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Konstantin Paustovskii's Memoirs as an Intergenerational Landmark

This article analyzes the reception of the six-part memoir cycle by Konstantin Paustovskii, published in 1946-63, and the discussions about it among professional critics, writers, and non-professionals. Using the concept of a *memory episteme* coined by Hans Brockmeier, I propose that Paustovskii positioned his autobiographical cycle between three memory epistemes. The first, which can be called the episteme of the lost world, originated towards the end of World War II. The second, which can be called the episteme of ideological purity, was characteristic of the years of the fight against cosmopolitanism (1948–53) and was, therefore, somewhat neglected in Paustovskii's works. However, it remained relevant even after Stalin's death, which forced Paustovskii to modify some of the episodes of his life or to silence them. The third episteme was launched by *Novyi mir* magazine not long before the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party. It was related to the idea of deep personal involvement in the Russian Revolution and the Civil War, including the traumatic losses of the Great Terror. Paustovskii's own memory episteme, which he started promoting after 1953, involved popularizing a revival of the life-creation and life-writing strategies of the modernist era, while also giving the *Novyi mir* episteme of personal involvement in *Big History* its due. Whereas older generations of readers saw this revival of modernist strategies culturally insignificant and derivative, younger readers perceived it as innovative and stimulating by the younger readers.

Five of the six parts of Konstantin Paustovskii's memoirs *Story of a Life* [Povest' o zhizni] were first published in the USSR between 1955 and 1964 and were considered among the Thaw's most significant cultural events. The story of their publication and reception, as well as the many discussions that arose after each of the books had appeared, can shed light on some critical processes that still need to be identified and described by the scholars of this period.

Literary scholars have studied Paustovskii's works extensively. However, his reception and the factors shaping his high reputation in the last decades of his life and the first years after his death have not been thoroughly analyzed, except for one aspect – his civic acts. The literary component of his legacy remains neglected and deserves special at-

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v12-004
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tention. Filling this lacuna, I will try to demonstrate that the reception of Paustovskii's autobiographical novels can help us construct a reasonably accurate picture of the literary tastes of Thaw-era readers.

In this paper, I will focus on two ruptures that become visible when one attempts to study how *Story of a Life* was perceived by its early readers. The first rupture is related to the different horizons of expectations characteristic of the mid-1940s, when the first part of the cycle came out, and the Thaw period, when the other five parts were published in different literary journals or in separate editions.[1] The second rupture points to the divergence demonstrated by the youngest generation of readers, i.e. by people born between the late 1920s and early 1940s, and several older generations.

I will use two theoretical frameworks to explain these ruptures: the notion of a *memory episteme*, introduced by the cultural psychologist Jens Brockmeier in his book *Beyond the Archive: Memory, Narrative, and the Autobiographical Process* (Brockmeier 2015), and the concept of historical generations developed by Karl Mannheim (Mannheim 1952: 276–320). Brockmeier defines a memory episteme as

> a historical framework that gives shape and meaning to our practices and ideas of remembering and forgetting. More precisely, a memory episteme stands for the whole of local and societal practices, technologies, and objects of remembering and forgetting; the ideas, concepts, and theories about what it is and what people do when they remember and forget; and the values and norms that regulate,

[1] Here is the chronology of the first publications. The first part, *The Distant Years* [Dalekie gody], up to the chapter 'The Classical Gymnasium' [Klassicheskaia gimnaziia], was published in *Novyi mir* in 1945 (issue 10), and then as a separate edition in 1946. The second part, *Turbulent Youth* [Bespokoinaia iunost'; in English translation, *Slow Approach of Thunder*) was published in *Novyi mir* in 1955 (issues 3–6). The third part, *The Beginning of the Unknown Age* [Nachalo nevedomogo veka; in English translation, *In That Dawn*] was published in the third volume of Paustovskii's six-volume collection in 1958. The fourth part, *A Time of Great Expectations* [Vremia bol'shikh ozhidanii; in English translation, *Years of Hope*) in the *Oktiabr'* magazine in 1959 (issues 3-5); the fifth part, *March to the South* [Brosok na Iug; in English translation, *Southern Adventure*) in *Oktiabr'* in 1960 (issue 10). And, finally, the sixth part, *The Book of Wandering* [Kniga skitanii; in English translation, *Restless Years*) in *Novyi mir* in 1963 (issues 10–11).

> within a given community or political system, which memory stories are permissible and which are not and hence ought to be excluded and prohibited. (Brockmeier 2015: 219–20)

According to Brockmeier, a memory episteme 'foregrounds the *cultural dynamic* in which all historical mnemonic conditions are involved' (Brockmeier 2015: 219–20). In Soviet cultural history between the mid-1940s and early 1960s, we can identify several memory epistemes that replaced each other rather quickly. Moreover, it is essential to understand that the memory episteme, at least in Soviet culture, is never universal and all-encompassing; alternative models of remembering/forgetting could emerge and later become, if not mainstream, then at least authoritative forms of the preservation and resurrection of memory.

What is most important for us in Mannheim's understanding of historical generations is his reference to the commonality of historical events and influences experienced by peer cohorts during childhood and adolescence, as well as the principles of interpreting new experiences.

I will start with the first rupture, produced by the difference between at least three distinct cultural contexts. The first of these contexts was shaped by the atmosphere of the last year of World War II and the first months after the war; the second emerged in the second half of 1946 and was influenced by the start of the Cold War and ideological campaigns in the arts and sciences; the third (very heterogeneous) context was the result of social and political conditions that took effect after March 1953.

1. First Episteme: Restoration of the Lost World

The very first part of the cycle, the novel *The Distant Years* [Dalekie gody; in English translation, *Childhood and Schooldays*] was conceived, written, and published long before the Thaw, between 1944 (first drafts) and 1946 (publication of the last chapters). As far as we can trace the primary design of the book, its very idea was formulated in 1944 and inspired by the latest news from the battlefield. A separate edition came out from the Detgiz publishing house in 1946 and was meant for a younger audience.

The Soviet army was retaking, one after another, cities and entire regions connected to

Paustovskii's childhood and youth: Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula. Working as a journalist, Paustovskii celebrated these events with a series of articles in which he praised the Soviet army and Soviet people and shared his memories of these places, describing the beloved traits that represented the *genii loci*. These included peculiar details, such as smells or effects of the light, that come to characterize the city or the whole region. Here is one example from his essay about the liberation of Odesa: 'The boathouse in the port, the steam mills, and factories on the Peresyp. Rusty anchors, the smell of oil and brine, estuaries with healing mud, the wide beaches of Luzanivka, and overhead – the dry light of a southern afternoon' (Paustovskii 1983, VII: 323).

Some of these memories relate to the pre-war years, some to the pre-revolutionary epoch, and Paustovskii intentionally did not draw distinct boundaries between them.

