures on the walls, we slowly realise (and footnotes in successive "notebooks" make clear), are all rooms from the artist's life. Like a painting, or an image in a dream the artist re-sees the room in the communal flat where he grew up, his neighbour's room where he went to draw, the different rooms of his studio, his summer dacha, always from a specific and singular viewpoint. We put together the whole from these multiple viewpoints.

The second notebook is supposedly written by an inhabitant of one of these interiors: it presents extracts from the notebooks of Grigorii Sergeevich Tatuzov who, if we have already read *The Agent in Love*, we know to be an actual neighbour in the communal flat where Pivovarov grew up with his mother — the notes give us a touching account of the unnamed artist's early discovery of drawing, observed from the proximity and distance that was distinctive to such communal existences. Tatuzov is a "small man", a shy mouth organ player. His literary origins are in 19th century Russian literature, the unnoticed clerks of Dostoevskii and Gogol', and their narrative forms of imaginary correspondences or diary notes.[9]

Notebook No.5, *Filimon, ili deistvitel'nye zapiski iz podpol'ia* (*Filimon or the real notes from underground*) continues the literary theme with writings by a well-read mouse who lives in Pivovarov's studio and narrates the comings and goings there, the daily life of Pivovarov and his son Pasha.[10] Perhaps the best descriptions of Pivovarov's friendships

[9] Pivovarov emphasises the literary, narrative aspect of Moscow Conceptualism in his essay *O Liubvi slova i izobrazheniia (On Love of the Word and the Image)* (Pivovarov 2004: 54-62 (60)).

[10] Pasha Pivovarov, now known as artist Pavel Pepperstein, and co-founder of the art group *Medical Hermeneutics*.

with Kabakov, and with the poets Ovsei Driz, Igor' Kholin and Henrich Sapgir are voiced by this observant creature, whose words are occasionally corrected in a footnote by Pivovarov (as V. P.) himself. An appendage to the text, "Filimon's collection", is an opportunity to display an assemblage of actual documents from the life described, in reproduction: a photo-booth shot of Pivovarov and his young son paper-clipped to a rough drawing on a piece of crumpled paper (possibly a receipt) by the Georgian poet Driz, drawings by artist and poet friends, a felt-tip doodle by the poet Kholin and more wild drawings by Driz in an open notebook, childhood drawings of mice by Pasha Pivovarov, photographs and newspaper clippings. There is a photograph of a haystack by Joseph Brodsky that he gave to Pivovarov when he visited the studio, shortly before he left Russia. These documents are laid out on the page as though they had all been secreted between the covers of the notebook.

More documents from the paper archive follow in Notebook No.6, compiled from handwritten notes left by the artist's friends on his studio door. Sadly these are printed, not reproduced facsimile in the original. These messages to the artist were scribbled down on chance scraps, often on official notepaper[11]. In this pre-electronic world the contrast in language and appearance between printed, state-issued forms or receipts and the handwritten intimate message or drawing inscribed across them was resonant. Soviet bureaucracy furnished ample opportunity for such felicitous clashes of language and material, particularly when paper was precious.

In the third notebook the artist's life is presented as a screenplay, with camera directions to help us imagine the cuts and the zooms, and indications for colour or black and white sequences. Each chapter is introduced by a title card, as in silent cinema. It is as though the artist has closed his eyes and is orchestrating an inner vision of his childhood in post-war Moscow. Familiar motifs such as his first encounter with Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale *Ole-Lukøje* being read on the radio (also described in *Agent in Love)*, are juxtaposed with new ones from history (or History): the young artist transfixed by his first sighting of Stalin at a Mayday demonstration. A description of the endless queues for the

[11] Other texts from this archive were used in Pivovarov's 1976 Album *Сад (Garden),* (Pivovarov 2004: 31).

first exhibition of works from the Dresden Gallery at the Pushkin Museum (which the young artist still managed to attend eight times) is followed by an entire poem-recitation of revered artists.[12]

