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

Director
Ulisse Spinnato Vega

Editors
Claudia Criveller (University of Padua, claudia.criveller@unipd.it)
Andrea Gullotta (University of Palermo, andrea.gullotta@unipa.it)

Advisory Board
Marina Balina (Illinois Wesleyan University)
Rodolphe Baudin (Paris-Sorbonne University)
Catherine Depretto (Paris-Sorbonne University)
Evgeny Dobrenko (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)
Lazar Fleishman (Stanford University)
Stefano Garzonio (University of Pisa)
Olga Hasty (Princeton University)
Polly Jones (University of Oxford)
Ilya Kukulin (Amherst Center for Russian Culture, Amherst College)
Damiano Rebecchini (State University of Milan)
Daniela Rizzi (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)
Stephanie Sandler (Harvard University)
Leona Toker (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
Yury Zaretskiy (National Research University – Higher School of Economics, Moscow)

Editorial Board
Stefano Aloe (University of Verona – Editor of the Section "Papers", stefano.aloe@univr.it)
Daniele Artoni (University of Verona)
Giulia De Florio (University of Parma – Editor of the Section "Materials and Discussions", giulia.deflorio@unipr.it)
Patrizia Deotto (University of Trieste)
Sara Dickinson (University of Genoa)
Giuseppina Giuliano (University of Salerno)
Simone Guagnelli (University of Bari)
Tatiana Kuzovkina (University of Tallinn – Editor of the Section "Materials and Discussions", tatjana.kuzovkina@tlu.ee)
Francesca Lazzarin (University of Udine)

Claudia Olivieri (University of Catania)
Bartosz Osiewicz (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań – Editor of the Section “Reviews”, osiebar@amu.edu.pl)
James Rann (University of Glasgow)
Tatiana Saburova (Indiana University, Bloomington)
Alexandra Smith (University of Edinburgh)
Josephine von Zitzewitz (Independent Scholar)
Kirill Zubkov (University of Bologna)

Managing Editors
Martina Morabito (University of Siena)
Chiara Rampazzo (Independent Scholar)

Website: www.avtobiografija.com
Contact: info@avtobiografija.com
Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/Avtobiografi%D0%AF-1492404737730803/?fref=ts
© 2025 AvtobiografiЯ
Design and Layout: Adriano Pavan, Samuele Saorin
Social Media Manager: Attilio Russo
Cover: Filippo Comuzzi

ISSN: 2281-6992

Università di Padova
Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari
Via Elisabetta Vendramini 13
35137 Padova

Registrazione del Tribunale di Padova 23-04-2013, n. 2326 Registro della Stampa, Variazione: Tribunale di Padova 27-10-2014, n. 3197 Registro della Stampa.

AvtobiografiЯ

Autobiography of Socialist Trauma– Part 2

n. 14/2025

AvtobiografiЯ
2025, Number 14

Autobiography of Socialist Trauma – Part 2

Table of Contents

Introduction
Claudia Criveller, Andrea Gullotta 5

Special issue

Introduction: Socialist Trauma and the Self
Andrea Gullotta 13

Dying by Instalments, the Cannibalism of a Regime
Maria Bidovec 19

A 'Microhistory' of Trauma and Collective Memory: Aleksandar Aleksiev and the Goli Otok Experience
Irina Talevska 41

The Remains of the Self: Trauma, Gender, and the Residue of Soviet State Violence in Nina Bardina's *My Life*
Ekaterina Gurtovaya 67

The Gulag of Polish Poets. Shame and Guilt in Poetry Born from Traumatic Experiences
Andrea F. De Carlo 89

Blood, Stigmata and The Prison Cell: Trauma and Redemption in Radu Gyr's Detention Poetry
Giovanni Magliocco 115

The Biography and Poetry of the Udmurt Poet Kuzebai Gerd as an Example of Repression of Ethnic Writers in Soviet Russia
Eva Toulouze 141

Papers

Ricordi sul caso Vera Zasulič di A. F. Koni. Autoritratto di un giudice
Annalisa Di Santo 173

Representations of Growing up in Wartime In the Contemporary Croatian Novel
Andrijana Kos-Lajtman 205

Remembering the (Post)War in Svetlana Alexievich and Ludmila Ulitskaya
Danijela Lugarić Vukas 233

Biographical Canon in the Soviet Children's Literature of the 1930s: On the History of Formation
Polina Popova 251

Nastas'ja Kairova: dal processo giudiziario al giornalismo di guerra
Iris Uccello 277

Materials and Discussions

Interview with Egana Dzhabbarova
Michela Romano 307

Reviews

Scherbakova, Irina. 2024. *Le mani di mio padre. Una storia di famiglia russa* (Milano: Mimesis), pp. 477.
Patrizia Deotto 319

Szyszko-Grzywacz, Anna. 2024. *La mia vita nel gulag. Memorie da Vorkuta 1945-1956* (Milano: Guerini e associati), pp. 191
Viviana Nosilia 323

Ветлугина, Анна; Максименко, Дмитрий. 2025. *Таривердиев* (Москва: Молодая Гвардия), 239[1] с.
Jakub Adamiak 329

Authors

Authors 339

Autobiography of Socialist Trauma - Part 2



© Lisa Gaye Crawshaw

Claudia Criveller, Andrea Gullotta

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

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-001
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

proxies, two Russian and Russophone 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 Kos-Lajtman 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 perspective — 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 women'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.

Special Issue

Andrea Gullotta

Introduction: Socialist Trauma and the Self

Introduction to the second part of the special issue on the autobiography of Socialist Trauma.

By focusing on authors of Macedonian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Slovenian and Udmurt literature, the second part of the special issue on the autobiography of Socialist Trauma widens the horizon on the phenomenon of the representation of the self in the literary works generated by authors who were victims of state repression in Socialist countries. The narratives and poems created by the authors studied in the articles published in both issues share two key aspects: first, they are written by people whose self has been crushed by the authorities of countries governed by Socialist principles, meaning that these individuals were convicted not for having committed any particular crime, but for reasons related to their belonging to social class, political factions, religion, or for their proximity with 'enemies of the people.' Unlike victims of genocides, they did not necessarily share common values or identify themselves with a specific community: still, they all went through the process of destruction of the before-the-arrest self, as brightly described by Iulii Margolin:

> Переступив порог милиции на Логишинской улице, я, не зная того, переступил черту, которая разделяла два мира. Но уже через несколько минут я понял, что случилось нечто невероятное.
> Я никогда в своей жизни не сидел в тюрьме. В момент ареста мне было тридцать девять лет. Я был отцом семейства, человеком материально и внутренне независимым, привыкшим к уважению окружающих, безусловно лояльным гражданином. Я никого не обидел, не преступил закона и был твердо убежден в своем праве на внимание и защиту со стороны учреждений каждого государства, кроме гитлеровского. В общем я оставался до-

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-002
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

вольно наивным европейским интеллигентом даже после девятимесячных попыток вырваться из липкой советской паутины, и я все еще чувствовал себя душой и сердцем гражданином прекрасной Европы с ее Парижем, Флоренцией и лазурными далями Средиземного моря.

За порогом дома на Логишинской я сразу перестал быть человеком. Этот переход совершился без всякой подготовки, так резко, точно я провалился среди бела дня в глубокую яму (Margolin 1977: 156-57).[1]

Second, all these authors were heavily traumatised by extreme violence – a violence which saw its motivation in the dehumanisation of the victims on behalf of the perpetrators and which had the typical effect of leaving the individuals broken, fragile, entangled in a difficult – at times impossible – negotiation between a variety of selves.

In this context, literature comes as a reaction to 'socialist trauma.' It can be the stronghold where the violated self establishes a connection with the before-the-arrest self and its complex system of values, literary references and beliefs, as is the case with both Radu Gyr – whose poetry is analysed by Giovanni Magliocco – and the Polish poets studied by Andrea F. De Carlo. Still, trauma leaves its scars on their poems in the form of both images of blood and violence, and feelings of guilt and shame. Scars that are not visible in Kuzebai Gerd's poems: however, Eva Toulouze's

[1] 'Stepping into the police station on Logishinskaya Street, I unknowingly crossed the line dividing two worlds. However, already within minutes, I realized that something incredible had happened.

I had never been in prison in my life. I was thirty-nine years old at the time of my arrest. I was a father, a man of material and intellectual independence, accustomed to the respect of others, an unconditionally loyal citizen. I had never offended anyone, never broken the law, and was firmly convinced of my right to have the attention and protection of the institutions of every state, except Hitler's. In short, I remained a rather naive European intellectual even after nine months of trying to escape the sticky Soviet spiderweb, and I still felt, heart and soul, a citizen of that beautiful Europe, with its Paris, Florence, and the azure expanses of the Mediterranean.

Once I stepped into the building on Logishinskaya Street, I immediately ceased to be a human being. This transition happened without any preparation, so abruptly, as if I had fallen into a deep hole in broad daylight'. [The translation is mine, A.G.]

article reconstructs how his literary biography led to his persecution and how his works became themselves body of evidence.