> My early childhood was spent in Bila Tserkva, this city surrounded by Ukraine's blue and golden fields. I remember it as the warm dew on the creeping flowers of the portulaca, as the sweet smoke of the straw used for heating the stoves, as the stories of my grandfather, a former soldier of Nicholas I, talking about the campaigns in Thrace. (Paustovskii 1983, VII: 314–15)
>
> The Germans desecrated the sacred Crimean land. But we knew that we would liberate Crimea, our Crimea, where steep promontories drown in the glitter and the blue, and the sea gathers fallen leaves at their feet. Crimea, where we all wanted time to stop so we would not lose the feeling of youth. Where life, like a morning at sea, has always been and will always be refreshing, and where it comes close to that line beyond which the golden age is in clear view. Crimea has always been for us the land of labour, inspiration, and poetry. (Paustovskii 1983, VII: 317)

In these short essays, Paustovskii clearly points out that the rebuilding and renaissance of the liberated cities will be possible only after the work of memory is completed and made public.

> We knew we would return to Sevastopol. We know that we will create this port and this city again with great effort and inspiration. But to recreate it we need to remember the Sevastopol we all knew and loved. It was picturesque. You could clearly see the features of a seaside city, the naval fortress, the fleet anchorage. Even in the streets far from the sea, everything reminded us of it – anchor chains used as railings, shells crackling underfoot, masts with flags rustling in the wind, the specific seaside architecture of houses made of weathered Inkerman stone and stairs like gangways linking its steep streets. (Paustovskii 1983, VII: 319)

Inspired by the promise of political and social change that the Soviet intelligentsia saw in the victory over Nazism (vividly depicted in the last paragraphs of *Doctor Zhivago*), Paustovskii believed that recollections of the past that had helped the Soviet people defeat the enemy would soon help them build a new world, much better than the one destroyed by the German invasion.

> How can a man with no past and no love fight desperately! Ineradicable hatred can only be born out of great love. We experienced this firsthand. And we arrived wiser, calmer, into the new, post-war life. When we talk about love, we know that love is not just about one person. It is everything that surrounds him, everything connected to him. It is something much greater than him. It is books and arguments, and meetings, and the entire stretch of life through which a loved one has passed.
>
> And the precise thought that all this, all these bits and pieces of life are the imperceptible beginnings of happy times, the beginning of that second, beautiful life, which we cherished in our minds for so long during the war. It is here, it is near. This is our first glimpse of it. (Paustovskii 1983, VII: 325)

There are even textual parallels between the journalistic essays Paustovskii published in 1944–45, and some fragments of *The Distant Years*, where he con-

nects memories from his childhood with episodes of his World War II biography. The historical timing of the release of the essays and the first book of memoirs is arranged very sophisticatedly.

Here is just one striking example. Written after the victory, the essay 'Life' [Zhizn', 1945] opens with a recollection of the experience of defeat and humiliation at the beginning of the war:

> In the summer of 1941, we were lying in the steppe near Tiraspol and watched from the side, from under our elbow, as German bombers were coming right down on us. [...] We watched from under the elbow and waited. The bombs whistled, the ground hooted, the dusty explosions rumbled, and a hot piece of shrapnel hit the ground nearby. [...] The shard was lying on the ground next to some ordinary flower, unfamiliar to me. [...] I touched the stem and thought, 'Here are two lives. The shard is the war, and the flower is the peaceful life, so distant now for all of us, we are fighting for it and carry it in our hearts'. (Paustovskii 1983, VII: 324)

The memory of the bombing and retreat of 1941 focuses on the symbolic image of a shell fragment next to a plant full of life. It conveys the idea that, alongside the terrible and deadly wartime experiences on the battlefield or the home front, there always existed memories of a peaceful life that, in a certain sense, could be restored following victory. Thus, the path between the first defeats and the final triumph was anthropologically predetermined by the existence of memory, which, on the one hand, gave strength to fight the enemy, and, on the other, promised the possibility of a new and better life.

Paustovskii later recalls the same episode of the bombing in the field near Tiraspol in one of the chapters of his novel *The Distant Years*, in which he talks about the first flights of the aviator Sergei Utochkin over Kyiv (this fragment was excluded from the first publications of the novel. For a long time, Paustovskii himself considered it lost. It was first published only posthumously, in 1968).

> We could not then look so far into the future as to hear the howl of one-ton

> bombs falling on our peaceful cities, we could not imagine that, in a few decades, we would have to bury ourselves in the ground, go into damp cellars and cracks because this shelter of the birds – the sky above our heads – would become a shelter for murderers.
>
> Could I have imagined then that in some thirty or so years, I would be lying on a dry, thorny field near Tiraspol, watching from under my palm as black Heinkels rushed over me with a sullen roar, as bombs exploded nearby? Every time the ground shuddered and hit me painfully in the chest. Somehow there, near Tiraspol, I remembered that quiet spring evening, the shouts of 'Bravo, Utochkin!' (Paustovskii 1968: 6)

The recollection of the defeats of 1941 is necessary here to show the direct connection between the technical discoveries and achievements that Paustovskii and his peers witnessed in the early twentieth century and the subsequent abuse of those same discoveries to exterminate people.

Thus, the detailed work of memory and the creation of the autobiographical text is legitimized in the first part of the cycle by the need to recreate the details of a world that has already been lost. It is necessary not so much to reproduce something unlikely to be repeated but to inspire and comfort those who feel devastated after the hardships of the war. The insistence on the power of personal memory also affirms the significance of each person's life, with its unique experiences and recollections. According to Marina Balina's observations, in this novel 'personal life experience, rather than well-known historical fact, triggers the narrative' (Balina 2003: 191).

It is no accident that the first novel of the cycle ends with a paean to the meaning of life and the possibility of finding it, almost in the spirit of Viktor Frankl. It is undoubtedly a message aimed not so much at children as at adults:

> I thought I would never believe anyone who told me that this life, with its love, its pursuit of truth and happiness, with its lightning bolts and the distant murmur of water

> in the middle of the night, was devoid of meaning and reason. Each of us must struggle for the affirmation of this life everywhere and always – to the end of our days. (Paustovskii 1946: 332)

For Paustovskii and many of his readers, the world reconstructed by the work of memory needed to be both pre-war and pre-revolutionary. In other words, memories could resurrect what the war, the revolution, and Bolshevik rule destroyed. Of course, this could not be openly stated, and Paustovskii left it to his readers to arrive at this truth independently.