One of Pivovarov's earliest and best known series is the *Projects for a Lonely Man*, made in the 1970s. Loneliness or solitude (*odinochestvo*) recurs throughout his work. Pivovarov says that this theme is "constantly present, it is an Ariadne's thread, running straight through me, and I couldn't lose this thread, even if I wanted to" (Pivovarov 2021: 165). It is embodied in the figure of Igor Kholin, poet and friend of the artist, who emerges as Pivovarov's artistic hero. Kholin, together with his friend the poet Sapgir, is repeatedly celebrated in both books. Pivovarov commemorated both men shortly before their death with home-made illustrated books, reminiscent of Futurist publications (Pivovarov 2021: 244). The seventh notebook in *Serye Tetradi* is dedicated to the two men, with anecdotes, reminiscences, photographs and drawings as well as Kholin's own letters to the artist and some of his quotes or "*sententsiia*" (Pivovarov 2017: 216-255). The poems inspired some exciting rougher illustrations (which Pivovarov calls his "hooligan" style) for various editions of Kholin's work, including his first translation into Czech in 2012 (Pivovarov 2021: 341-346). The poet embodies an ideal of artistic integrity and freedom, almost an alter-ego for the artist, with his attitude of "conscious solitude" that is more important than artistic fame, and even a form of resistance (Pivovarov 2017: 285-286). Kholin died in relative obscurity in 1999. But Pivovarov's sense of Kholin's significance proved prescient, with new interest from a younger generation beyond Russia, and posthumous publications and translations of his poems, prose and diaries.[13]

If Pivovarov's evocations of Moscow, and of loneliness have a lyrical, wistful mood, *Kashira Highway,* Andrei Monastyrskii's novelised account of a nervous and spiritual crisis in the winter of 1981-82, is pitched in quite a different mode. Monastyrskii was a leading figure

[12] You can hear Pivovarov recite this poem at the start of the interview he recorded for the Tret'iakov Gallery series "The Artist Speaks" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fv-Nfl_r22M&list=RDCMUCCJR2fHtwpHs5eYirnbCNQA&index=4 [Accessed 30 December 2022].

[13] There has been extensive publication of Kholin's poetry and prose in Russia, as well as published translations in Israel and the Czech Republic and the recent English translation of the poet's selected diaries and prose (Kholin 2018).

among the Moscow Conceptualists and is mentioned several times in Pivovarov's books. The illustrations have been made for this edition by Pavel Pepperstein, Pivovarov's son, and it has been translated by Andrew Bromfield. The text was first published in 1987 as part of the series *Poezdki za gorod* (Trips out of town), produced by the group *Kollektivnye Deistviia* (Collective Actions), founded by Monastyrskii in 1976. The art critic and historian of Moscow Conceptualism, Ekaterina Degot, calls the book "a novel I would put in the top ten, possibly even top five Russian books ever written" (Degot 2014: 51).

The novel is an account of spiritual practice pushed to extreme. A self-imposed régime of prayer (recitation of the Hesychast Jesus prayer) and fasting produces a visionary state by which everyday Soviet reality is transformed and becomes saturated with divine and demonic essence. The setting of Moscow is crucial. Moscow at the very start of the 1980s becomes a battleground between forces of destruction and forces of spiritual light, and these energies constellate at everyday corners and in everyday objects — the boot sign of a shoe repair shop in a back court, the needles and rulers on the counter of a basement dry cleaners: "it never even occurred to me to regard all these effects as manifestations of psychosis and delirium. I perceived them as a demonic apparition, legitimised by a thousand-year-old tradition" (Monastyrskii 2021: 131). The inclusion of recognisable street names, tram numbers and places give the reader a much needed topographic anchor in the reality of the city, from which the writer is continually taking off on spiritual and imaginative flights. Complex elaborations of these visions are set against reassuring detail of the Soviet everyday — the metro escalator, a three kopeck coin, light on a linoleum floor.

Many of the artists of the 1970s and 80s made work that engaged with the disjunction between the symbols and discourse of Soviet ideology and the experience of everyday life. *Kashira Highway* pushes these layers of perception to an extreme. The visible symbols and structures of the Soviet state are interpreted through the protagonist's spiritual practice until the five-pointed star on the button of the wadded jacket of a man opposite him on a suburban train becomes proof of Soviet Russia's unique spiritual role: "having clarified the spiritual position of Soviet ideology in the divine dispensation and tied up all loose ends, I was highly delighted with my own expert hermeneutic knowledge, and for a

while, I regarded the surrounding ideological reality in a completely different light" (Monastyrskii 2021: 122).