Literature is also the way to work through trauma, as is the case of Aleksandar Aleksiev's work, here analysed by Irina Talevska, whose article tries to go beyond the pages of Aleksiev's text in order to see traces of a collective working-through in Macedonian society. A similar process happens in the text by another author who spent his term in Goli Otok, Igor Torkar, whose *Dying by Instalments* is at the centre of the article by Maria Bidovec, who delves deep into one of many texts on Goli Otok published after Tito's death by Slovenian authors. Torkar's work shares some of the features of autofiction as described by Serge Doubrovsky (Doubrovsky 1977: 10). However, it does contain elements of originality, in particular, the instances where the author, through a pseudonym, intervenes into the text and provides contextual information that helps framing the story retold in *Dying by Instalments*. Such instances show the complexity of some of the dynamics at play when the representation of the self is also a representation of trauma.

Relying on a wide critical framework of studies on trauma, Ekaterina Gurtovaya focuses on the memoirs written by Nina Bardina, an author who, unlike most women memoirists of the Gulag, depicts her own experience of sexual abuse in a straightforward way. The depiction of the sexual violence suffered by Bardina from Lavrentii Beriia, the head of NKVD, is impressively detailed and shows Bardina's clear representation of her own naivety. However, Gurtovaya identifies some of the ways in which a traumatised self may surface, sometimes unexpectedly – Bardina's depiction of a love story with an inmate in the camp shows her difficulty in representing her emotion and identifying her feelings. Scarred by these experiences, detached from her before-the-arrest self, unable to express her emotions and to communicate with her mother – another heavily traumatised individual – Bardina finds herself unable to live in society after being freed from the camp and asks to return to the Gulag, an image that stands out as a monument to the complexity of the study of the self in works generated by authors of 'socialist trauma literature'.

These articles, together with those published in the first part of this special issues and the

other outputs of the project *Literature of Socialist Trauma (LOST): Mapping and Researching the Lost Page of European Literature* show how, regardless of the hardships of finding a common framework capable of studying such a wide corpus in a coherent way, the literature of Socialist trauma is indeed a page of European literature that deserves further attention.

The research presented in this article was conducted within the framework of the PRIN 2022 PNRR project "Literature of Socialist Trauma: Mapping and Researching the Lost Page of European Literature (LOST)", ID: P2022Z45X8, CUP: B53D23029360001, Principal Investigator: Andrea Gullotta (University of Palermo). The project was funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research (MIUR) under the 2022 PRIN PNRR Call for Proposals, Directorial Decree No. 1409 of September 14, 2022.

Bibliography

Doubrovsky 1977: Doubrovsky, Serge. 1977. *Fils* (Paris: Galilée).

Margolin 1977: Margolin, Iulii. 1977. 'Sentiabr ', 1939', *Vremia i my*, 15: 155-85.

Maria Bidovec

Dying by Instalments, the Cannibalism of a Regime

The paper analyses certain aspects of the narration of trauma in one of the best-known Slovenian novels thematising the violence of the Yugoslav regime in the 1940s and 1950s, *Umiranje na obroke* [Dying by Instalments, 1984], by the playwright and prose writer Igor Torkar (1913-2004). The paper contextualises the novel in the historical situation in Slovenia during the Second World War and in the period immediately after it, and relates it to other earlier and later representations of these themes in Slovenian literature.

Igor Torkar's work is deeply marked by his personal experiences of repression. Considering the close connection between this theme and the author's experience, it is necessary to briefly outline the historical context of a large part of his life, in particular the part he focuses on and writes about in his novel, which takes place in Yugoslavia, in particular in Slovenia, in the 1940s and 1950s.[1]

1. The Slovenians during the Second World War (1941–1945)

For over six centuries, almost the entire Slovenian population lived in the Habsburg Monarchy's provinces. When the Austro-Hungarian Empire fell, they found themselves part of a state that over the previous decades had various official names, but from 1929 onwards was commonly known as Yugoslavia. From the (re)birth of this state as a federal socialist republic in 1945 until the split with Stalin in 1948, Yugoslavia modelled itself on the Soviet Union in every way. Slovenia became one of the six republics that formed the new state, which dissolved definitively a few decades later, starting in 1991, following the secession first of all of the Republic of Slovenia, which from a national point of view (both linguistically and culturally), was the most homogeneous of the Federation. It was exactly for this reason, and also because it

[1] The main reference for the general historical data quoted in this article is Granda 2008. For in depth studies, from the Slovenian point of view, on the repressive aspects of the Yugoslav regime, see, in addition to the titles already mentioned in the text also (in chronological order) Rus 1961, Prunk 1962-1989, Štrovs 2014, Šturm 2015.

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-003
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

was the only republic of the federal state that shared a border with as many as three Axis states (Austria-Germany after the *Anschluß*, Italy and Hungary) and for many decades to come with two states (Austria and Italy) of the European Community (or Union), that its destiny was often different from that of the other states on its south-eastern borders.

Following the Treaty of Rapallo (November 1920), tens of thousands of Slovenians (like many Croatians, but a far greater percentage), found that they were a minority in Fascist Italy and were therefore subject to the repression of the regime, which in some way 'immunised' Slovenia from any possible future sympathy for this dictatorship (Granda 2008: 273).

Despite this situation, and despite the fact that at the beginning, Slovenia was compact in its (at least passive) resistance to the Nazi-Fascist invasion, things changed very fast during the Second World War. The destiny of the Slovenians was very seriously affected during the whole of the following period and even today, the long shadow of these events is strongly present in the nation's consciousness. In this country, as in the whole of Europe, the population organised a rebellion that was widespread and politically varied. From the beginning it was clear that the local Communist Party was the best organised, above all thanks to its close contact with the Soviet Union, although several other groups joined them, especially the liberals who were connected to the *Sokol* [Hawk] movement and the *krščanski demokrati*, the Christian Democrats. The Communist Party had a widespread network and a hierarchical organisation. At first, it was apparently open to political dialogue with other forces – in mid-1941 the name *Protiimperialistična fronta* [Anti-imperialist front], which in alluding to the anti-imperialist revolution indicated the deep intentions of the struggle, changed to *Osvobodilna fronta* (OF), the Liberation Front (Granda 2008: 272), a more representative term for the aspirations of the various factions. None the less, the Communist leadership quickly took increasingly more power into their hands and excluded everyone else. However, what alienated them – most of all in the eyes of their many supporters – were their methods, which were based on an extreme and often unjustified use of violence. In the end, in the absence of serious discussions, since any objection could put whoever ex-

pressed themselves in serious danger, some of the combatants believed that the Nazi-Fascists were the lesser evil. This is how, on 6th August 1942, the so-called Anti-Communist Volunteer Militia (MVAC) was formed. It was later commonly called the *bela garda*, that is, the white guard, with reference to the events in Russia. When Italy surrendered around six months later, this further intensified the various positions; the Italian invaders were able to leave the area almost unhindered, as long as they surrendered all their arms, but it was the collaborators, whether real or not, who paid the price for the crimes committed by them and in general by the Nazi-Fascists. The violence was often indiscriminate and brutal: the suspects were often beaten and killed, with widespread revenge even taken out on the wounded, the sick, the old and children. The previously feared political commissars, who were also based on the Soviet model, of the VOS (Security Information Service) were replaced by the dreaded OZNA, who later became the equally notorious UDBA. For the Slovenian population this was a double problem: a political one that involved the definitive establishment of a Party that was by then untouchable and repressive, both with respect to its opponents and to its own members; in addition, a national problem, because the OZNA (as later the UDBA), unlike the VOS, also involved the elimination of the Slovenian administrative autonomy in favour of a completely unified 'Yugoslavian' partisan resistance structure. The Slovenian language was discriminated against and at the same time preparations began for the mass killings of the post-war period, which remained a deep and devastating collective trauma for the nation.

2. Slovenia in the Early Years of Socialist Yugoslavia (1945–1950)

The Communist revolution began in Yugoslavia in May 1945, at the end of the war, and its most dramatic expression in Slovenia was the massacre of thousands of anti-Communist soldiers. This event was destined to leave an indelible mark on all future generations, in particular in relation to the massacre of around 15,000 young Slovenians, mainly officers, who were killed between 8th and 31st May at Kočevski rog after trying in vain to escape to Austria.
These were certainly not the only victims of fratricidal struggles between Slovenians, with on one

side, already during the conflict, Communists or sympathisers, and on the other side Anti-Communists. However, the extent and the brutality of this massacre, with the war by now over, also anticipated the violence of the new regime in peace times, because the persecutions and killings that had been planned before did not stop afterwards either. From January 1946 onward, with the approval of the new constitution, based on the Soviet model, which conferred absolute power to the Party leadership, a sort of final confrontation began. This was a period of violence directed not only at the political opponents, but also former 'comrades-in-arms,' people who had taken part in the partisan struggle fervently but who for various reasons had become a liability. The phenomenon became particularly intense after 1948, as will be seen later. Another category that the regime targeted was the Catholic Church, even though many priests had opposed Nazi-Fascism. In the decade following the war and afterwards, the Catholic Church was systematically persecuted – at the top (the bishops), also its priests, monks and nuns and even the simple believers. From May 1945 to the end of 1961, just under one thousand people – priests, monks, nuns and seminarians – were sent to court (Griesser-Pečar 2005: 15; on this subject, see also, among others, Kvaternik 2001), and their trials were often summary. Some priests were killed, many of them were attacked and almost all of them were victims of various forms of harassment.