2. Second Episteme: Ideological *Purity* in Representing the Pre-revolutionary Era

According to Paustovskii's own account, shared in a letter to his foster son Sergei Navashin, the first chapters of the novel published in *Novyi mir* were received very warmly by the readership: 'The magazine is not out yet (I mean the full print), but some issues have already leaked, and I'm already getting calls from various people congratulating me. Sholokhov called, by the way…' (letter of 29 December 1945; Paustovskii 1986, IX: 248).
However, this kind of response lasted only a short time. The situation changed rapidly after the country's top officials tightened ideological control over literature, starting with the so-called *thick* literary magazines. Initially, *Novyi mir*, *Znamia*, and *Oktiabr'* were also under suspicion. Still, the famous 'Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party' issued in August 1946 directly affected the Leningrad magazines *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*. Mikhail Zoshchenko, Anna Akhmatova, and Alexander Khazin were to bear the primary responsibility for the 'erroneous line' of the two magazines. Akhmatova and Zoshchenko were excluded from the Writers Union because, according to their colleagues, they did not participate in the project of *socialist construction*. Thus, they lost any opportunity to publish, earn money, or receive ration cards, without which it was physically impossible to survive at that time (Khazin could write sketches for comic actors under a pseudonym).
This attack on fiction did not spare the autobiographical genre. Fierce criticism of Mikhail Zoshchenko was directed at two texts: the more recent story *The Adventures of the Monkey* [Pri-

kliucheniia obez'iany], published in *Zvezda* in June 1946, and the older autobiographical novel *Before Sunrise* [Pered voskhodom solntsa]. Its publication was suspended in the fall of 1943, and the novel was branded as 'alien to the spirit of Soviet literature' at an expanded meeting of the Presidium of the Union of Soviet Writers in December of that year. To understand the context of the 1946 change, it is important to know that Zoshchenko's novel was mentioned in the August 1946 decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in the most negative context. Andrei Zhdanov, who prepared the text of this resolution, stated that during the war, Zoshchenko, 'rather than helping the Soviet people in their struggle against the German invaders, wrote such a disgusting thing as *Before Sunrise*' (Artizov et al. 1999: 565–66).

The question of the possible influence of Zoshchenko's autobiography on Paustovskii's autobiographical project should be the subject of a separate study. I will note here only that the autobiographical narrative of his childhood in *The Distant Years* is also characterized by an emphasis on intense negative experiences and intra-family conflicts, but without the slightest appeal to psychoanalysis. It is also known that Paustovskii appreciated Zoshchenko's work. Regardless of the answer to this question, one thing is certain: after the publication of the 'Resolution' of 1946, the state's literary policy began to evolve rapidly, and with it, the value scale and discourse of Soviet official criticism (Dobrenko 2020, I: 363–83). These changes were rather quickly reflected in the published responses to the novel *The Distant Years* and halted the formation of the memory episteme that Paustovskii began to form in his essays and autobiographical prose of 1944–45, and which apparently was discerned and at first highly appreciated by his fellow writers. Starting in late 1946, his first book was read through the lens of 'Soviet fiction about a pre-revolutionary childhood' which had to reflect special values, give unambiguous evaluations, and present equally unambiguously shaped heroes – purely positive or purely negative, not to mention the mandatory requirement to portray social injustice and the hardships of working people.

For Soviet literary criticism of the 1930s and 1940s, the autobiographical novels of Maxim Gorky served as model texts about childhood, and any deviations from this model, even

those made to reproduce the autobiographical canvas faithfully, were immediately noticed, and condemned. Moreover, autobiographical accuracy had to be sacrificed for ideological and didactic purposes. In other words, what was expected of socialist realist autobiographies of childhood was not documentary authenticity but the artistic and ideological transformation of biographical facts and memories to the point of a complete victory of fiction – predetermined by the dominant value paradigm – over the transmission of historical experience.

The most notable responses to the first novel of the memoir cycle were written in this vein. Writing for *Literaturnaia gazeta*, the critic Berta Brainina points directly to the ambivalent nature of Paustovskii's novel. Everything worthy ('healthy') in it is inherited from Gorky, and everything that Paustovskii does not inherit from Gorky is 'artificial and false' (Brainina 1946).

These ideas were formulated even more clearly by Vladimir Ermilov, the notorious party critic and editor-in-chief of *Literaturnaia gazeta*. His article 'On Partisanship in Literature and the Responsibility of Criticism' [O partiinosti v literature i ob otvetstvennosti kritiki, 1947] is usually remembered in connection with the discrediting of Andrei Platonov's story *The Return* (*Ivanov's Family*) [Vozvrashchenie (Sem'ia Ivanova), 1945]. However, the article begins with a harsh criticism of Paustovskii's memoir. Here, Ermilov explicitly denies Paustovskii the right to present his own biographical experience, arguing that it is far more critical that his prose perform an educational function. According to Ermilov, Paustovskii's story did not fulfil this function, but, on the contrary, gave readers utterly different reference points: 'It is quite possible, of course, that an episode told by the writer reproduces with complete photographic precision an actual incident from his childhood. But in fact, this "objectivism" means an attempt to establish in the souls of the readers of Detgiz an alien, aesthetic, bourgeois limited prejudice' (Ermilov 1947).

Reformatting the horizon of readers' expectations in 1946–47 was so unexpected and painful for Paustovskii that he and his literary associates long remembered it. Many years later, in 1982, Lev Levitskii, Paustovskii's former literary secretary, found it necessary to preface his commentary on this novel with a particular explanation that disavows the charges made by proponents of strengthening the

'didactic line' (Paustovskii 1982, IV: 713). 'These reproaches are difficult to accept as fair because the author did not "compose" the hero but described him as he was. It is hardly appropriate to expect from an autobiographical narrative the things that can be demanded of a novel' (Paustovskii 1982, IV: 713).

3. Ideas of *Enriching Biographical Experience* in the mid-1950s

Paustovskii suspended work on his next novel till the months after Stalin's death, and that pause was not coincidental. He probably understood that the following parts of the memoir would require even greater ideological certainty from the protagonist, and that the author would need an even more straightforward portrayal of the protagonist's cultural and historical conditions. Literary scholar Aleksandr Khrabrovitskii, reading Paustovskii's memoirs in the late 1950s, recalled how in 1948 the writer had told him (apparently in connection with his work on the memoirs): 'The themes are falling away one by one' (Khrabrovitskii 2012).

All that changed soon after Stalin's death. On the eve of the Second Writers' Congress (1954), Paustovskii wrote an article for *Novyi mir* magazine in which he talked at length about purifying and enriching the Russian language, encouraging innovation in literature, but also about the need for Soviet writers to radically change their lives to carry out their professional mission fully.

