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Introduction to the fourteenth issue of *AvtobiografiЯ*

The fourteenth issue of *AvtobiografiЯ* hosts the second part of the special issue devoted to the ‘autobiography of Socialist trauma’ with articles by Maria Bidovec, Andrea F. De Carlo, Ekaterina Gurtovaya, Giovanni Magliocco Irina Talevska and Eva Toulouze, which study some of the many aspects related to the representation of the self in texts written by authors who underwent state repression in socialist countries. Together with the contributions of the first part, this set of articles provides an innovative body of research on a complex corpus, whose definition, study and understanding are still far from being reached.

The five articles collected in the miscellaneous section share a common intellectual horizon, even though they adopt different disciplinary angles and are related to different historical periods and geographical contexts. Ranging from late Imperial Russia to post-Soviet Eastern Europe, from contemporary Croatian novel to the Soviet children’s biographical canon of the

interwar period, these contributions converge around a set of interconnected questions: how do individuals — and communities — construct narratives of the self in the face of historical trauma? What literary, rhetorical, and ideological strategies govern the representation of memory, childhood, and war in autobiographical and quasi-autobiographical writing? And, perhaps most crucially, whose voices are authorised to speak, and whose are systematically silenced or marginalised within the cultural and political orders they inhabit?

At the centre of all five contributions lies the relationship between memory and self-writing — understood not as a transparent recovery of the past, but as an active, culturally mediated, and often politically charged process of construction. Whether the subject is a nineteenth-century Russian judge composing his apologetic memoirs decades after a controversial trial, a group of Croatian novelists reimagining their wartime childhoods through fictional

proxies, two Russian and Russo-phone authors staging the fragmented recollections of child survivors of the Second World War, a Soviet regime carefully managing — and suppressing — the biographical representation of its leaders for young readers, or a pioneering female journalist and autobiographer writing from prison, a psychiatric ward, and the front lines of a nineteenth-century war, the texts examined in this section all testify to the same fundamental insight: that self-writing is never simply about the self. It is always also about power, legitimacy, and the contested right to narrate.

The contribution by Annalisa Di Santo, devoted to the memoirs of the Russian jurist Anatolii Fëdorovich Koni and his account of the trial of the revolutionary Vera Zasulich, offers a close rhetorical and argumentative analysis of a text that presents itself as historical testimony but functions, in practice, as an elaborate act of self-defence and self-glorification. Written between 1904 and 1906, nearly three decades after the events it describes, Koni's *Vospominaniia o dele Very Zasulich* constructs the image of an incorruptible judge, a lone defender of the law against a corrupt and servile system. The article demonstrates

how Koni deploys a rich array of rhetorical strategies — dialogism, rhetorical questions, religious metaphors, evaluative lexicon, citations of legal and literary authorities — to shape the reader's perception of himself as a *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, a man of irreproachable moral stature and exceptional oratorical skill. What emerges from this analysis is a portrait of autobiographical writing as apologia: the memoir as a courtroom in which the author simultaneously plays the role of witness, lawyer, and judge. The temporal distance from the events, far from guaranteeing objectivity, becomes in Koni's hands a rhetorical resource, a vantage point from which he can reframe the past and establish his own version of truth as the authoritative one. This contribution thus introduces one of the central themes of the section: the self as constructed through narrative, and narrative as an instrument of political and moral legitimation.

The article of Andrijana Koslajtman shifts the focus to contemporary Croatian fiction, examining five novels published between 2008 and 2023 (*Underground Barbie* by Maša Kolanović, *Hotel Tito* by Ivana Bodrožić, *In Late Summer* by Magdalena Blažević, *Cabbage*

Leafing by Igor Beleš, *The Croat Factory* by Nebojša Lujanović) that place children at the centre of their narratives of the Croatian and Bosnian wars of the 1990s. Drawing on the concept of crossover literature — texts that circulate across the boundary between adult and children's or young adult fiction — the article identifies two major modalities in the representation of wartime childhood: one in which war remains a distant background against which the ordinary life of children unfolds, and one in which war penetrates directly and violently into the protagonist's existence, leaving irreparable psychological and social consequences. In all five novels, the autobiographical or pseudo-autobiographical dimension is a structural constant: the authors draw on their own wartime childhoods to construct fictional narratives that are, simultaneously, acts of personal memory and of collective witness. War, in these texts, functions as a powerful accelerator of biographical experience: it forces children into premature confrontation with loss, displacement, social exclusion, and moral complexity, producing what the article describes as a model of accelerated and traumatic maturation. The contribution highlights how the child's per-

spective — limited, confused, but ultimately more perceptive than the adults around it tend to assume — becomes a privileged instrument of social criticism, allowing authors to expose the failures of institutions, the mechanisms of nationalist ideology, and the human cost of political conflict with a directness that the adult perspective would make more difficult to sustain.