Despite anticipations of spiritual transformation, the artist's condition remains one of estrangement. Finding himself on a bus full of military personnel, as he travels back to Moscow after visiting relatives outside the city, he observes: "I was very keenly aware of the passengers' consensual reality and their communal solidarity, so alien to me (...) I had absolutely no connection with this communal solidarity of theirs. My loneliness was appalling and hopeless" (Monastyrskii 2021: 120). Such passages elicit recognition from the reader beyond any recourse to psychotic excuse. This loneliness is at its extreme when the protagonist is separated from Moscow. The city is a crucial holding ground and site of transformation, which the author notes under the heading "Unfamiliar City", in his journal. These are intimations of Moscow as a sort of eternal, spiritual city connected with childhood perceptions, as in Pivovarov's writing, but in a very different mode:

The essential element of these experiences was an extraordinary clear, surprising, and new perception of streets, buildings, the sky, and so on, a perception that was previously entirely unknown to me. Every now and then, my glance stumbled across sections of the urban topography that I had never seen before, and at spots through which I had definitely walked a thousand times. (...) In all probability, as a result of all this turbulence in my brain, long-forgotten layers of memory, containing information about my visual perception as a child, had risen to the surface (Monastyrskii 2021: 173-174).

Kashira Highway is grounded in the experience of a city, and an ideological discourse, that was formative for the artists of this time: a complex and elaborately symbolised construction overlaying an unwieldy human reality palpably at odds with the slogans and imagery that strove to contain it. The city held a secret poetry of back courtyards, neglected everyday objects and even rubbish heaps; things full of artistic potential, but overlooked and discarded by the controlling ideology. This ideology, though recognised by artists as hollow and absurd, was structured by an ideal of absolute truth and synthesis. Soviet education was underpinned by a culture of "*vseznanie*" or universal knowledge, that was implied in the founding myth of the Soviet new man but also echoed the ambitions of frustrated intellectuals, the desire to know

"everything". Hunger for encyclopaedic knowledge, as well as metaphysical and religious speculation were intrinsic to the atmosphere. Kabakov singles out Monastyrski and Pavel Pepperstein as outstanding embodiments of this "universal thinking", and sees their attitude as part of an existing Russian intellectual tradition that was incorporated into the ideology of the Soviet state (Kabakov et al. 2010: 204-207). He acknowledges the serious interest in religious philosophy among artists and writers in the 1970s but insists that this was not an impassioned "existential" enquiry in the spirit of Munch and his circle (Kabakov 2010: 97). Monastyrski's experience seems to contradict this. The journey made in *Kashira Highway* puts religious speculation to a high pressure test. It makes for an intense and somewhat claustrophobic read, shot through with glimpses of recognition of the physical fabric of Soviet Moscow.

Kabakov has downplayed the autobiographical aspects of the art made in this period (Kabakov 2010: 96-97). However the books reviewed here seem to belie such a definitive conclusion. Both are extremely personal documents of a singular time and place that contain a kaleidoscopic variety of voices, viewpoints and forms, actual and invented, specific to the world from which they emerged. They richly supplement the growing archive of documentation, reminiscence and debate about the artistic life of the period, and help us to situate the movement of Moscow Conceptualism in the wider context of Russian, and not purely Soviet, literary, artistic and philosophical traditions.

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Lidia Tripiccione

Kuzovkina, Tat'iana, Larisa Naidich and Natal'ia Obraztsova (eds.). 2022. *Lotmany. Semeinaia perepiska 1940-1946. Sostavlenie, podgotovka teksta, predislovie i kommentarii T. D. Kuzovkinoi, L. E. Naidich, N. Iu. Obraztsovoi, pri uchastii G.G. Superfina* (Tallinn: Izdatel'stvo TLU), pp. 716

The volume, published by the University of Tallinn in the fast-expanding series "Bibliotheca Lotmaniana", is the result of a titanic archival enterprise undertaken by Tat'iana Kuzovkina (University of Tallinn), Larisa Naidich (Professor Emeritus at Jerusalem University and daughter of Lidiia Mikhailovna Lotman), and Natal'ia Obraztsova (philologist and daughter of Inna Mikhailovna Lotman), with the participation of Gabriel' Superfin.

The structure of the book is very interesting. The central documents, the 356 letters (of which 329 were previously unpublished) that Aleksandra Samoilovna and her children Inna, Lidiia, Viktroriia, and Iurii exchanged between 1940 and 1946, when Iurii Mikhailovich was fighting in the war, are encased in a wealth of supplemental material, both archival and not.[1] In fact, beyond the preface and the bio-bibliographical aids that the reader customarily finds in epistolary publications, the volume also includes several other documents and fascinating contributions.