> We writers should have real creative biographies. Many of us have them. Many writers' biographies are inextricable from the life of the people, from the times and our current reality. Many, but not all.
>
> This vocation comes with obligations. Literature is not an occupation, craft, mechanical work [*masterovshchina*], or an easy life. Above all, it is a service to the people. Blok said: 'I am a busy man. I serve literature'. Meanwhile, we have some writers whose life journey is so meagre that it makes us fear their future. The first book is about success, universal recognition, prosperity, and, for some reason, the excessive conceit that often arises from this success. (Paustovskii 1954: 201)

Paustovskii saw opportunities for the development of the stagnating Soviet literature
in the renewal and expansion of the writer's life space. He understood the active transformation of his own life not just as a quest for ways to gain new experiences and new impressions, but as active life-building – a conscious search for his place in society and in history. However, and Paustovskii placed particular emphasis on this, he said that just a few canonized biographical models could not predetermine this life. Writers, as well as Soviet citizens who wanted to embark on the same path of life-building, should be given greater creative freedom, not only in their writing but also in their lives and the forms of representation in their own biographies.
Within this context, the conception of the following parts of the memoir cycle took shape. In a short introductory note that precedes the publication, Paustovskii describes *The Turbulent Youth* as part of a 'large autobiographical novel', where the central theme is 'the formation of a human and a writer' (Paustovskii 1955: 3).[2]

This short description accurately represents how the Thaw-era readers perceived the second and subsequent parts of the memoir cycle. It was no longer about abstract periods of a person's life or valuable memories of the lost world of pre-revolutionary Kyiv but about the single biographical path of the hero, which was supposed to be a direct projection of the historical and creative personality of the author.
Some of Paustovskii's readers evaluated his autobiographical strategies as utterly unsuccessful, and some as worthy not just of attention and emulation.
In the case of *The Distant Years,* we see a break between the original idea and the subsequent recoding of the text according to another genre model and another memory episteme. Following the publication of the second novel of the cycle, one may observe how Paustovskii gradually loses credibility and authority among readers from older generations and becomes an idol and biographical model for the youngest generation, those born between the late 1920s and the beginning of World War II.

[2] '"Беспокойная юность" является второй книгой большой автобиографической повести. Тема этой повести – становление человека и писателя'.

4. A Part of *Big History*: A New Memory Episteme and the Programme of the Journal *Novyi mir*

The literary and journalistic mainstream of the Thaw created a new memory episteme, requiring the portrayal of a human as part of and alongside *Big History*, not just as a backdrop, but with active participation in memorable historical events, most commonly the Revolution and the Civil War, and sometimes even World War II. Marina Balina argues that 'it was Thaw literature that began the work of unlocking memory: not simply individual memory, but the memory of the whole generation born during the ascent of revolutionary zeal and suffering through the traumatic losses of Stalinism and war…' (Balina 2011: 156).

People who were not well known, illegally repressed, or undeservedly marginalized would appear in print as either authors of memoirs, or sometimes their characters, and occasionally, already posthumously, as authors of diary entries and correspondence. In these works, they were always returning readers to the heroic *beginning* of the Soviet regime. The publication of this kind of material became the programmatic task of the journal *Novyi mir*.

For this purpose, the section 'Diaries. Memories. Documents' was created and frequently appeared in the magazine. Sometimes it included materials on the history of pre-revolutionary Russian literature or European literature, but, with time, it turned more and more often to personal accounts related to early Soviet history.

More and more often, these documents were retrieved directly from the archives of the magazine. For example, the second issue of 1955 (in fact, the one preceding the publication of Paustovskii's *Turbulent Youth*) presented Aleksei Nikolaevich Tolstoi's response to comments by the critic (and employee of *Novyi mir*) Viacheslav Polonskii on the changes that the editorial board suggested the writer make to the second part of the trilogy *The Road to Calvary* [Khozhdenie po mukam, 1920], which was devoted to the events of 1918 (Krestinskii 1955). In the second issue of the magazine for 1956, which came out precisely when the Twentieth Party Congress Party started, fragments from the war diaries of the writer Effendi Kapiev (1909–44) were published (Kapiev 1956).

After the Twentieth Congress, these publications openly served

the task of *returning to Leninist norms*. One of the first publications of this kind were the memoirs of Boris Korotkov, who in 1917–18 worked in Lenin's reception room; they were published in the final issue of the magazine from 1956 (Korotkov 1956). The sixth issue from 1956 featured one of the first materials by an author killed during the Great Terror: the 1928–36 correspondence between Gorky and Mikhail Kol'tsov, famous journalist, and chief editor of the journal *Za rubezhom* (Perepiska 1956).

Two ideas were at the basis of the new memory episteme that was being shaped in Soviet culture of the second half of the 1950s: the restoration of historical continuity with the first third of the twentieth century *across* the period of Stalinism, and the restoration of the individual's right to an autonomous inner world. Both processes were connected to de-Stalinization and a return to the cultural achievements of the 1920s (and with them, implicitly, to some fragments of Silver Age culture: for example, as early as 1956, *Novyi mir* published documents devoted to the adolescent years of Aleksandr Blok).

However, this activity took on fundamentally different meanings. For older generations – those born between the 1880s and the early 1920s – the new memory episteme meant, above all, a return to the individual significance of their own biographies. As Denis Kozlov proves in his book about *Novyi mir* readers, the publication of articles related to the history of the 1920s and 1930s typically elicited numerous letters from readers from older generations. Sometimes, these letters were dozens of pages long, and their authors described their entire lives in detail, believing their narratives had finally gained legitimacy after this or that book was published (for example, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* [Odin' den' Ivana Denisovicha, 1962]) (Kozlov 2013).

In general, this means that in the 1950s, and, as it later turned out, throughout the late Soviet era, memoirs about events of the twentieth century presented within this new memory episteme became very significant: generations of readers formed in the 1950s–70s perceived them to be a way to access *authentic* history rather than the version of history presented in textbooks.

Perhaps the most significant contribution to the formation of this new memory episteme was made by Il'ia Ehrenburg (1891–1967) in his memoir *People.*

Years. Life [Liudi, gody, zhizn', 1960]. Ehrenburg began writing his book in 1959, and in 1960 the first part was already published in *Novyi mir* (issues 8–10; before that, short excerpts were published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* and *Ogonek* magazine). Ehrenburg's memoir cycle received very positive reactions from readers of different generations – and a much harsher response from censors and party functionaries.[3] Ehrenburg and Paustovskii were almost the same age (Ehrenburg was born in 1891, Paustovskii in 1892), and in the 1950s they both sought to resurrect *displaced*, forcibly forgotten historical periods in their memoirs. However, the methods they used were profoundly different.

Ehrenburg's memoirs create a large-scale narrative that addresses several issues at once. First, it provides detailed and sympathetic descriptions of people who were repressed during Stalin's rule, or of poets and novelists who survived the repressions but were stigmatized in other ways (for example, Boris Pasternak in 1959–60). Ehrenburg also sought to recreate the atmosphere of a bygone time – and even of the Great Terror, which brought on particularly harsh criticism from official critics. Finally, Ehrenburg, who travelled a lot in other countries in the 1920s and 1930s and at the end of World War II and immediately after, wrote extensively about everyday life in Europe and foreign cultural figures known in the USSR at most through veiled references.