The persecution of former partisans of proven Communist conviction, including those who first fought against Nazi-Fascism, deserves to be treated separately. Many of them were accused, often completely falsely, of plotting against the regime, which branded them as traitors. This took place throughout Yugoslavia in the years between 1945 to 1953, but again in this case Slovenia followed its own particular path, at least partially.

From 1948 members of the party (some of whom very prominent) were systematically persecuted and were rightly or wrongly accused of remaining faithful to the Cominform (locally known as *Informbiro*), that is, of supporting Stalin's USSR. In June that year, Tito's regime openly opposed the former model inspired by Stalin, and, in a sort of collective paranoia, it began to fear conspiracies by these party members, called *informbirojevci*, or simply by the acronym IB (i-bé), *ibeovci*. The worst expres-

sion of the persecution of these former comrades[2] was the prison camp created on Goli Otok ('Barren Island'), an island off the coast of Croatia.[3] This tragic place, which no one even dared mention for decades, concerned less Slovenians than people of other nations in the Federation. In fact, there were 'only' 566 Slovenian prisoners, compared to, for example, thousands of Serbs, Croatians and above all (in proportion to their population) Montenegrins (Jezernik 2013: 16).

None the less, Goli Otok was certainly not the only place where the regime tried to 're-educate' (the stated purpose in fact of these places) its real or alleged enemies. There were several other similar camps and many prisoners were also detained in prisons that were more or less harsh, and they were often tortured, generally in order to extort confessions that would implicate other unfortunate people.

The regime's obsession with the Cominform may have been the most evident aspect of its sort of 'siege mentality,' which was similar to that of other dictatorships. In those years, even a slight, very general or indirect criticism of Party members' activities or maybe just of the situation in the country, or even a joke with political implications, could be enough to find oneself trapped in a situation from which it would be difficult to escape. People would then be arrested, accused with no possibility of contesting the accusations (sometimes without even understanding what they were accused of), and sent to prison or to forced labour camps. Often, even after serving their sentence, the nightmare continued because, in order to be released, many of them had to agree to collaborate with the OZNA, and former prisoners found themselves in a dilemma that was dif-

[2] Based on official data, 55,663 people were arrested in Yugoslavia. All victims were only accused of supporting Moscow and the Cominform. In the following years, according to some Western scholars, this number rose to 300,000, but they also included other categories of persecuted people (Jezernik 2013: 15). In relation to the population, it was as though 1,000,000 people were imprisoned in Italy.

[3] For information regarding the complex structure of the Yugoslavian repressive system, above all the forced labour camps, and the repressive methods used there, one can refer to the specialist literature. See, among others, Tasić 1987, Logar 1991, Jezernik 2013, Previšić 2022, in Italian also Scotti 2012; see also Morabito 2024; among the memoirs on Goli Otok, and among the Slovenian authors, it is important to mention Hrast 1991. The data in the present article are mainly taken from Jezernik 2013.

ficult to resolve: they either had to get their colleagues, friends or acquaintances into trouble by revealing something about them to the secret police, or else they would find themselves in trouble again and end up in the abyss of detention, forced labour or torture.

In this contest, at the end of the 1940s, a paradoxical and tragic series of events occurred in Slovenia. These were the so-called '*Dachauski procesi*' [Dachau trials], ten[4] sham trials against active and respected members of the Party (see Ivanič 1990, Pučnik 1996, Jančar 2018, Čoh Kladnik 2014). Between 1948 and 1950, during these trials, 11 people were sentenced to death, and others were sent to hard prisons or concentration camps.[5] The name given to these trials refers to the fact that the people accused were almost all survivors of Nazi concentration camps, in particular Dachau. Most of the people were intellectuals. Together with other categories of people who were persecuted – like the Catholics (see Kvaternik 2001, Merlak 2001, and above all Griesser-Pečar 2005), farmers who owned land (see Čoh Kladnik 2012) and, after 1948, admirers of the Soviet Union, as well as minorities, for example Roma people and Jehovah's witnesses – the intellectuals, even if they were 'authentic' Communists, were often considered even more dangerous. One of the defendants on trial, together with other chemical engineers, was the writer Igor Torkar.

3. Igor Torkar: His Life

Igor Torkar (1913-2004),[6] Boris Fakin's pen name, was born in the Karst region (Kostanjevica na Krasu) but spent most of his life in Ljubljana. The future prose writer and playwright studied chemical engineering and that became his profession. He joined the Communist Party at a young age. Already as a student, he took part in many young left-wing organisations, fought for the rights of the weakest and published political-journalistic articles and literary works, initially poems, in various journals. He later found that the expressive form that worked best for him was playwriting, even though he became famous

[4] The number may vary, depending on whether some trials during those years were considered or not as part of this calculation.

[5] Three others died during the interrogations, whereas one of the 11 people sentenced to death was spared.

[6] Most of the biographical information on Torkar is taken from Jevnikar 1990.

mainly because of the novel which will be described in detail later, but also for reasons beyond literature. His passion for politics, supported by a personality that was action-oriented but also favoured a rational approach, exposed him to many difficult situations, in one of the most turbulent periods of European history. He was imprisoned by four different regimes, each adopting very different methods and with a different impact every time (Torkar 1979: 12). In 1938, as a young man, still in the Yugoslavia before the war, he came to the attention of the authorities because of his participation in student demonstrations and for distributing leaflets, and was detained for a few days. At the beginning of the war, since he had joined the Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation (OF) very early on, he was beaten up and then imprisoned for a brief period by the Italian Fascist authorities that occupied the province of Ljubljana.

However, his two most harrowing experiences took place later: first from January 1943 to May 1945, in the Dachau and Sachsenhausen Nazi concentration camps; then, and worst of all, the prisons of the new Communist Yugoslavia, the State that he himself had been involved in establishing and organising. Following a conviction in one of the 'Dachau trials,' he spent four years and four days in those prisons, just under half that time in solitary confinement. This was the deepest trauma of his life, and he wrote about it later in many literary and non-fiction works. Torkar was released on parole in April 1952, but had to wait almost 20 years (July 1971) until he and his group of colleagues who had been wrongfully accused were legally rehabilitated. It was only in 1985 that the State offered him and his fellow sufferers compensation, which he, however, refused. As mentioned above, most of the defendants in that trial were dead by then, they had either been killed or they had died from ill-treatment and torture.

Already by the mid-1950s, Torkar had been able to live an apparently normal life. He taught at the Ljubljana Academy of Figurative Art for 20 years, from 1954 until he retired in 1974. After already experiencing a partial easing of the regime's brutality in that period, the writer lived another 30 years, so he was able to see its end. One decisive date was 1980, the death of the dictator Tito, when the whole system began to fall apart. In 1984, Torkar was one of the first people to break a taboo,

that of narrating the abuse suffered by those like him, who supported the regime and generally agreed with its ideology. After seeing Slovenia as an independent and democratic nation, and unfortunately also the wars that devastated the neighbouring States that had emerged from the ashes of Yugoslavia during the whole of the 1990s, the writer, who continued to raise his rational and dialogical voice until the very end, passed away in 2004, at the age of 90.

4. Torkar's Work

4.1. Before *Dying by Instalments*: Torkar and the Others

Torkar began his literary activity before the war, and he published poems in various journals. In 1940, his collection of satirical sonnets *Blazni Kronos* [Mad Chronos] was published and was appreciated for its effectively grotesque nature. Immediately after the war, more poems were published, and then more in the 1970s and 1980s, when the author, who was exhausted by his extreme experiences, did not give up but tried to express the horrors he had suffered in the Dachau camp and in the Ljubljana prison: *Jetniški soneti* [Sonnets from Jail, 1974]. The *Balada o smehu* [The Ballad of Laughter, 1977], which focused on the struggle of laughter, a profoundly human attribute, against inhumanity, was confiscated by the police.

Torkar was a highly acclaimed playwright. The following are just some of his many plays, mainly drama but also comedies: The theme of *Pisana žoga* [The Coloured Ball, 1955] is the partisan struggle, however, as Edvard Kocbek did a few years before in his collection of short stories *Strah in pogum* [Fear and Courage, 1951], it concentrates on a question that at the time (and for many years to come) was extremely delicate, that of the killing that took place within the Liberation Front. The play, like many of Torkar's works, shows a 'poetic protest, full of tension and humanity, against arbitrary violence' (Jevnikar 1990: 33).

The protagonists of *Pozabljeni ljudje* [Forgotten People, 1957] are ordinary, lost people, with a sad destiny. Despite the dark atmosphere, the play conveys a strong faith in humanity [Jevnikar, 1990: 33]. The setting of *Delirij* [Delirium, 1957] is even darker.