Danijela Lugarić Vukas examines two non-fictional works — Svetlana Alexievich's *Last Witnesses* and Ludmila Ulitskaya's *Childhood* 45–53 — as ethnographies of Soviet childhood during the Second World War and the early post-war years. The article focuses on the temporal dimension of memory, arguing that the transformation of fragmentary episodic recollections into coherent autobiographical narratives is made possible not simply by the act of remembering, but by the deployment of specific temporal frameworks — markers such as 'before the war,' 'after the war,' 'during' — that organise scattered childhood memories into structured life stories. Drawing on memory studies, narratology, and the philosophy of time, the article shows how these temporal coordinates do more than locate events in chronological

sequence: they produce the narrative continuity through which a fragmented childhood self is connected to the remembering adult self, and through which private trauma is linked to collective historical experience. The polyphonic structure of both works — built from multiple individual voices rather than a single authoritative narrative — is read as a deliberate resistance to the triumphalist and monolithic politics of memory that continue to surround the Second World War in post-Soviet Russia. By giving space to the hesitations, silences, and contradictions of individual recollection, Alexievich and Ulitskaya open a space for mourning that official commemorative culture systematically forecloses.

The article by Polina Popova addresses a striking absence at the heart of Soviet children's biographical literature: the childhood of Joseph Stalin. Through a careful reconstruction of the Soviet biographical canon for children — tracing its roots from the Plutarchan tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through the revolutionary obituary form and the heroic biographies of Bolshevik leaders produced in the 1930s — the article argues that the systematic erasure of Stalin's childhood from children's literature was

not an oversight but a deliberate political strategy, personally controlled by Stalin himself. While figures such as Kirov, Ordzhonikidze, and Sverdlov were given childhoods in the pages of books written for young Soviet readers — childhoods carefully shaped to illustrate the formation of revolutionary virtue, the seeds of heroic destiny visible already in the small boy's behaviour and choices — Stalin remained beyond and above such humanisation. To have a childhood, the article suggests, is to be vulnerable, to be in the process of becoming rather than already fully formed. The Soviet biographical genre for children relied on precisely this vulnerability to create identification and pedagogical models for young readers. Stalin, constructed as the omnipotent Father of the Soviet family, could not be a child: the very narrative logic of childhood would have undermined the mythological structure of his authority. This contribution brings into sharp relief the political stakes of biographical self-writing — and of biographical silencing — showing how the management of life narratives, including their suppression, is always an exercise of power. Against the background of this, Popova devotes space to the analysis of Kirov's childhood

as depicted in biographical texts written after his murder.

Iris Uccello introduces a figure who has received very little scholarly attention despite her remarkable significance: Nastas'ia Vasil'evna Kairova (1844–1888), journalist, autobiographer, and the first Russian woman to report directly from a war zone. Drawing on archival materials — letters, diaries, journalistic correspondence, and unpublished manuscripts — the article reconstructs Kairova's multifaceted career across three overlapping domains: her autobiographical writings, produced during her imprisonment and psychiatric internment following the 1876 trial in which she was accused of the attempted murder of her lover's wife; her journalistic activity as a war correspondent during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878; and her broader literary ambitions, including her relationship with Aleksei Suvorin and her correspondence with Nikolai Leskov. The article's most significant contribution lies in its analysis of Kairova's autobiographical texts as *pathographies* — first-person narratives of mental illness and psychological disintegration — a genre in which she emerges as an extraordinarily early and original practitioner. In a literary culture where wom-

en's mental illness was almost exclusively narrated from the outside, as an object of male clinical observation, Kairova writes from the inside, making herself the subject rather than the object of diagnostic scrutiny. Her autobiographical voice is direct, dialogic, and deliberately provocative: she addresses topics — sexual freedom, the absence of maternal instinct, suicidal ideation, religious hypocrisy — that would not find open literary expression for decades. Her journalistic writing displays an equally modern sensibility, characterised by a commitment to truth-telling that she identifies, with bitter irony, as a deeply subversive act in a society she describes as constitutionally averse to the truth.

Taken together, these five contributions articulate a coherent set of questions about the relationship between memory, self-writing, and power in Eastern European and Russian literary and cultural history. Across different historical moments and generic forms, they show that autobiographical and quasi-autobiographical writing is never a neutral or private act: it is always embedded in specific political and ideological contexts that determine who can speak, in what form, about what subjects, and with what degree of

authority. The child, the judge, the revolutionary, the journalist, the psychiatric patient: all of these figures, in the texts examined here, use the resources of self-narration to negotiate their position within — or against — the dominant structures of their time. Memory, in all five contributions, emerges not as a passive repository of the past but as an active, contested, and profoundly political practice: a site where individual experience and collective history meet, where silences are broken or enforced, and where the boundaries of the sayable are constantly being tested and redrawn.

Michela Romano's interview with Egana Dzhabbarova brings some of these topics to the contemporary world. In her dialogue with Romano, Dzhabbarova – one of the most influential authors of contemporary

Russophone literature – discusses the role of her writings as an act of resistance and agency against the Imperial canon of Russian literature, and against the backdrop of the literary, cultural and socio-political changes occurred in Russophone literature and within the circles of Russian emigration after 24 February 2022. Dzhabbarova focuses also on autofiction as a politically engaged genre, which is contrasted by authoritarian regimes because of its capacity to offer a platform to marginalised, liminal and repressed authors and communities. Thus, the issue of agency surfaces as one of the cornerstones of contemporary Russophone autobiographical writing.