Overall, the section 'Diaries. Memoirs. Documents' and Ehrenburg's memoirs expressed the notion of direct access to the flow of history not hindered by ideologized interpreters – a kind of *historical Protestantism*. This was markedly different from Paustovskii's method, which highlighted not direct contact with history, but his hero's ability to see the life's beauty and notice the unusual rather than the typical. The private lives of Ehrenburg's characters were part of the ongoing historical transformation; the private lives of Paustovskii's characters were opposed to the steady, teleologi-

[3] We know from Kornei Chukovskii's diaries that Paustovskii might have followed the reviews of Ehrenburg's book. After another volume of Ehrenburg's memoirs was criticized in the newspaper *Izvestiia* in 1963 by the same Vladimir Ermilov, and then the same newspaper published a collection of letters from 'ordinary readers' who allegedly supported Ermilov, Paustovskii, when he visited Chukovskii, had already started talking about this discussion when he was on the stairs (Chukovskii 2013, XIII: 359–60).

cally directed flow of history. The private person was of interest to Paustovskii whenever his/her memory retained events and encounters that only tangentially coincided with the movement of history. These events co-occurred with fundamental historical changes but were always associated with private biography and the individualized processing of life experience.

Like Paustovskii's memoirs, *People. Years. Life* marked a return to a previously abandoned plan, but in Ehrenburg's case, the first draft referred to the period before World War II, and, just as importantly, before the Great Terror. In a preface to the first edition of his memoirs, Ehrenburg admitted that he used chapters from the novel *A Book for Adults* [Kniga dlia vzroslykh], published in 1936. The title of the novel, which seems strange from today's point of view, does not suggest the inclusion of explicit erotic passages (there are none), but that the book was addressed to the author's (and Paustovskii's) peers, that is, people who lived through the events of 1917 already at a conscious age. The novel describes the left-democratic intelligentsia involved in the construction of the socialist economy, but a large part of it is occupied by autobiographical short stories about early twentieth-century Moscow; the rest is a fictional story about people who create and implement a new industrial method of producing ammonia.

Both in the memoir chapters of *The Book for Adults* and in the beginning of the first volume of *People. Years. Life*, one can discern the influence of Osip Mandel'shtam's autobiographical essay *The Noise of Time* [Shum vremeni, 1925] – one of the most important memoirs written in Russian in the first half of the twentieth century.[4] Mandel'shtam describes the Russian intelligentsia and the social space it inhabited at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – the sensory memories, the topics of everyday conversations, individual vivid impressions. Mandel'shtam's method differed from modernist prose in the style of Marcel Proust in one critical detail: he depicted the atmosphere of a particular social circle or geographic location as a point in the

[4] Mandel'shtam and Ehrenburg's wives were related. The two poets knew each other well and met periodically. In 1965 Ehrenburg was the host of the first legally sanctioned evening of reminiscences about Mandel'shtam, organized by students of the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics at Moscow State University.

progress of significant European history, as a kind of overture to the wars and revolutions of the twentieth century and implied the existence of a disastrous gap between self-recollection and self-reproduction.

5. Revitalizing Modernist Strategies for Life-creation

Both Ehrenburg and Paustovskii were junior participants in the Russian modernist movement. In the 1950s, they sought to rehabilitate – at least partially – the modernist aesthetic in the Soviet cultural space. However, their previous work and memoirs emphasized very different aspects of the modernist legacy. Unlike Ehrenburg, Paustovskii had been very interested in *life creation* – or, to borrow the expression from Schamma Schahadat, in the *art of life* – since the very beginning of his career. Shahadat defines the art of life as a concept and practice that 'is born in that in-between space where life becomes a text, and the text is meant to be lived' (Schahadat 2017).

Vladislav Khodasevich was one of the first to analyse the life-creative strategies of Russian modernism in his book of memoir essays *Necropolis* [Nekropol', 1939]. He drew attention to the fact that for many participants in the modernist movement, from the symbolists to Gorky, personal biography and even everyday life became the most important object and outcome of artistic creativity. Based on contemporary research (including Lidiia Ginzburg's book *On Psychological Prose* [O psikhologicheskoi proze, 1971] and Shahadat's work), another element can be added to Khodasevich's observations: life-writing created synchronously (diaries and letters) or retrospectively (memoirs) become an important *key* to their author's biography, they are seen as part of the sphere of the author's creative work and are designed to arrange their semantic accents in accordance with the author's intention.

In his memoirs, Paustovskii does not depict his life as the result of his own creative efforts – on the contrary, he emphasizes the importance of accidental events. He significantly changes (or, more accurately, eliminates) the real facts of his life. He writes nothing about the religiosity of his youth, almost never mentions his romantic affairs, which continued even when he was officially married, or about people he disliked and portrayed in his diary (for example, Nikolai Khardzhiev). In his autobiog-

raphy, Paustovskii does not say a word about his first, but tells the story of his platonic love for a front-line nurse who died of smallpox during World War I.
Some of these transformations happened for pragmatic reasons; however, to understand the general meaning of this remaking of his own biography, we should consider that in his letters and diaries of the 1910 and 1920s, Paustovskii regularly returns to the idea that his own life was a subject to be approached through an aesthetic lens. Thus, in a letter to his beloved and future wife Ekaterina Zagorskaia from 16 November 1915, the writer lays out a life-creating program, clearly devised under the influence not just of Rabindranath Tagore, mentioned earlier in the same letter, but also of the then-fashionable 'philosophy of life' of Henri Bergson:

> I create myself. The irrepressible creative urge toward the highest refinement, spirituality, the desire to see my soul as changeable and beautiful, the urge that you have awakened in me is so strong that sometimes it torments me. And slowly, quietly the will to live lights up; it is born in me; I may have lost it for a time, and thought that I did not have it. How stupid I am.
>
> I know now. Out of the roots and seed-buds of the bitter and wild earth rose a flower – exquisite, exciting, dazzling. It was a man.
>
> And if he is evil, muddy, and dull – anger rises in me, but it does not kill my strength.
> I have all these thoughts now. It seems to me that in the peacefulness of the snow, in the lakes of the sunset, in the playfulness of the sun, in the murmur of the majestic murky seas, in the evenings and the purple disk of the moon, in the sound of the wind, in the eyes of girls, in love and passion, in the beauty of lines, in the soul of a pure man, in his melancholy and creativity, in dreams and madness lives the truth, our God, the Single Will, the World Sun from Afanasii Fet's poetry. It suddenly revealed itself to me. There must be harmony between the soul of man and the soul of the world, because the human

> soul is the highest, most refined element of the world's soul, and contains, like a drop from a fountain, the essence of all water, the whole world of beauty and light. (Paustovskii 1986, IX: 14–15)

In his diaries from the 1920s, Paustovskii sometimes mentions reading Vasilii Rozanov,[5] which is also quite telling. Rozanov's work – especially books such as *Solitude* [Uedinennoe, 1912] and *Fallen Leaves* [Opavshie list'ia, 1913] – can be seen as an example of countering the project of life-creation: it does not involve a conscious construction of biography, but rather the aestheticization of the everyday, which opposes progress in its positivistic sense. This conception of everyday life seems to have had a very significant influence on Paustovskii.

We can assume that for Paustovskii, the cycle of novels about his formation as a writer was the final part of a literary-existential project aimed at aestheticizing his own biography.