In the 1970s the atmosphere changed and although the author continued to write dramas, he also wrote comedies, like *Revizor 74* [The Government In-

spector 74, 1974]. Many of his works were written (or later adapted) for television.

Torkar also wrote several reports, reflections and provocative essays for newspapers and journals, a selection of which was published at the end of the 1980s. He received some awards but not the most important literary prizes, which may have been an indication of the continuing difficulty of Slovenian society, still during the 1990s and even later, to digest certain wounds from the past. Already in the previous decades, the writer had won several literary competitions, but only in those cases, in a tragicomic way, in which the jury did not know the names of the candidates.

He only wrote two novels, both mainly autobiographies. The first one, *Deseti bratje* [The Tenth Brothers, 1979],[7] can be considered a combination of a memoir and non-fiction. It is full of portraits of his contemporaries and is particularly interesting from a historical point of view.

However, the author's most interesting prose is definitely *Umiranje na obroke* [Dying by Instalments, 1984] and it is no coincidence that it was published after 1980, the watershed year. The fact that this was a new era could also be seen by the publication of works by other authors who, in those years, slowly but surely talked about what until recently had been impossible to express directly. The novel by Branko Hofman (1929-1991) *Noč do jutra* [The Night until Morning], published in 1981, was the first one to address the unspeakable Goli Otok. This was not a description of the author's personal experience; it was inspired by the tragically true story of the writer and journalist Ludvik Mrzel that he himself recounted to Hofman (see Lah 2017: 42). In 1982, Vitomil Zupan (1914-1987),[8] a rebellious and nonconformist writer, published his *Levitan* [Leviathan], a sarcastic and unconventional memoir of the years he spent in Communist prisons. The following year, the comedy *Moj ata, socialistični kulak* [My Father, a Socialist Kulak, 1983] by Tone Partljič, was published. Partljič was the youngest of these four writers (he was born in 1940 and is still alive), and he was the only one of those mentioned above who experienced the regime through the eyes of a child. The light-hearted

[7] The title refers to Slovenian folklore that attributes particular powers to the tenth son; in this case it implies Slovenian artists.

[8] Several features of a character in *Umiranje na obroke* are inspired by him: the two writers were friends.

tone of his comedy, which has some wonderfully humorous moments, poetically transforms the events but at the same time the seriousness can just be seen in the background. A successful film with the same title (1988) was based on the play, and Partljič himself wrote the screenplay.

In fact, Slovenian literary works that alluded to the violence of the regime (with or without autobiographical plots) had even appeared from the end of the 1950s. However, for obvious reasons, the artistic language adopted in those years was necessarily the more abstract and symbolic language of poetry and the theatre. So, for example, there are the plays by Dominik Smole, Gregor Strniša, Primož Kozak and Marjan Rožanc; the poems by Dane Zajc, Ludvik Mrzel and others. Starting from the 1970s, these themes also gradually started to be found in prose, often with autobiographical references, including novels by Lojze Kovačič, Jože Javoršek, Marjan Rožanc, Žarko Petan, Drago Jančar and many others.

4.2. *Dying by Instalments* both as an Autobiography and Fiction

Starting from the end of the 1980s, while Yugoslavia was already breaking up and Slovenia was on its way to become a democracy and a sovereign State, many people decided to write their memoirs or edit those of others, based on their notes or diaries. Most of them, unlike during the previous period, were not professional writers but people from various backgrounds and political affiliations who, between the end of the 1940s and mid-1950s, were caught up in the grip of political persecutions. These works were therefore real (auto)biographies (see, in chronological order: Jezeršek 1989, Hrast 1991, Lenič 1997, Jerič 2000, Vovk 2000 e 2003, Hrast 2007 and Gomizel 2015).[9]

Dying by Instalments, which was written before all these works, is not, however, an autobiography, but a literary work for which the writer drew inspiration from his own experience. The novel, therefore, both from a point of

[9] The list of titles mentioned, which is not complete for reasons of space, only refers to works published as books. Many accounts have been published in periodicals or within other works, but some have never been published.

view of the themes dealt with and also from a diachronic point of view, somehow fits in between the literary works with their indirect allusions that preceded it, and the factual biographies that followed it. Five years after the above mentioned *The Tenth Brothers*, Torkar started working on his autobiographical material again but with a different approach. In the meantime (1980) Tito had died, and the whole Yugoslavian system was showing signs of falling apart. What previously was unspeakable could now be said and written about publicly, although not without some hesitation.[10] Maybe also the greater distance from the facts, if only just a few years, made it easier to write about them. In fact, the writer himself stated at the end of his text that he wrote this work between February 1981 and December 1983.

Reality or fiction? Regardless of the debate, which it is not the case to go further into here, since the opposition in this dichotomy itself can be questioned (see Čeh 2008: 25), the discriminating factor between a genuine autobiography and a work of fiction is generally a question of the 'pact' with the reader. An autobiographical novel imitates the narrative of an autobiography in a certain way; however, the reader is aware of the different identity of the author and that of the narrator, which requires a fictional reading of the text (Čeh 2008: 26). Moreover: autobiographical prose may be limited to just some parts of the author's life, whereas a 'real' autobiography narrates the whole (or at least a large part) of the story of his life.

In the case of *Dying by Instalments*, Torkar himself guides us along this razor's edge path, between a biography and fiction, and the novel is mainly narrated in the third person. The protagonist is one of the author's alter egos and can be recognised as such, but he is given fictional names (his 'legal' name, Fran Pevkar, his nickname Icek and in particular Gaber, Pevkar the partisan's *nom de guerre*) and different characteristics.

None the less, during the narration, the author often introduces authentic material, such as information taken from the court proceedings against him or other documents, for example newspaper articles. In these cases, the writer speaks directly to the read-

[10] Only in the third edition of the novel (1988) was it possible to publish the provocative survey inside the book, in which the author asks the readers in what way the horrors of post 1948 Yugoslavia were less awful than those carried out by Stalin.

er in the first person and introduces himself with his legal name and surname (Boris Fakin), thus indicating the veracity of the information given. In crucial moments of the story, the real author talks to his alter ego Gaber, who is the one who 'tells him his story.' In doing so, he in turn narrates his own story and indicates to the reader that he is revealing something really autobiographical. Torkar, however, is not only, or above all, concerned about his own experience, he aims to write something paradigmatic: 'It's not my biography [...] it's that of a hero of our time. Of all those who have lived and died in our time' (Torkar 1984: 35).

The text consists of 18 unnumbered chapters, and each has a double title, with the conjunction *ali* ('or,' 'that is') joining the two options, a detail that has a theatrical feel to it. The first 100 pages or so (of a total of 400) are dedicated to the protagonist's childhood and youth, with a particular focus on the armed resistance against the Nazi-Fascist invaders. Several characters, comrades in arms and friends, are introduced in this section and they appear again in the large second part of the novel as interrogators, persecutors and executioners. After just 35 pages that describe one and a half years in Dachau, and after a brief interval, which corresponds to a period of almost three years in the story (from the end of the war to the first problems with the regime), the novel continues with the series of events that had the greatest impact on the protagonist and the author himself: inhuman interrogations, false accusations, incrimination, prison, parole, the very long wait for rehabilitation, his disappointment with the poor attention given to this and the regime's belated and inadequate apologies.

4.3. *Dying by Instalments* and the Author's Real Traumas

Dying by Instalments narrates very painful experiences, even if poetically transformed, that the author himself suffered. As with other literary works of this kind, one can reasonably suppose that it is a sort of 'therapeutic' undertaking that helped the writer break the silence around the trauma that leads 'to the death of the soul' (van der Kolk 2014: 265).

The importance of breaking this silence, which is very dangerous for the human psyche, is highlighted by neuroscientists. None the less, they point out the great

difference between two different forms of self-awareness, 'one that keeps track of the self across time and one that registers the self in the present moment,' which in turn correspond to two types of narration (van der Kolk 2014: 269). Even though, according to these neuroscientists, the second one is more useful, since it is more likely to allow an individual to come to terms with their experience, a work that is intended to be published will generally arise from a more coherent and less spontaneous type of narration.

A more complex question, perhaps, concerns literature in the literal sense of the word, that is, literature that also includes an aesthetic point of view, which is the most interesting aspect here. However, even a writer of fiction generally tries to write in such a way that the reader will understand, and in any case (in the absence of the above mentioned 'pact') does not have to limit himself strictly to the facts. If, as scholars have observed, a story created 'for public consumption' and narrated many times, often, in the end, appears to its narrator to be true, this will presumably be even more the case for stories intended to be printed and conceived by an author who was already a professional writer before his trauma.

Taking all of this into consideration, and knowing the writer's real biography, one can in any case attempt to identify in the novel the signs of the trauma he really experienced. We will try and analyse some of the many passages of interest in this respect and follow themes that run through the whole novel like common threads, both in the form of dreamlike visions and as descriptions that appear as filtered by the protagonist's particularly subjective point of view.

4.4. Dreamlike Visions and Descriptions

In Torkar's novel, the protagonist's dreams, in which he is usually called 'Gaber,' play a key role. The main character, who in describing them speaks in the first person, generally sees himself as a bat, whereas his friends and acquaintances appear as aggressive birds. There are also often other animals, sometimes embalmed.