The rich archival material presented in the book is organized thematically into three separate sections. Other than the aforementioned family correspondence, the volume also contains a second section featuring part of the Lotmans' correspondence with family acquaintances and friends, and a third block with heterogeneous documents pertaining to the Lotmans' activity in those years. Among the documents included in this last section, we find Iurii Mikhailovich's university certificates and his correspondence to be reinstated as a student in Leningrad after he was demobilized in 1946, alongside the short autobiography of Boris

[1] For a list of the previously published letters, see footnote 20 on page 32 of the volume.

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Davidovich Lakhman, a schoolmate of Iurii Mikhailovich who tragically disappeared in 1939.

The letters and documents in all three archival-based sections are chronologically organized, and the principle that the editors pursued is that of the maximum degree of exhaustiveness. Indeed, the editors put together all the family letters still extant by drawing from a variety of different archives, including Obraztsova's and Naidich's personal archives, Iurii Mikhailovich's archive in Tartu, and Lidiia Lotman's fond in Saint Petersburg (IRLI).[2] Most letters were retrieved from Obraztsova's fond. Each letter from the family correspondence is accompanied not only by a thorough description of its appearance but also by footnotes comparing its content with salient passages from Lotman's 1995 *Ne-memuary* and from his still unpublished diaries. Following the principle of exhaustiveness, the choice of including correspondence with members outside of the Lotman family – material that *per se* is of marginal interest – finds its rationale, as the information in these letters resonates and supplements what the reader finds in the main correspondence.

The meaning of the family correspondence is further explored in a fourth section containing, alongside a short piece by Iurii Mikhailovich, essays by Mikhail Lotman, Liubov Kiseleva, and Larisa Naidich relating to Iurii Mikhailovich's memories and tales about the war. It is precisely in this polyphony of voices accompanying the family correspondence that lies the strength of the volume.

As always when confronted with the epistolary form, the reader must consider questions of methodological import. The correspondence *per se* is of unquestionable value but the pragmatic question remains on how to employ the material now available to us to further scholarly research. The polyphonic structure of the book, weaving the family correspondence in a complex net of documents and memoiristic essays, suggests several possible approaches.

The most straightforward answer to the question is to use the volume as a source of biographical information. While the letters allow only for a partial reconstruction of the military activities Lotman participated in, and while most letters are short communiqués where Iurii Mikhailovich informs his mother and sisters that he is alive and well, the

[2] Another minor note of criticism, it would have been better if all the archives used had been indicated separately to the reader. As it is, the reader is forced to reconstruct the archival work from the commentary to the letters.

chronological organization allows the reader to follow the evolution of one of the central themes of the correspondence, Iurii Mikhailovich's pursuit to further his education. He studies French, reads Hugo, Tolstoi, George Sand, Heine - whom he translates into Russian -, laments his inability to write good letters, and, after May 9th, starts to ask his sisters for handbooks to prepare for his return to university. From the letters penned by Lidiia Mikhailovna, we can also reconstruct with some precision the development of her dissertation, whereas one letter by Inna Mikhailovna records the lecture plan for the course in ancient Russian literature in Leningrad in 1946 (n. 265).

Of particular interest from the scholarly perspective are the epistolary discussions on literature between Iurii Mikhailovich and Lidiia Mikhailovna. The siblings discuss articles by Gukovskii, Azadovskii, and other contemporary scholars that Iurii Mikhailovich could get his hands on: as Iurii Mikhailovich frequently wrote to Lidiia, the possibility to participate - albeit from a marginal position - in the scholarly discussions was of vital importance for him. Particularly noteworthy are two "theoretical letters" (n. 231, 244, and 251, written between April and June 1945) where the siblings discuss questions such as the relationship between form and content in literature and art: "I really cannot understand how the new content fills the old form, as I cannot imagine what we mean here by form and what we mean by content" (Kuzovkina et al. 2022: 367), writes Iurii Mikhailovich criticizing Lidiia's Belinskian perspective.

The third and last "theoretical letter" from June 1st 1945, where Iurii Mikhailovich describes his conception of culture as an interrelated whole - a possible prefiguration of the semiosphere? - suggests the second way to frame the correspondence:

It is impossible to understand an epoch [...] without knowing, for instance, female fashion and everyday details, and without feeling that the Impressionists are more linked to long-range cannons than to the Romantics. The former link is like that of a hand to his leg, whereas the latter link is comparable to that between my hand and the hand of a Roman (Kuzovkina et al. 2022: 336).