This emphasis on life-creation is especially strong in the essay 'Aleksandr Blok', which Paustovskii wrote in 1961, at the same time as his memoir cycle:

> In my autobiographical narrative, I write about my life as it was. But everyone, including me, must have a second life, a second biography. It, as they say, 'didn't come out' in real life, it didn't happen. It exists only in my desires and in my imagination. And this second life is what I want to write about. To write my life as it would certainly be if I had created it of my own free will, regardless of all accidents…
>
> You may ask why this is necessary. It is necessary so that my life can have a harmonious ending… (Paustovskii 1961: 38)

Paustovskii repeated that same desire to write 'memoirs of the unfulfilled' in the preface to the separate edition of his autobiographical cycle, but he added an important thought in the second paragraph, which can be understood as the key to the whole cycle:

[5] See, for example: Paustovskii 1996 (entry from 25 November 1920); Paustovskii 2012 (entries from 9 November 1928 and 16 November 1928).

> In addition to my true biography, where everything is subordinate to reality, I want to write my second autobiography, which can be called fictional. This fictional autobiography will depict my life among the amazing events and people I have constantly and unsuccessfully dreamed about.
>
> But whatever I manage to write in the future, I wish for the readers of these six stories to experience the same feeling that has possessed me throughout the years I have lived – the feeling of the significance of our human existence and a profound fascination with life. (Paustovskii 1982, IV: 6)

The expression of this feeling allowed Paustovskii to make his life more harmoniously complete in his memoirs than he had experienced it, and thus, in part, to solve the problem that he formulated as 'a plan for the future'.

The last book of Paustovskii's memoirs, *The Book of Wanderings* (1963), is markedly different from the previous ones in plot structure. There is no linear, chronologically organized narration; the author freely moves between periods. Many more of Paustovskii's famous acquaintances appear. This series of personal recollections is astonishing compared with all previous parts of the project: we read about Mikhail Bulgakov (Paustovskii 1982, V: 437–41), Eduard Bagritskii (Paustovskii 1982, V: 448–62), Mikhail Prishvin (Paustovskii 1982, V: 465–67), Vladimir Maiakovskii (Paustovskii 1982, V: 467–70), Andrei Platonov (Paustovskii 1982, V: 470), Sergei Esenin (Paustovskii 1982, V: 471), etc. It is likely that, impressed by the success of Ehrenburg's memoirs, Paustovskii decided to change his own narrative strategy, bringing it closer to Ehrenburg's, especially considering the background of his featured characters: Bulgakov and Platonov were semi-forbidden authors, and the biography of Maiakovskii was being hotly debated shortly before *The Book of Wanderings* came out, after the 1958 publication of a volume titled *New About Maiakovskii* [Novoe o Maiakovskom] as part of the series 'Literary Heritage' [Literaturnoe nasledstvo] (volume 65). But, in choosing this approach, Paustovskii also took part in establishing the mainstream memory episteme (*historical Protestantism*), which

would also influence future Russian memoir writing.

6. *Idle Chatter*: Rejection by Older Generations

The fact that the first of the Thaw-era novels, *The Turbulent Youth*, as well as the novels that followed it, elicited scornful reviews from official critics is not surprising: the substance and tone of the reviews seem to adhere to those from the 1948–49 campaigns, accusing Paustovskii of not managing to bring his character anywhere near the formula for a real Soviet man, especially when it comes to his understanding of the historical process and the progress of history.
Lidiia Fomenko (1909–74), a critic and one of the editors of the newspaper *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, reproached Paustovskii for making his hero a passive, contemplative person:

> …What is surprising is not that Paustovskii's hero is always contemplative and passive, that he is stretched like a string, waiting for outstanding achievements, but not contributing to these achievements – that is not only possible, but was often the case. What is surprising is the author's attitude in the present day to this kind of contemplative position, to such a purely aesthetic perception of the revolution.
>
> That is why Paustovskii's hero, for all his enthusiasm for the new reality, is far removed from it; it is difficult to accept his position of life 'on an island', in a deserted Arcadia, in a kind of intelligentsia Hermitage, while the struggle blazed all around, when time itself was calling, shouting about taking action, about the battle, that great expectations should be brought closer with one's own hands, even with one's own blood. (Fomenko 1960)

Tat'iana Trifonova (1904–62), critic and literary scholar, a regular contributor to the journal *Voprosy literatury* [Issues of Literature], was not satisfied with the low level of historical consciousness found not only in Paustovskii's hero, but also in the author himself:

> …This hero did not see or understand the main thing

> in the era he lived through, and the author, telling us about it, in no way assesses the position of his character back then, does not look at it from the perspective of his mature experience, but returns to the past as if to relive it and not understand its harsh and truthful laws again. (Trifonova 1960)

Arkadii El'iashevich (1921–2004), reviewing the fourth novel for the journal *Moskva*, noted that Paustovskii rejected 'a revolutionary view of reality'. This rejection 'put the artist in a difficult position: individual bright and colourful pictures of life do not allow the story to grow into a historically truthful and profound understanding of reality' (El'iashevich 1960).

In other words, critics have described quite accurately, though not without bias, the model of the relationship between human and history embodied by Paustovskii in his memoirs – and have recognized this model as inadequate to the officially sanctioned tasks of Soviet literature.

Passivity, the avoidance of a revolutionary position, the emphasis on the life of a private person to the detriment of public life – this criticism of Paustovskii's memoirs was not limited to the critics from *Literaturnaia gazeta*, *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, *Moskva* and *Voprosy literatury*. Aleksandr Tvardovskii (1910–71), editor-in-chief of *Novyi mir*, responded with similar claims when Paustovskii sent his revised manuscript to the magazine's editors. The letter was so harsh and intolerant of both the text of the memoirs and of Paustovskii himself, that the latter, responding with great dignity to Tvardovskii's claims, withdrew the manuscript from the journal.

> It does not feature any motifs of labour, struggle, and politics, yet it has poetic solitude, the sea and all the beauty of nature, the value of art, in our opinion, understood very narrowly, the last Mohicans of the old and various slickers of the new press, Odesa, depicted exotically, from anecdotes. […]
>
> And, most importantly, we find in everything, so to speak, the pathos of an irresponsible, essentially intensely egotistical existence, pardon me, of narrow-mindedness and pride, which does not give

> a damn about world history from the height of its contemplative 'suprastellar' unity with eternity. Perhaps unwittingly, you seek to secure in the form of literature such a poor biography that bears no imprint of its great time, of the tremendous national destinies, in short of all that has lasting value. (Tvardovskii 2012)

In a conversation with Kornei Chukovskii, Tvardovskii was even more frank and called Paustovskii 'a petty bourgeois in love with beauty,' adding: 'His autobiography is a lie' (Chukovskii 1994: 303).