However, even in the descriptions that are not dreamlike, for example, the presumably realistic descriptions of the various kinds of confrontations (mainly interrogations) with many representatives of the regime's agents (and therefore appear to

be inhuman, alienated and depersonalised), one can see the obsessive return of some obsessively recurrent themes, in particular eyes and light, often accompanied by disturbing chromatic visions.

4.4.1. Flying Animals

These are some of the motifs that recur most often in the dreamlike visions presented in the novel. The narrator dreams that he has turned into a bat, a small, blind, flying mammal. Blind like the author himself, one may think, who for years did not, or did not want to see the dehumanisation of the regime. Disoriented like the protagonist who, during the narrative, gradually loses all his points of reference and is a victim of a truly perverse mechanism. This falling down into an abyss, in the narrative, as presumably in the author's biography, begins with his first contact with the OZNA and his first interrogations. At this point Gaber could still be free, if he collaborated with the secret police and reported his friends (but he chooses not to do that). His descent continues with his four years in prison and does not even ease when he is released from prison, a moment that does not bring joy because it does not (and cannot) coincide with finding the points of reference he had lost.

The image of the bat flitting around desperately because it is lost had already appeared in *The Tenth Brothers* five years before. This Kafka-sounding metamorphosis recurs often in *Dying by Instalments*. One example is a passage from the chapter 'Preventive Prison, that is, a Clouded Mind,' when the protagonist finds himself in the increasingly tight spiral of the interrogations. After taking him (several times) to a special, remote office on the outskirts of Ljubljana, the police attempt to force him to make false confessions in order to be able to incriminate his colleagues. In the end, as a result of Gaber's repeated denial, he is sent to prison. During those weeks of regular meetings, he begins to have terrifying nightmares:

> And once again, I'm getting smaller. I only measure ten, fifteen centimetres, my little body is covered with black hair, I cannot see my feet anywhere. My face is a rat's face, even my eyes are rat's eyes. My arms are flattened into two cartilaginous bat-like wings [...] Out of breath, close to

> death, I now continue to flutter in circles, looking for a place to perch (Torkar 1984: 167).[11]

The bat is also mentioned at the beginning of the chapter 'Parole, that is, Evil Isolation,' which describes the torturous process through which the protagonist tries, years after his release from prison, to find a semblance of normality. His previous life is lost forever, after his faith in his old ideals is shattered. The new reality is loneliness and confusion, the fear of a bottomless pit.

> To come back… from where, when, where to? Whose world am I coming back to? Those dreadful dreams of bats […] They clouded the eyes of my body and my mind. Everything around me looked blurred and was deformed into strange, transparent, bodiless ghosts (Torkar 1984: 231).

He also has a recurrent dream in which one of his closest friends from a long time ago, who has by now changed (his nickname is *Pločevinar*, a word echoing with tin, a low-quality metal) and turns into a rooster that pecks the protagonist until he bleeds because he is guilty of 'seeing too much'. The following is an example of one of such moments:

> Then he flew up to my chin and started gouging my eyes out. In the meantime, he was singing […] The one who's seen too much, the one who's seen too much is the one whose eyes the raven, is the one whose eyes the raven gouges out! Cock-a-doodle-doo! (Torkar 1984: 86)

The descriptions of eyes appear even more frequently in the novel. Alongside the descriptions referring to the protagonist, the deliberately stereotyped descriptions of the eyes of the characters who successively confront him recur dozens of times.

4.4.2. Eyes

Eyes that see too much are naturally unpopular with any dictatorial regime.
This theme, however, is also present in the novel with a different meaning. Our organs of sight, traditionally known as the

[11] Here and below, the Italian translation from the original Slovenian is by M.B., while the English translation from the Italian is by C.S.

'mirror of the soul,' can also reveal their owner's lack of humanity. In *Dying by Instalments*, the eyes are obsessively present and represent the various persecutors. The descriptions are repeated like a fixed attribute, every time a certain character appears: their shapes are geometrical and they are made of inert materials (metal, plastic, glass) in order to evoke machines, not human beings. Sometimes, there are unsettling instances of paraesthesia: the gaze of perhaps the most disturbing character in the whole novel, the fanatical and painfully inhuman Ras, has a 'metallic sound.'

Another (linguistic, morphologic) particularity that emphasises this alienation is the constant reference to eyes as dual. Although the Slovenian language has and normally uses the dual form, for entities that are double by their nature, above all equal organs like eyes, ears and hands, it prefers the plural. The uncommon use here of the dual form adds an alienating characteristic, almost as though they were two single objects. The following is a brief description of each character's eyes:

> His eyes [Miro's eyes, a friend from a long time ago, M.B.] – two small smooth aluminium spheres – shine icily. […] Under the ash [in his smile, M.B.], fanaticism, irony, caution and metallic confidence can just be seen, smouldering (Torkar 1984: 152).

> An OZNA officer walks in.... His eyes are impossible to forget. Round. Like two halves of a ping pong ball (Torkar 1984: 159).

> A new OZNA officer has come into the room. Tall, upright, athletic body, flawless […] the only feature of his face that looks rather unfriendly, actually really treacherous, are his big black sunglasses […].
> Ras [his comrade-in-arms from a long time ago, M.B.] who, instead of human eyes in his eye sockets, has two small glass balls, stares Gaber icily in the face. It seems to Gaber as though Ras's gaze makes a metallic sound. He can hear it in his ears and in his heart. A sound that stings. Burning (Torkar 1984: 178).

4.4.3. Light and Colours

In some respects, the theme of light is similar, in that in the novel it does not have its usual positive meaning. The (excessive) light relates explicitly on one hand to realistic images like that of the exhausting interrogations really experienced by the author, who was interrogated for weeks, even 20 hours at a time, while his prison wardens took it in turn to rest, to prevent him from sleeping:

> Ras's question and Gaber's silence continue at a steady pace, slowly, sleepily, already for the eighth consecutive hour. The silver arrows of light from the lighthouse have also already been piercing Gaber's eyes for eight hours. His tears no longer fall in drops from his eyes. They flow. They burn more and more (Torkar 1984: 180).

On the other hand, the light also represents the obligation to see what one does not want to see because it hurts or is frightening. This can easily be linked to the trauma of the return to a 'freedom' – after the release from prison, as parole, and without even the psychological comfort of rehabilitation – which leads to dreadful loneliness. The alienation of not being understood in a world that is impossible to understand, with the fear that by now lives constantly in one's soul:

> Gaber opens his eyes, but because of the sunlight… why on earth does it seem so bristling with daggers?… he half closes his eyes. He takes a few steps… and stops. […] Walking through this open space, walking across this light bristling with daggers… […] The sunlight makes his clouded eyes dry and clear (Torkar 1984: 230).

Again here, like in the recurrent dream of the bat, the question is the return 'to where?' The world of illusions no longer exists and freedom cannot sooth this terrifying awareness: 'there's no joy in freedom' (Torkar 1984: 229).
The confusion of the colours is also an indication of a reality perceived as distorted, monstrous. Unbearable to the point of almost making one miss the solid prison walls:

> The worst thing is the sky. Gaber […] had forgotten

> what the sky was like, what the sky was. [...] How blue it is... no... how red it is... no, it's green... it's a corpse-like white. It's evil! It burns the pupils more than acid, more than fire does. Gaber closes his eyes so he doesn't get blinded. He puts out his left arm so he doesn't fall down. But what can he lean on? The wall... the wall... of the prison cell! (Torkar 1984: 229)

the psychological pressure of the interrogations, the torture suffered and the harsh prison conditions. Until the sad return to freedom, experiencing constant fear and an exhausting and frustrating wait for the rehabilitation that will arrive very late and will be disappointing. These experiences, albeit filtered through the novel, show a reader a glimpse of the suffering that remains, in essence, completely unspeakable.

In addition to being a literary work, the novel *Dying by Instalments* can also certainly be read as an expression of multiple traumas, really experienced by the author over the years: from the incredulous dismay at being arrested for no apparent reason,

Translated into English by Caroline Swinton

The research presented in this article was conducted within the framework of the PRIN 2022 PNRR project "Literature of Socialist Trauma: Mapping and Researching the Lost Page of European Literature (LOST)", ID: P2022Z45X8, CUP: B53D23029360001, Principal Investigator: Andrea Gullotta (University of Palermo). The project was funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research (MIUR) under the 2022 PRIN PNRR Call for Proposals, Directorial Decree No. 1409 of September 14, 2022.

Bibliography

Čeh 2008: Čeh, Jožica. 2008. 'Med fikcijo in resničnostjo v avtobiografski prozi', *Jezik in slovstvo*, 53(4): 23–35.

Čoh Kladnik 2012: Čoh Kladnik, Mateja. 2012. *Kulaški procesi v Sloveniji med letoma 1949 in 1951* (Ljubljana: Študijski center za narodno spravo).