The relationship between an artistic movement and military advancements contemporary to it, so Lotman argues, runs deeper than the relationship between two artistic systems that are chronologically distinct. Synchronicity trumps issues of genealogical and, more importantly, intellectual dependency, so that no author or literary text can be understood without the knowledge of the *byt* of the epoch to which they be-

long. The publication of the Lotmans' correspondence in the war years forces the reader to consider a question similar to that posed by Iurii Mikhailovich to his sister in 1946. What – and how deep – is the link between Iurii Mikhailovich Lotman and the experience of the II World War, and to what extent should we consider it when discussing his intellectual heritage? In the words of the editors in the preface: "The published material forces us to consider the influence that the experience of the war had on the personality and scholarly work of Iurii Mikhailovich" (Kuzovkina et al. 2022: 34).

The memoiristic essays by Kiseleva and Mihhail Lotman detailing how Iurii Mikhailovich would speak about his war years later in his life could provide important clues to answer this question. Mikhail Lotman's essay, however, reminds us that the reader must approach the letters as documents subject not only to military censorship but also to *family censorship*: virtually absent are any references to the dangers Iurii Mikhailovich was exposed to, and to the hardships he had to endure lest his family worry too much. Similarly absent are indications of the difficulties that Aleksandra Samoilovna, Inna, and Viktoriia encountered during the siege of Leningrad. Later on, Iurii Mikhailovich would narrate different war episodes to different addresses, sparing his children the violence he had witnessed. Mikhail Lotman, in short, forces us to consider the letters - as well as Iurii Mikhailovich's later war stories - within the boundaries of a specific genre with a given narrative and discursive logic, and not only as biographical sources. As Sergei Ushakin and Aleksei Golubev wrote in the preface to their anthology of war correspondence, by setting aside a strictly biographical perspective, the reader can concentrate on other questions, like the "place of the letter in the formation of the symbolic order, [...] the position of the letter in relation to other forms of documental sources, and [...] those intersubjective relationships that emerge in the epistolary process" (Ushakin et al. 2016: 8). From this perspective, the presence of selected letters from and to people outside of the family circle could be of great importance.

Whatever scholarship the volume will inspire, the publication of the Lotmans' correspondence marks an important event for the scholarly world interested in Lotman. The editors' complex weaving of the correspondence into a variety of sources, and the polyphonic nature of the volume provide an array of stimulating interpretive avenues to the engaged reader.

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Michela Venditti

Losev, Aleksej e Loseva, Valentina. 2021. *La gioia per l'eternità. Lettere dal gulag (1931-1933)*, traduzione e cura di G. Rimondi, postfazione di E. Takho-Godi, (Milano: Guerini e associati), pp. 288.

La letteratura concentrazionaria, che ricostruisce gli infiniti frammenti dell'esperienza del campo di concentramento, si esprime in diverse forme che vanno dall'opera letteraria basata su una esperienza personale, che può essere narrata da diversi punti di vista (il prigioniero Dostoevskij, la guardia Dovlatov, il cane Ruslan di Vladimov) al diario (N. Lugovskaja), dal reportage (Čechov, Doroševič) e dal documento letterario (E. Ginzburg) alla corrispondenza dalla *zona* (Florenskij) fino alla prosa contemporanea, in cui il campo diventa motivo narrativo documentato, ma non vissuto in prima persona (Prilepin, Bykov, Jachina, Vodolazkin, Remizov).

Il libro che presentiamo offre un esempio alquanto raro di corrispondenza bilaterale tra due detenuti in lager diversi. Il carteggio tra il filosofo Aleksej Losev, sua moglie Valentina e i genitori di lei, presenta peculiarità che lo rendono un documento unico nel suo genere: una corrispondenza tutta all'interno della *zona*, due lager allo stesso tempo; ma anche una scrittura cifrata, in codice, consapevole del proprio carattere "pubblico", poiché sarà letta dai censori. Nonostante ciò ogni tanto erompe un grido di disperazione che squarcia la neutralità del testo controllato: "la mia mente si offusca e la coscienza si annulla, vedo un abisso nero e non so dove posare il mio piede. (...) Tu sei la sola a non dimenticarmi. Jasočka, mia gioia, Dio ci ha abbandonati, e che possiamo noi attendere se non la morte?" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 64). Oppure lo sfogo: "Bisogna lottare contro la feccia della società e i criminali che hanno trovato una strada per il potere, contro questa belva dalle mille teste e la sua grossolanità, la sua insolenza, la sua indole incredibilmente selvaggia e rozza, il suo odio dell'intelletto, della cultura..." (Losev *et al.* 2021: 99).