As a result, in the five years after his text was rejected, Paustovskii submitted the fourth and fifth parts of the cycle to the journal *Oktiabr'* and returned to *Novyi mir* only with the sixth and final instalment: *The Book of Wanderings*. This last book, at least superficially, was more in keeping with Tvardovskii's demands; it devotes a great deal of attention to important historical events (Lenin's death, for example), journalistic work and business trips, and it ends with the well-known episode of the author's fateful conversation with Gorky. Nevertheless, Tvardovskii continued to be very dismissive of Paustovskii's prose: before the publication of the last story, according to Lakshin, Tvardovskii 'scolded' Paustovskii 'for [his] "literariness," [his] approximation even in language…' (Lakshin 1991: 176). A few years later, he told Iurii Trifonov that Paustovskii was not worthy of imitation, because 'he radiates reflected light' (Kondratovich 2011: 118).

This opinion was held not just by Tvardovskii, but also, if we believe Tvardovskii and his deputy Vladimir Lakshin, by Solzhenitsyn, who often stopped by the editorial office of *Novyi mir* at the time. Lakshin recalls that Tvardovskii and Solzhenitsyn were in agreement on Paustovskii's story *March to the South*:

> [Tvardovskii] was delighted that Solzhenitsyn said about the *March to the South* almost the same words as he himself expressed: 'I thought it would be about the Civil War, fighting with Vrangel', the capture of Crimea, and it turns out that the author rushed from Moscow to Odesa's taverns and beaches'. (Lakshin 1991: 87)

Apparently, Tvardovskii and Solzhenitsyn expected from Paustovskii's memoirs an approach to *Big History* similar to *Novyi mir*'s series of publications

on early Soviet history, while Paustovskii was pursuing something very different.

In his rejection of Paustovskii's autobiographical prose, Solzhenitsyn also agreed with Varlam Shalamov (1907–82), his aesthetic antagonist, regarding portrayals of the Gulag system. In a journal draft from 1964 exploring the topic of readers' tastes, Shalamov first complains about the lack of appreciation for Pavel Vasil'ev's poetry, while books by Vladimir Tsybin, whom Shalamov considers an epigone of Vasil'ev, sell out overnight. He then turns to Paustovskii's work, implying that he enjoys great popularity with readers: 'Paustovskii is a small writer, no matter how much he puffs himself up'. In the next sentence, Shalamov turns his attention to his own work: 'I began to consider myself a poet when I saw that I could not play out of tune in my poems' (Shalamov 2004: 299).

The fact that the fragments about Vasil'ev, Tsybin and Paustovskii appear together in this notebook indicates that Shalamov considered Paustovskii's prose imitative; the third fragment, devoted to the 'falsity' of his own poetry, seems to suggest that Shalamov found such falsity in Paustovskii's writing. In the 1950s and 1960s, Shalamov was a very perspicacious reader. Perhaps in Paustovskii's autobiographical prose about the revolution and the early years of Soviet power, he saw a meaningful paralipsis concerning the hero's biography and his attitude to historical events. In other words, for Shalamov, Paustovskii's position was not insufficiently Soviet, as the official critics saw it, but a silenced and unexpressed non-Soviet or anti-Soviet stance.

During the same period in 1964, David Samoilov (1920–90) also reflected on Paustovskii in his diaries, apparently in connection with the publication of the last part of the memoirs. His review is even less flattering than Shalamov's. 'In our literature, a writer's conduct trumps his writing. That is true of Paustovskii – his memoirs are idle chatter' (Samoilov 2002: 352).

I think that this statement requires an additional comment. By 1964, Paustovskii was known as the editor and compiler of two anthologies of contemporary literature, *Literary Moscow* [Literaturnaia Moskva, 1957] and *Pages from Tarusa* [Tarusskie stranitsy, 1961], which were considered oppositional and were reprimanded at the level of the Central Committee and by Khrushchev himself. At the end of 1956, Paustovskii spoke at a

public discussion of the novel *Ne khlebom edinym* [Not by Bread Alone, 1956] by Vladimir Dudintsev and openly denounced the Soviet conservative nomenklatura, saying it was responsible for the Great Terror. By saying, 'behaviour determines the worth of the work', Samoilov points to Paustovskii's high public reputation, suggesting that his civic courage and hard-earned ethical position increase the artistic value of his work, which would be low on its own merits.

7. 'Give Me Your Hand, Paustovskii!': A Biographical Model for a Younger Generation

When listing negative reviews of Paustovskii's memoirs, it was no accident that I indicated the birth year of their authors. These dates clarify that the rejection of Paustovskii's model of the relationship between human and history, the perception of his texts as second-rate literature, the pointing out of their 'falsity' or 'historical inconsistency' were typical of people born before the late 1920s. In other words, of those who were conscious of the events of the second half of the 1930s and who were old enough to have taken part in World War II. The generation born between the late 1920s and the early 1940s offers a very different model of historical perception: authors who remembered the atmosphere of the war years had a poor recollection of the sociopolitical experience of the late 1930s.

This younger generation accepted Paustovskii's memoirs with great enthusiasm – first, as a model of historical biography that they saw as relevant, and second, as an example of an aesthetically perfect (or at least successful) model for a literary autobiographical narrative.

Nina Kravchenko, a twenty-year-old student from the Moscow Teacher Training Institute, quotes fragments of *The Distant Years* in her diary from 1953 and uses Paustovskii to formulate the specifics of children's perception (Kravchenko n.d.). With similar piety, another twenty-year-old student, Larissa Pogudina, writes down quotations from the novel *The Beginning of an Unknown Century* in her diary from 1959: 'Everyone retains on his soul, like the delicate scent of linden trees from Noah's garden, the memory of the problem of happiness, littered with worldly garbage afterwards' (Pogudina n.d.).

In 1959, Liudmila Poliakova, then a nineteen-year-old stu-

dent at the Moscow Pedagogical Institute, later a famous stage and film actress, tried to escape from her native city (Moscow) and her chosen profession (teaching) and went to Odesa (just like Paustovskii left Moscow for Kyiv in 1918 and later Odesa). The escape proved unsuccessful but, sitting at the train station before leaving Moscow, she recalls her recent reading of Paustovskii's autobiography and gives herself a pep talk:

> I'm holding a ticket. I'm sitting at the train station, waiting for the train. It's another three hours. That's how early I am. Very anxious. It's interesting to run away from home. But why so anxious? I've tried to read several times, and nothing works. My head is all mixed up. I wish I could cry, but there are no tears. Something is painfully squeezing my heart. I fear for my dream. What if it doesn't work out again? Give me your hand, Paustovskii! (Poliakova n.d.)

In 1963, a twenty-year-old student from the Geology Department of Moscow State University, Oleg Amitrov, goes to Kyiv on a business trip and enjoys sightseeing with his friends; among the places they visit is 'the castle where Paustovskii served as a soldier' (Amitrov n.d.). This brief reference indicates that Paustovskii's autobiographical stories had become part of the city's cultural topography by this point.