Čoh Kladnik 2014: Čoh Kladnik, Mateja (ed). 2014. *Revolucionarno nasilje, sodni procesi in kultura spominjanja: zbornik prispevkov z znanstvenega posveta* (Ljubljana: Študijski center za narodno spravo).

Gomizel 2015: Gomizel, Virgil. 2015. *Moje življenje* (Trieste: Mladika).

Granda 2008: Granda, Stane. 2008. *Mala zgodovina Slovenije* (Celje: Celjska Mohorjeva družba).

Griesser-Pečar 2005: Griesser-Pečar, Tamara. 2005. *Cerkev na zatožni klopi. Sodni procesi, administrativne kazni, posegi "ljudske oblasti" v Sloveniji od 1943 do 1960* (Ljubljana: Družina).

Hofman 1981: Hofman, Branko. 1981. *Noč do jutra* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica).

Hrast 1991: Hrast, Radovan. 1991. *Čas, ki ga ni* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga).

Hrast 2007: Hrast, Radovan. 2007. *Viharnik na razpotjih časa* (Ljubljana: Forma 7).

Ivanič 1990: Ivanič, Martin (ed). 1990. *Dachauski procesi* (Ljubljana: Komunist).

Jančar 1998: Jančar, Drago (ed). 1998. *Temna stran meseca, Kratka zgodovina totalitarizma v Sloveniji 1945-1990* (Ljubljana: Nova revija).

Jerič 2000: Jerič, Ivan. 2000. *Moji spomini* (Murska Sobota: Zavod Sv. Miklavža).

Jevnikar 1990: Jevnikar, Martin. 1990. *Torkar, Igor (1913–2004)* in *Primorski slovenski biografski leksikon: 16. snopič Tič – Velikonja, 4. Knjiga*, ed. by Martin Jevnikar (Gorizia/Gorica: Goriška Mohorjeva družba), 32–34.

Jezernik 2013: Jezernik, Božidar. 2013. *Titov gulag* (Ljubljana: Modrijan založba).

Jezeršek 1989: Jezeršek, Janez. 1989. *Arhipelag Goli* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba).

Kvaternik 2001: Kvaternik, Peter (ed). 2001. *V prelomnih časih: rezultati mednarodne raziskave – Cerkev na Slovenskem v času komunizma in po njem (1945–2000)* (Ljubljana: Družina/TEOF).

Lenič 1997a: Lenič, Stanislav. 1997. *Moji spomini* (Ljubljana: Družina).

Lenič 1997b: Lenič, Stanislav. 1997. *Življenjepis iz zapora* (Celovec/Ljubljana/Dunaj: Mohorjeva založba).

Logar 1991: Logar, Cene. 1991. 'Goli otok', *Borec: revija za zgodovino, literaturo in antropologijo*, 43(4/5/6): 264–335.

Merlak 2001: Merlak, Ivan. 2001. *Za cerkev in narod. Življenjepis božjega služabnika nadškofa Antona Vovka* (Ljubljana: Družina).

Morabito 2024: Morabito, Rosanna. 2024. 'Memoirs of Trauma Halfway between History and Literature: Dragoslav Mihailović', *AvtobiografiЯ*, 13: 67-86

Previšić 2022: Previšić, Martin. 2022. *Zgodovina Golega otoka* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga).

Prunk 1962-1989: Prunk, Janko (ed). 1962-1989). *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije v Sloveniji*, vv. 1-7 (Ljubljana: Inštitut za zgodovino delavskega gibanja).

Pučnik 1996: Pučnik, Jože (ed). 1996. *Iz arhivov slovenske politične policije* (Ljubljana: Veda).

Rus 1960: Rus, V. 1960. 'O etičnih problemih graditve komunizma', *Perspektive: mesečnik za kulturo in družbena vprašanja*, 1(1): 25–54.

Scotti 2012: Scotti, Giacomo. 2012. *Il gulag in mezzo al mare: nuove rivelazioni su Goli Otok* (Trieste/Trst: Lint).

Škafar 2004: Škafar, Vinko. 2004. *Ivanu Škafarju v spomin* (Maribor: Postulatura).

Štrovs 2014: Štrovs, Marko. 2014. *Neme priče: množični poboji nasprotnikov komunizma 1941-1946* (Ljubljana: Nova obzorja).

Šturm 2015: Šturm, Lovro (ed). 2015. *O vzponu komunizma na Slovenskem: zbornik razprav* (Ljubljana: Inštitut Nove revije, zavod za humanistiko).

Tasić 1987: Tasić, David. 1987. *Goli otok* (Ljubljana: Delavska enotnost).

Torkar 1979: Torkar, Igor. 1979. *Deseti bratje: potepanje skozi sebe in čas* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba).

Torkar 1984: Torkar, Igor. 1984. *Umiranje na obroke* (Zagreb: Globus).

Vovk 2000: Vovk, Anton. 2000. *V Gospoda zaupam: iz zapisov nadškofa Antona Vovka* (Ljubljana: Družina).

Vovk 2003: Vovk, Anton. 2003. *V spomin in opomin. Osebni zapisi škofa Antona Vovka od 1945 do 1953* (Ljubljana: Družina).

Zupan 1982: Zupan, Vitomil. 1982. *Levitan: roman ali pa tudi ne* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije).

Irina Talevska

A 'Microhistory' of Trauma and Collective Memory: Aleksandar Aleksiev and the Goli Otok Experience

This paper analyses the written testimony of the Macedonian writer Aleksandar Aleksiev, which recounts his internment on Goli Otok, the Yugoslav political labour camp established in the aftermath of the Tito-Stalin split. It focuses on Aleksiev's subjective experience of the mechanisms of political repression, and ideological re-education.

The conceptual framework is grounded in Theodor Adorno's notion of working through trauma and its subsequent elaboration by Dominick LaCapra, who distinguishes between acting out and working through trauma in both individual and collective contexts. Within this theoretical paradigm, Aleksiev's testimony is understood not merely as a personal reckoning with past violence, but as a site of collective working through of trauma in post-Yugoslav societies. His account represents the experiences of Goli Otok inmates and could thus become part of a more inclusive and critical public memory.

By bringing Aleksiev's narrative into a dialogue with trauma theory and historiography, this paper argues that literary and testimonial texts are crucial to the process of collectively working through trauma. They enable the articulation of suppressed experiences, foster empathetic identification, and open a discursive space for re-evaluating the legacy of state violence. Aleksiev's testimony, in this sense, becomes not only a record of individual suffering but also a medium through which society might begin to confront and integrate traumatic pasts into a shared historical consciousness.

1. Goli Otok: A Brief Historical Premise

Following World War II, Yugoslavia closely followed the Soviet model in most aspects of its social and political structure: education, culture, economy, and the justice system. However, tensions arose over Yugoslavia's tendency to strengthen its regional role. These tensions culminated in the 1948 Resolution deliberated by the Cominform – an international organization of Communist parties (of Yugoslavia, USSR, France, Italy, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland and Czechoslovakia) – which condemned Yugoslavia for deviating from the Marxist-Leninist line in its internal and external affairs, and for leading anti-Soviet politics, among other things. In doing so the Resolution aimed to put pressure on

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-004
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Yugoslavia's leadership. Since the conflict was held outside public attention, the Resolution came as a surprise to many Yugoslav citizens. Economic and diplomatic isolation, and the threat of military intervention from the USSR, deteriorated the relations to a point of schism. In response to this, Yugoslavia began a campaign against perceived internal threats, targeting followers of Stalin but also those confused by the shifting political landscape or those who criticized the Yugoslav leadership; these groups were collectively labelled Cominformists. To isolate these individuals, the Yugoslav government established a system of prisons and camps, the most infamous being Goli Otok, which was opened in July 1949. Goli Otok was a barren island in the Adriatic Sea, chosen for its natural isolation and harsh conditions.

The exact number of people who passed through the Goli Otok labour camp system between 1949 and 1956 was a subject of speculation for decades. Estimates of those arrested and those who perished were often entangled in ideological disputes, particularly from the mid-1980s onward, when Goli Otok became a powerful symbol for discrediting the entire era of Yugoslav socialism. However, the files published by the National Archives of Zagreb in recent years attest that the number of prisoners was around 16,000 (Vujic 2013).

During Yugoslavia's dispute with Stalin, 862 women were also arrested and interned in camps under charges like those faced by men. The women were strictly segregated from male prisoners. They were held in special prison sections during investigations, tried in separate proceedings, and later transferred to women-only camps.

