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Introduction

On 10 and 11 May 2014, soon after the International Conference *The Space of Memory. Russian Auto-Biographical Genres and European Context* held at the University of Padua, the University of Verona hosted a two-day conference for junior scholars in Slavic Studies. A similar event had been organized by the same University in 2009. Following the successful format of the Russian *molodezhnye konferentsii* (a common practice both in Russia and Eastern Europe), PhD students and postdocs from all over Italy had the opportunity to meet and to present the results of their research in front of many Italian and foreign senior scholars in Slavic Studies, including a number of participants from the Padua conference. The theme of the conference, in affinity with the areas of interest of the conference held in Padua, was that of biographical, autobiographical writing and memoirs within the 'Slavic literary space'. The topic proved to be highly stimulating and was able to attract many junior scholars in Russian, Ukrainian, Czech and Serbo-Croatian Studies, who read their papers on diaries and letters, autobiographies and autofiction. Here we publish the revised and extended versions of some of the papers presented at the conference, which the authors have developed and extended on the basis of the review received from both internal and external peer reviewers. The fourth issue will host more of these essays.

We would like to thank Cinzia De Lotto and Claudia Criveller for their immense energy shown in promoting and supporting the event; Pietro Tosco, for the fundamental organizational support; the moderators of the different panels of the conference and all the senior scholars available for the input that they were able to give during the discussions. Our final thanks goes to Alexey Kholikov for the support and punctual proofreading of the articles in Russian.

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Since the beginning of modern Russian literature, Russian authors have assiduously dealt with at least one of the various forms of auto-biographical writ-

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ing. More or less spoilt by fictional elements, autobiographies, biographies, memoirs, diaries, letters were, alongside the *khudozhestvennaia literatura* and the *publitsistika*, an indispensable tool for understanding the *vexata quaestio* of the hybrid Russian identity, a question that has always been the gift and the curse of the sixth part of the world's intellectuals. The author looks in the mirror and tries to make sense and give shape to his own image, therefore trying to find shelter from the many traumas inflicted upon him/her such as censorship, repression and or exile. At the same time, the narration of one's own individual experience is related to a collective experience – a subversive or conservative circle, a generation of 'sons' opposed to the 'fathers' or, more broadly, a nation with a glorious past by virtue of its great literature.

The common thread that winds through the articles collected in this section is the attempt to forge a collective identity through the inverted prism of individual experience, thus sketching a profile of the Russian social context as a whole (where Russia is perceived more as a cultural, idealized and imagined nation). The article that inaugurates the section deals with an example that does not come from literature, but from music. The focus is on Musorgsky, who with his *Boris Godunov* succeeded in bringing into classical music hints of Russian folk melodies, unlike the 'Westerner' Tchaikovsky. The article by Daniele Artoni shows how the 'Russian soul' is present in the Romance *Detskaia*, full of childhood reminiscences of the time spent by the composer in the rural Pskov. Following is another case related to the nineteenth century, i.e. Nikolai Kostomarov, a personality suspended between Ukraine and Russia. Andrea Franco, through the autobiography of this talented historian persecuted by the tsarist authorities, notes the changes in Kostomarov's position on Ukrainian nationalism.

A few decades later, already in the twentieth century, several upheavals forced the Russian intellectuals to indulge in painful reflections on their condition and their own national and cultural roots, whether they should have remained in the newly formed Soviet Union or emigrated. The large sector devoted to twentieth century Russian culture is opened by an article on a personality that lived on the cusp of the two centuries, i.e. Valerii Briusov, *chef-de-file* and theorist of Russian

symbolism. In her article, Linda Torresin focuses on the autobiography of one of the pioneers of the *zhiznetvorchestvo*, i.e. the 'construction of the life' on aesthetic basis, greeted with great enthusiasm by a poet eager to show his audience, in D'Annunzio's words, his own "inimitable life".