Even the famous literary scholar Mikhail Gasparov, writing about the mid-1950s, when he was an undergraduate and then graduate student at the Philological Faculty of Moscow State University, expressed appreciation for Paustovskii's prose:

> I wanted to write criticism as the formalists once did: from the heights of the history and theory of literature. Paustovskii released a new book, I praised it for the faculty wall newspaper, but my words were too unusual: everyone decided that I was not praising but scolding him, and female admirers of Paustovskii gathered to beat me up. This is when I realized I was not a good critic. (Gasparov 2001: 327)

Iulii Daniel' (1925-1988) provides an interesting example of the reception of Paustovskii. He took

part in World War II as a very young man. Still, he was barely in middle school during the period of the Great Terror. Reading Paustovskii's autobiography in 1967, he was left with ambivalent impressions: 'I read Paustovskii's *A Story of a Life*. Oh, what an interesting and confusing book, how kind and – again! – helpless. I wish I had one of those' (Daniel' 2000: 203). Daniel' seems to intuitively detect what Shalamov articulated quite clearly: a kind of falsity, a silencing. The value of his restoration of lost historical context is resorted to the epithets 'confused' and 'helpless'.

Speaking in 1960 at a meeting of the fifth session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971), who belonged to the same historical generation as Paustovskii, characterized him as an author who 'sees only simple, kind people around him, helping each other in a time of need', and was doubtful that this type of social relations met the modern objectives for how the revolutionary period should be depicted. In Khruschev's view, this mode of representation diverged from the memory episteme which had already developed by the late 1950s: '…was this the meaning of the epoch, the very moment when the capitalist system collapsed, and an unprecedented new world began to emerge?' (Khrushchev 1960)

The model Khrushchev had accurately grasped from Paustovskii's prose –'simple, kind people helping each other in a difficult moment', along with the position of the private person 'on the margins' of history who still carefully monitors and reflects on what is happening – turned out to be in high demand among the younger generation.

Another feature of Paustovskii's prose, which Aleksandr Gladkov very accurately defined as working in the tradition of Charles Dickens, might have appealed to readers from this younger generation: Paustovskii often used hypertrophied character descriptions. Gladkov stated that Paustovskii took it 'to the point of being [sounding] anecdotal', which also proved to be in demand at the time (Gladkov 1975: 285).

The early 1960s were marked by the rise of student culture. The number of students entering higher education institutions doubled compared to the Stalin era. A central feature of student culture was oral communication and oral speech genres, such as anecdotes, satiric performances, singalongs, and ordinary conversations – in the kitchen during a party or around the fire after a

long hike. Paustovskii's style and mode of representing people in their everyday life matched this cultural trend and was thus in demand among this younger generation.

Specific short stories included in Paustovskii's memoirs resemble anecdotes not only because they emphasize one trait in the protagonist's character but also because their plot includes paradoxical peripety, through which the character succeeds or fails. For example, the protagonist of the short story 'That's Not My Mother' [Eto ne mama], Misha Siniavskii, an artist from Batumi in the early 1920s, paints portraits of townspeople, but his earnings are unpredictable: the customers can say that they do not recognize themselves or their relatives in the portrait and refuse to pay. Then, on his wife's advice, Siniavskii begins to paint portraits of the founder of modern Turkey, Kemal Ataturk, and sells them to ethnic Turks living in Batumi. These earnings prove to be both stable and plentiful. In the finale, it turns out that Misha can draw Ataturk even when blindfolded (Paustovskii 1982, V: 285–86).

A representative of the same younger generation, Sergei Dovlatov (1941–90), was clearly inspired by this novel – its plot, rhythm, and various anecdotal details – when he depicted Lev Baranov, one of the characters in his story *A Foreign Woman* [Inostranka, 1986]. Baranov's story is as paradoxical as that of Siniavskii, but it has the opposite dynamic: it represents not a success but a failure. Baranov draws numerous portraits of Viacheslav Molotov in the early 1950s. To win a bet, he draws a portrait of Molotov in ten seconds while blindfolded. After the change of leadership in the USSR, Baranov cannot paint the new leaders, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev, well enough and starts losing requests for painting jobs. After a long period of unemployment and drunkenness, Baranov decides to emigrate to New York, where he successfully (at the time of the story) works as a cab driver and in his spare time draws Ronald Reagan on horseback. Thus, the story becomes an ironic reference to Paustovskii, whose character paints Kemal Atatürk on horseback for extra pay (Dovlatov 2017: 8–9). More generally, the question of Paustovskii's influence on Dovlatov – primarily in terms of plot composition and the rhythm of the phrasing and paragraphs – has seemingly not yet been explored and deserves further study.

8. Conclusions

Paustovskii found himself in a paradoxical position in the 1950s. He was one of the forerunners constructing a new memory episteme through his prose, but in the end, his approach did not quite coincide with the mainstream model of liberal Thaw-era memoir writing. At the time, a new autobiographical canon was being developed, largely on the pages of *Novyi mir*, though it was not limited to this journal. At that time the Hegelian notion of the correlation between personal biography and historical time, which had developed among the Russian intelligentsia in the nineteenth century under the influence of Aleksandr Herzen's *My Past and Thoughts* [Byloe i dumy, 1861] (Paperno 2009), was being restored for the older generations of the 1950s. For Paustovskii, however, as a *younger* participant in the literature of Russian modernism with its focus on individualism, personal biographical memory was opposed to the *communal* historical narrative and was considered more important.

For members of older generations, Paustovskii's individualism and pointedly modernist style largely devalued his memoirs. Paustovskii's modernist stylistics were perceived by these *elders* as an inappropriate reenactment of the Silver Age, an aesthetic era they considered irrevocably lost. Paustovskii avoided direct descriptions of large-scale historical events and depicted them through anecdotal situations (one may recall, for example, how he describes the establishment of Soviet regime in Odesa in the very first chapter of *The Times of Great Expectations*). Official critics ascribed this strategy to his reluctance to reproduce Soviet narratives about the Revolution and the Civil War (and they were, it seems, right in their diagnosis.) At the same time, anti-Stalinists in the opposition saw it as a cowardly refusal to utter a dangerous truth.

For younger generations, the new idea of history that was being developed in the late 1950s involved the notion that history was different from what was taught in Soviet schools, but above all the representatives of this generation valued the right to choose a unique life path and an acknowledgment of the significance of the individually chosen biography. Therefore, to these younger readers, Paustovskii felt even closer than, for example, Ehrenburg and other memoirists who talked about the traumatic events of the Sta-

lin era, precisely because of the author's individualism and impressionism of his style. For them, Paustovskii rehabilitated the aesthetics of private life, which had been repressed under Stalin.[6] His descriptions of his endless and, as depicted in his memoirs, aimless travels embodied the idea of freedom. The same generation's members later became involved in tourism and travelled through Russian villages in search of authentic icons and handicrafts. Thus, Paustovskii, in seeking to solve his own existential and artistic problems, became one of the favourite writers of the Soviet *Sixties* generation and, as we see in the quotation from Dovlatov, had a lasting impact on the development of Soviet and even post-Soviet literature.

[6] On the need for such rehabilitation and its means in the late 1950s, see, for example, Frumkina 2005.

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