For illustrative purposes, I would cite the example of Ženi Lebl, a Serbian journalist born to a Jewish family, who ended up on Goli Otok for the mere pleasure of telling a joke. Namely, a colleague once told her a joke about how Yugoslavia won an international flower competition because it had a 100-kilogram white violet, referencing the song entitled *Comrade Tito, Our White Violet, the Entire Youth Loves You*. Soon after she shared the joke around the office, Secret Service (UDBA, Directorate for State Security) agents arrived, accusing her of speaking against Tito and failing to report the 'enemy of the people' from whom she had learned the controversial joke (Lebl 1990: 61–69). In a similar vein, Dimče Najčeski, an anti-fascist,

who took part in Yugoslavia's National Liberation War, and former detainee of Goli Otok asserts

> In the still ambiguous situation, the organs of persecution employed every means at their disposal – provocation, entrapment, deceit, and manipulation – to 'verify' the loyalty of party members, and others as well, to the official policy. The insufficiently qualified police apparatus did not hesitate to use any means to demonstrate its zeal and efficiency. Members of the party found themselves at risk of being accused even for any careless or vaguely expressed word, let alone for voicing doubt or mistrust toward the state leadership (Najceski 1999: 9-10).[1]

2. Individual Trauma: The 'Microhistory' of Aleksandar Aleksiev

In calling the concentration camp 'nomos' of modernity, Agamben is arguing that it is not an aberration or an exceptional space but rather a paradigmatic one – a structural feature of the political and legal order of modernity. The camp is where individuals are reduced to bare life, a life stripped of political, social, or legal significance. In this sense, Agamben's thesis challenges the view that the atrocities of concentration camps are historical anomalies. Instead, he argues that they are intrinsic to the structure of modern sovereignty and governance. According to the philosopher, the camp is the hidden truth of modernity: a space where the logic of inclusion and exclusion, central to the nation-state and modern law, is laid bare (Agamben 2005: 185-201). It could be argued that Goli Otok constituted a phenomenon inherent to the structures of postwar state sovereignty, with its 'shadow' persisting long after its formal dismantlement. Immediately after the break with Stalin, the Yugoslav authorities considered it a necessity, as it served as an expedient to maintain the unity of the party, which was regarded as vital and not subject to compromise (Calic 2024: 212) and thus became instrumental in shaping Yugoslav socialist ideology. For those who supported Stalin – writes Jelena Vujic – the years that followed were marked by suffering and personal tragedies.

[1] All translations from this text are my own, I.T.

For others, however, the Resolution brought the hope of a better life, as it enabled Yugoslavia's separation from the Soviet bloc, led to the liberalization of life within the country, and opened the door to Western culture in an irreversible way (Vujic 2013). However, there is also a more uncompromising perspective regarding the historical significance of Goli Otok. In the compilation of testimonies edited and annotated by Dimče Najčeski, an anonymous testimony, bearing the signature 'X.Y.Z.' employs markedly harsher language when reflecting on this chapter of history:

> The only true historical significance of the greatest and most terrifying site of torture in Tito's Yugoslavia – Goli Otok – does not lie in the legend that it was there (and in other such 'Goli Otok' islands) that a 'break with Stalinism' was enacted, as the rulers and official propagandists of that former quasi-socialist state tirelessly repeated from 1949 until the demise of the second Yugoslavia. On Goli Otok, Tito and his clique brutally crushed the vital core of the Revolution – the very force capable of offering critique, and which possessed the courage to do so when the political and economic conditions were sufficiently ripe (Najčeski 1999: 17).

In the wake of Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Cominform there were citizens who never understood why they were interned in the Goli Otok prison camp, and the phrase 'I never understood why' was a sort of a trauma trope that permeated their whole life. In a similar vein, the writer Aleksandar Aleksiev – who at the time was a student – declared an 'enemy of the people,' found himself bewildered and unable to fully grasp the events unfolding around him. He was one of many who were – according to his account – falsely accused of being part of a student organization of Cominformists, and from November 13, 1949, to the end of August 1951, was interned on Goli Otok. The twenty-two-month agony spent in the inferno created by the Communist Yugoslav system was represented in his narrative testimony, a two-volume work: *Деветте круга на пеколот* [The Nine Circles of Hell, 1999], dedicated to his experience as an inmate on Goli Otok, and *Чардак ни на небо, ни на земја* [Neither on Heaven nor on

Earth, 2003], dedicated to his life in the aftermath of his liberation. In his accounts, Aleksiev testifies to the physical suffering, and the humiliation endured in the labour camp, which aimed for 're-education and attitude reform.' The postwar student generation was among the groups subjected to repression during the Cominform [*Informbiro*] period. The energy and enthusiasm directed toward rebuilding a country devastated by war – particularly through its educational and cultural institutions – were overshadowed by the abrupt shift in political direction taken by the Yugoslav authorities. Aleksiev's testimony is also corroborated by Najčeski's writings on Goli Otok:

> The optimism (of the students) was clouded by the political upheavals following the appearance of the IB Resolution [...]. Young people, who had come to study and build their life careers, full of enthusiasm and hope, suddenly found themselves behind bars, subjected to brutal humiliation, physical and psychological torture; they were sent to camps for political prisoners. Although they had virtually no political background, they were required to revise their views and political beliefs. Everything that was happening to those young people was so senseless, so absurd. At the very first step into the world of adults, they collided with harsh reality (Najceski 2006: 47-48).

Like many written testimonies on the camps, Aleksiev's work is both a novel and a historical account. It weaves together history – but, viewed from a ground-level perspective, through the eyes of an individual who experienced and endured 'history'– also personal memory. Regarding the relationship between these two domains of experience, Dominick LaCapra emphasizes that history and memory, as modes of writing, should neither be conflated nor treated as entirely oppositional (LaCapra 2001: xx). In this relationship – neither in conflation nor in opposition – history and individual memory, in this specific case, are intertwined with trauma. This intersection of the three concepts – history, individual memory and trauma – in witness narratives establishes a dynamic relationship and, in my view, should be explored as a triad when dealing not only with personal, but with collective trauma

as well. As Cathy Caruth asserts 'through the notion of trauma [...] we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not' (Caruth 1996: 11). In line with this argument, LaCapra rightly observes that individual trauma is always inherently connected to the social and political conditions in which the subject is immersed and can only be understood and addressed in relation to them (LaCapra 2001: xi).

It is precisely this intersection of history, memory, and trauma that, in Aleksiev's case, may be most productively understood through the lens of 'microhistory.' Microhistory emerges in explicit contrast to grand, teleological historical narratives that privilege state actors, ideological coherence and institutional continuity, and shifts the analytical attention to a small scale: to individual lives, subjective experiences, and seemingly marginal events. Far from reducing historical significance, this change of scale allows for a more incisive examination of how power operates, how ideology is internalized and enforced, and how historical violence is experienced at a personal level. In this sense, microhistory interrogates it from below, exposing its blind spots, silences, and moral contradictions.

Approached in this way, Aleksiev's witness narrative acquires analytical value, not despite its subjectivity, but precisely because of it. His personal account functions as a condensed site in which broader sociopolitical dynamics, including state repression, ideological discipline, mechanisms of surveillance, and the production of 'enemies of the people,' visibly affect a single life. Aleksiev's experience thus operates as a microhistorical prism through which the structural logic of the Goli Otok system can be grasped: how abstract political decisions translated into embodied suffering, moral disorientation, and long-term psychic injury. The convergence of history, memory, and trauma at the level of personal experience renders visible what grand narratives tend to obscure, namely, the human cost of political projects and the ethical consequences of state power.

The literary form is particularly suited to this microhistorical perspective. Literary witness narratives provide an interpretive space in which factual referentiality and subjective reflection coexist, allowing the past to

be explored not only as a sequence of events but as a personal, affective, and ethically charged experience. When literary expression is relieved of the constraints of a model of writing that presents itself as self-sufficient, it enables a deeper engagement with consciousness, moral ambiguity, and the temporality of trauma. In doing so, it illuminates the complexity of ethical questions related to existence, the socio-political systems in which individuals are embedded, and the contingencies that shape those systems.

This microhistorical and literary mode of reflection fosters critical engagement with structures of power and prompts a reassessment of individual agency and responsibility within one's immediate sphere of influence. By foregrounding the singular without losing sight of the systemic, it resists both abstraction and relativization. As such, microhistory emerges here not merely as a methodological choice, but as an ethical stance, one that insists that the meaning of history must be sought where it was lived, suffered, and remembered. This reflective practice remains one of the few meaningful tools available for imagining and improving the future of socio-political communities, particularly those still struggling to confront unresolved traumatic pasts.

In this sense, the relationship between history, individual memory, and trauma can also be understood through what LaCapra describes as a *double bind*. Traumatic experience places the subject in a condition in which remembering is both ethically necessary and potentially retraumatizing, while forgetting or silencing, though seemingly protective, risks denial and historical erasure. Witness narratives thus emerge from a structural tension: the witnesses are compelled to testify and yet remain marked by the impossibility to fully articulate the traumatic event. This tension gives rise to what LaCapra terms an *aporia* – a point of impasse where representation both becomes indispensable and reveals its own limits (LaCapra 2001). The aporetic dimension of trauma does not signal the failure of historical or literary discourse but rather marks the site where history must be rethought in relation to affect, loss, and ethical responsibility. Literary witness narratives are particularly suited to engaging this double bind and inhabiting the aporetic space it produces. Rather than resolving the tension between saying and not saying, literature can formally register hesitation,

fragmentation, and temporal disjunction, thereby acknowledging the limits of representation while still insisting on the necessity of testimony. In this way, the aporia becomes not an obstacle to understanding, but a critical mode through which the passage from personal to collective trauma can be ethically negotiated.