I coniugi Losev vengono arrestati nel 1930 e, dopo un primo periodo nella famigerata prigione Butyrki di Mosca, vengono condannati e inviati Aleksej allo Svirlag e Valentina in Siberia. Losev sarà liberato per invalidità dopo tre anni, malato e quasi cieco; nel 1933 la coppia ottiene

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il permesso di tornare a Mosca. La corrispondenza raccoglie 28 lettere di Losev, 26 di Valentina e 37 lettere tra i Losev ed i genitori di lei, Tat'jana e Michail Sokolov. Questo prezioso documento è stato pubblicato in russo per la prima volta, parzialmente, nel 1989, e solo nel 2005 nella versione completa, su cui si è basata la presente traduzione.

G. Rimondi, attenta e abile traduttrice e curatrice, riconosce nell'introduzione come il filosofo Aleksej Losev (1893-1988), in Russia considerato uno dei più importanti rappresentanti del pensiero novecentesco, in Italia non sia molto noto. Storico della filosofia, filologo, scrittore, personaggio eclettico e importante pensatore religioso, Losev accoglie in sé elementi moderni e antimoderni, rileggendo la tradizione filosofica da Platone a Kant attraverso la fenomenologia husserliana. Viene arrestato nel 1930 per attività antisovietica, ossia per aver pubblicato il suo *Dialettica del mito* senza espunzioni, ultima opera antimarxista uscita in URSS.

Le immagini ricorrenti nelle lettere appartengono alla letteratura concentrazionaria inaugurata da Dostoevskij: la convivenza coatta con sconosciuti, l'affollamento, la mancanza di intimità, il grigiore incessante e avvolgente; il non rendersi conto del proprio aspetto per la mancanza di specchi, come raccontava Evgenija Ginzburg; la mancanza del minimo necessario: "per una tazza d'acqua calda bisogna umiliarsi, implorare e correre per tutto il campo" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 98).

La comunicazione tra i due coniugi ha, tuttavia, delle caratteristiche singolari, è una conversazione tra spiriti affini, studiosi colti e vivaci, che vivono di arte e non sopportano l'inattività intellettuale: lui sente di voler iniziare a scrivere prosa e lei, invece, vuole dipingere. L'astronoma Valentina si preoccupa di non restare al passo con gli studi scientifici, il filosofo Aleksej sceglie di fare il guardiano per riflettere in solitudine, ma sente la "costante e snervante impossibilità fisica di riflettere in maniera sistematica su qualcosa e di prendere appunti" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 108).

L'importanza della cultura, della lettura, della propria libertà interiore è un motivo che ricorre nella letteratura del Gulag, basta ricordare la suggestiva scena della recitazione a memoria dei versi di *Evgenij Onegin* in treno da parte delle detenute in *Viaggio nella vertigine* di E. Ginzburg. Così ciò che brucia di più al filosofo Losev è quando viene a sapere di aver perso i suoi libri: "ho appena perso la speranza di ritornare al mio lavoro scientifico, perché cosa sono io senza la mia biblioteca? Sono come Šaljapin senza voce o Rachmaninov senza pianoforte" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 60).

Li aveva sposati l'amico e filosofo padre Pavel Florenskij che, dopo aver trascorso un periodo alle Solovki, sarebbe morto fucilato nel 1937. Pochi mesi prima del matrimonio Aleksej regala a Valentina il libro di Florenskij *La gioia per l'eternità*, frase che ricorre nel carteggio ed esprime il loro particolare legame spirituale al di fuori del tempo. Scrive G. Rimondi: "la separazione fisica in qualche modo non è importante, 'forse è perché presto saremo di nuovo insieme, o forse perché siamo insieme anche ora'. Lo spazio e il tempo, vivificati dalla parola, si dilatano al punto che il passato viene vissuto come presente, riecheggia e vive nel presente" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 12). La salda intesa e la profonda complicità dei Losev si manifesta nel fatto che solo nel 1993 si scoprirà che entrambi avevano preso i voti. Nel 1932 Aleksej scrive a Valentina: "durante i nostri lunghi anni di amicizia io e te abbiamo elaborato nuove forme di vita del tutto originali, questa unione di scienza, filosofia, matrimonio spirituale e monachesimo, che poche persone avrebbero avuto il coraggio di vivere e di cui i nostri piccoli borghesi saggi, filosofi, persone sposate e monaci non saprebbero neanche sognare" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 61).