The wish to transfigure one's own private experience into a public and 'legendary' event unites the Symbolists in some of the *preodolevshie simvolizm*, or "those who have overcome Symbolism". This is shown in the articles on the futurist Velimir Khlebnikov (by Ilaria Aletto) and on the so-called 'peasant poet' Nikolai Kliuev (by Roberto Sarracco). Unlike what happened with the Francophile Briusov, in their case their self-made 'individual legend' is modeled on Christian and pagan myths of the Russian land, which were kept in the collective memory of the people of the Volga region. After Khlebnikov and Kliuev, an article is devoted to the intriguing and lesser studied Russian poet Ivan Aksenov, an intellectual devoted to various forms of art (painting, music, cinema). Alessandro Farsetti focuses on the biographies of famous people of the time compiled by Aksenov in the Thirties. Contrasting with the documentary prose already pushed by the propaganda of that time, Aksenov turns these figures into literary heroes, a typical pre-revolutionary attitude.

Also the 'heretical' pages by Evgenii Zamiatin are in contrast with the official statements that anticipated the upcoming Socialist Realism. In her contribution, which stresses numerous linguistic peculiarities of Zamiatin's style, Valentina Bertola emphasizes the wit and irony used by the author in his autobiographies on commission in order to 'imply' through stylistic devices what could not be clearly stated. The emigrant Shul'gin gives instead his own clear interpretation of the Revolution from his exile in Paris. As Maria Gatti Racah shows in her article, Shul'gin overlaps his individual experience with collective experience, providing his own deformed and essentially anti-Semitic version on the events of 1917, of which he was a witness to in Ukraine.

The following articles are devoted to authors who were victims of Soviet repression, which obviously has a very strong impact on their autobiographical writings. In Nadezhda Mandel'shtam's memoirs, analyzed by Enza Dammiano, the absolute value of the faithful guardi-

an of the life and works of Osip Mandel'shtam is emphasized. Alessandro Achilli focuses on the highly emotional lyric by Marina Tsvetaeva (forced into a terrible 'internal exile') and Ukrainian poet Vasyl' Stus, imprisoned in the Seventies. The complex autobiography by Lev Kopelev, another well-known former *zek*, is presented by Giulia Peroni. A convinced and enthusiastic communist in the Thirties who was later arrested, Kopelev in his autobiographical trilogy attempts to rehabilitate himself and the ideas he had defended.

A series of articles that share a common interest in the literary experiments of the authors analyzed concludes the section. The writers chosen by the junior scholars put to paper their own life with extensive use of imaginative details, alter-egos or heteronymous (more or less recognizable identity or encrypted), thus fitting the typical post-war disintegration of both the traditional post-modern narrative techniques and the dichotomy author-character. These authors are already established in the canon of Twentieth century Russian literature: Vladimir Nabokov (whose English prose and whose 'double' Sebastian Knight are analyzed by Irina Marchesini), Sergei Dovlatov (whose 'complex self' is at the centre of Ilaria Remonato's article) and the extravagant 'bad boy' of contemporary Russian prose Eduard 'Edichka' Limonov (who, as shown by Valentina Parisi and Marco Puleri, resumes and brings to the extremes the symbolist *zhiznetvorchestvo* during another crucial transition period in Russian history, i.e. the shift between the Brezhnev era and perestroika to the 'terrible '90s'. While Parisi focuses on Limonov's autofictional strategies, Puleri stresses the fact that the French author Carrère, in his well-known biography of Limonov, has somehow identified himself with the Russian author. In his work, he created a 'third hybrid figure' that combines the features of both object and subject of the literary work.

The only contribution not devoted to Russia deals with the late twentieth century and postmodernism. Stefania Mella describes, within the known reality of the Czech *samizdat* and of post-1968 'normalized' Czechoslovakia, a very interesting experiment, i.e. a collective diary that circulated within underground intellectual circles. The intellectuals were thus able to find a tool adapt to convey their ideas and further underline (in

and from the underground) their dual existence as individuals and social entity at a time. This is a further demonstration of the particular interdependence between the 'I' and the 'we', between personal and collective memories and of multiple selves. We hope that the articles contained in this section will satisfy the readers' hunger for ideas and discussion.