Sia G. Rimondi, che E. Takho-Godi nella interessante postfazione, identificano la fede e l'amore come quei perni che aiutano la coppia a superare l'esperienza del Gulag. Un motivo inusuale in questo tipo di documenti, che ricorre probabilmente per motivi censori, ma anche per una sorta di ingenuità, è l'ottimismo e la speranza che Losev prova all'inizio. Gli avevano detto che avrebbe potuto continuare a fare il suo lavoro in provincia: "non nascondo che riguardo a tutto questo nutro un ottimismo piuttosto forte, contrariamente all'opinione della maggior parte dei detenuti che conosco, molti dei quali ridono di me" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 22-23). Di solito in questo tipo di letteratura dopo una prima fase di incredulità, sopravviene l'angoscia, la disperazione e non ricorrono esclamazioni come quelle di Aleksej: "Jasočka cara, io ho talmente tanta, tanta voglia di vivere! A volte sono assalito da una folle voglia di vivere! (...) Ah, cara, come ho voglia di vivere!" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 44, 244). Abbondano semmai le affermazioni opposte, anche qui presenti: "non posso vivere senza il pensiero e la creazione intellettuale" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 61).

Sono estremamente suggestive le immagini che esprimono il forte legame tra i coniugi: "la nostra vita comune ondeggia come un mare d'amore e di tenerezza, dolce e infinito (...) mare di amore e comunicazione" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 30, 31); "un'unica cosa, un tutto indivisibile e vergine, indistruttibile ed eterno" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 63).

In questo dialogo a due voci Aleksej è inquieto, ribelle, impaziente, a volte furioso e spesso infantile, mentre Valentina è dolce, calma, equilibrata, rassicurante. La prova del Gulag mette a dura prova la fede e Losev spesso si abbandona al totale sconforto: "la mia anima è così travagliata, in essa vi è tanta sofferenza animale assurda, mancanza di gioia, di tenerezza, di preghiera, mi sento così abbandonato da Dio e privato della sua grazia, che alla fine mi chiedo se non corro il rischio di una mostruosa e irreparabile catastrofe spirituale" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 95).
In Aleksej risuona l'originario impeto cosacco (come si evince anche dalle sue foto), il furore: "la mia anima è piena di una violenta ribellione e di collera contro le forze superiori, per quanto il mio spirito mi dica che ogni protesta e rivolta contro Dio è insensata e assurda" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 61) o ancora più crudo "la mia anima non accetta questa vita schifosa e vile che conduco da due anni" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 95). La sua esuberanza, l'incontenibile desiderio di vita e di creazione sono racchiuse in una splendida immagine presente in una delle ultime lettere del 1933, in cui il filosofo paragona il processo del pensiero al parto: "sono attanagliato dalle contrazioni dei pensieri e dei sentimenti, da tutta una nuvola di pensieri e sentimenti che montano e ribollono nella mia anima e che cercano di venire fuori, desiderano ardentemente nascere e diventare organismi viventi" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 223).
La riconsiderazione e rivalutazione dei dettagli quotidiani, il cambiamento totale di prospettiva causato dalla spietata esperienza del Gulag sono tutti nelle considerazioni del filosofo che durante la settimana di Maslenica, nel 1932 ricorda i festeggiamenti e i *bliny*: "non siamo mai stati amanti di questo genere di "piaceri": spesso questi *bliny* li mangiavamo solo per fare onore alla tavola dei nostri genitori (...). Ma ora che mi trovo privato non soltanto di questi *bliny*, ma anche di tutte le altre cose dello stesso genere, che consolazione, che pace emana da questa usanza, la quale, seppure lontana dagli interessi dello spirito puro, celava in sé così tante fonti di equilibrio interiore, così tante strade verso una saggia padronanza della vita! I *bliny* e la buona tavola sono la dolcezza della vita, l'inizio di un ordine pacifico, la gioia ingenua e spensierata dell'esistenza" (Losev *et al.* 2021: 110).

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