Equally important, literature has an inherently subversive quality, enabling it to challenge dominant paradigms and encourage transformative thought. The essential feature of witness narratives lies precisely in their performative aspect, through which meaning is shaped: ethical aspects of the event are revealed, emotional responses are elicited, and trauma is engaged beyond the mere statement of facts. Within the performative aspect of Aleksiev's 'microhistory,' I would explore one concept related to trauma, drawn from the field of psychoanalysis that Adorno, and later historian Dominick LaCapra builds on, namely, the concept of 'working through' trauma. Further down in this paper, I will focus on the (un)successful process of dealing with collective trauma.

I argue that Aleksiev's testimony narrative – whether on a conscious level or not – is undoubtedly part of the author's engagement with the concept of working through trauma. Although we lack more detailed writings that would allow us to draw conclusions about the author's intention in writing his testimony, Aleksiev's work is in line with that of other authors who, in the late 1990s, published documents and testimonies related to the Goli Otok experience. Some of these authors sought to engage with this chapter of history, which had remained unspoken until the dismantling of Yugoslavia. They expressed an urgent need to tell their experiences, thereby contributing to a more truthful account of this grim period in Yugoslav history. However, Aleksiev is among the few former inmates who reworked their testimony into a literary form, shaping it through a narrative structure: he structures narrative time through the use of analepsis when reflecting on the postwar innovations of the new government, and constructs a plausible protagonist within the Goli Otok events – one free of ideological burden, portrayed instead as a student caught in the whirlwind of historical upheaval.

2.1. Working through Trauma

The notion of 'working through' trauma has been utilized in trauma studies, drawing on its psychoanalytic foundation, but attentive to its ethical, even political, dimension as well (Ganteau 2020: 131). Working through trauma – as elaborated by historian Dominick LaCapra – is a process of coming to terms with trauma by critically engaging with it and understanding it, enabling individuals or societies to acknowledge and integrate the past in their lives without being overwhelmed by it. Engaging in the process of working through trauma is an act of articulation. It allows one to distinguish between past and present, acknowledging that an event occurred in the past – whether personally or collectively – while remaining aware of the present and open to the future. This does not imply a rigid separation between past and present, but rather that working through trauma can help counteract the cycle of reenactment and compulsive repetition (LaCapra 2001: 22). Hence, it may counteract the process of acting out as a feeling of an 'ethical' imperative to be faithful to experienced trauma. What is central to this concept are its foundational elements: memory, healing, and ethics (Ganteau 2020: 132): narratives of experienced trauma are not only essential for an individual's process of coming to terms with one's past, but also crucial for fostering an empathetic dimension within the objective study of history, thereby underscoring the profound ethical implications of past events. And what's important, moreover, is that this process necessarily relates the individual to the collective, the subject of trauma to society and the political processes that shape it. Adorno uses the term 'working through' ('*Aufarbeitung*') to describe the effort of reclaiming memories through the process of working through them, which he claims involves an open-ended engagement with history and memory that avoids reification and that will prevent a society to 'close the books on the past and, if possible, remove it from history' (Adorno 2005: 90).
The events that led Aleksiev to Goli Otok are represented with somewhat Kafkesque undertones. They began with him being unexpectedly accused by the president of the then Student's Organization. I will cite the episode that Aleksiev invokes in his memory:

> 'You have been branded an "enemy of the people",

an ingrate to the Party that gave you the opportunity to study while the working masses bled! And that, no less, with a scholarship of two thousand dinars…'. The hoarse voice of the student organization president echoed in my ears – a man concerned only with saving his own skin, indifferent to whether these grave accusations were true.
This – and far worse – was hurled at you in public, leaving you feeling like a dog with empty cans tied to its tail by malicious children, powerless to shake them off […]
'No, these are lies – at worst, a misunderstanding. I will prove it,' I reassured myself, continuing the dialogue with the gnawing worm of doubt that had taken root inside me that day, growing larger and more terrifying […]
Most of those expelled were accused of belonging to an underground, Cominform-linked student organization, whose supposed leaders were Goce Stefanovski and Dimče Najčeski, both fourth-year students. And so, a chance meeting with them in late 1948 was enough to have me branded an enemy of the people! (Aleksiev 2000: 11-13)

It is plausible that his correspondence with Dimče Najčeski was among the factors leading to his arrest and subsequent imprisonment on Goli Otok, as Najčeski himself maintains:

> The period from 1949 to 1954 is rightly called the darkest era in the life of Tito's Yugoslavia. This period, in fact, was characterized by extremely harsh state terror directed against communist internationalists – those who were both great patriots and consistent supporters of proletarian internationalism, and steadfast opponents of the bearers of savagery – revived fascism. The massive state terror was evident in the fact that it was not only directed against the communist internationalists themselves, but also against their family members, close relatives, and even their personal friends (Najčeski 1999: 13).

The accusations raised against Aleksiev were followed by de-

tention within the facilities of the Department for State Security, where they questioned him and forced him to sign a document claiming allegiance to the Communist party of Yugoslavia, and his willingness to help carry out the Party's program. However, despite his willingness to cooperate, a process was already set in motion, which ultimately led Aleksiev to Goli Otok.

What is interesting in Aleksiev's case is that he completed the first volume in 1999 – almost fifty years after his release from Goli Otok and eight years after Macedonia's independence. Two reasons for this prolonged silence can be detected. A possible explanation for the long-lasting silence – that falls within the field of psychoanalysis – may lie in the hypothesis that camp survivors endure a prolonged process of mourning in which victims cannot detach themselves from trauma and stay bogged down in suffering. 'In victims themselves – LaCapra writes – trauma, instead of calling for processes of working-over and working through, may be valorised as a limit experience or as stigmata demanding endless melancholy or grieving, whose mitigation or rendering in narrative is perceived as objectionably consoling or even as sacrilegious' (LaCapra 2001: xv). We might hypothesize that a prolonged process of mourning, which for the author evolved into long-term grief, accounts for the extended period between the traumatic event and its eventually being worked through in this witness narrative. Since, as Freud sustained, what cannot be identified as belonging to the past is repeated in the present (Ganteau 2020: 133), the urge to convey this traumatic memory could be read as a part of the process of grief giving way to the process of working through it. By framing his testimony in a narrative, he is already engaging in such a process. Within Aleksiev's strong desire to rebuild his life after the camp experience, there is tendency to attain to what the historian Saul Friedlander defines individual common memory, that 'restores the self to the normal pre and post-camp routines, but also offers detached portraits, from the vantage point of today, of what it must have been like then […] Individual common memory, as well as collective memory, tends to restore or establish coherence, closure and possibly a redemptive stance, notwithstanding the resistance of deep memory at the individual level' (Friedlander 1992: 40-41). Especially in the second volume of the memoir –

besides Aleksiev's effort to restore his life and chart a path forward for himself – snippets of what Friedlander calls deep memory emerge unexpectedly, but mostly in the form of psychological scars, that translate themselves into a sensation of deteriorating selfhood:

> Lord, will I ever find a strong enough and long enough pole to help me balance and safely cross the wire stretched over the abyss that once again gapes within me [...] Or, exhausted and desperate, will I finally sit among the beggars, lean against the railing of the Stone Bridge, and with an outstretched hand beg the passerby: 'People, have mercy, grant me a crumb of reason, since I have already lost my soul' (Aleksiev 2003: 58).

The complexities in post-traumatic processes consist in this constant agonism between the tendency for coherence and closure, and, on the other hand, working through the trauma as an open self-reflective process that, according to LaCapra, never fully reaches closure and it is deceptive to see it as consolation and a cure (LaCapra 2001: xxiii). And the constant reference to Goli Otok in the second volume of the novel attests to such agonism. In Aleksiev's case, working through trauma is also an 'articulatory practice' (LaCapra 2001: 22). Even nearly fifty years after the trauma occurred, Aleksiev articulates narration that is remarkably coherent and attentive to detail – whether regarding his detention and questioning by the Secret Service agents, the sequence of traumatic events on Goli Otok, or the emotional distress triggered by these experiences. He demonstrates an awareness that the trauma lies in the past, recalling it through memory while simultaneously situating himself in the present. From this present standpoint, Aleksiev's account illuminates how power operated within the framework of the 'state of exception' that was ideologically burdened. He testified to how the trauma was inflicted on the individual by state power structures – an individual trapped in the whirlwind of political events, too complex to fully comprehend as they unfolded – but also to the ways in which the individual responded to these power dynamics. Reading Aleksiev's account provides a clear view of the mimicry mechanism employed by the State – to insinuate itself into the fabric of socie-

ty – in order to identify the so-called 'enemies of the state:' during the Cominform period, everyone could have been a potential collaborator to the Secret Services, and in that sense, every single citizen was a potential enemy.

> Well, from the very first day of work, I realized that silence on Goli Otok was more valuable than dry gold! One of the conditions to survive. Don't ask questions, don't answer questions. Even if someone mentioned heavy rain, even that would be twisted into something like: 'They treat us like cattle, forcing us to work in this rain!' For such, and similar ramblings, I had a prepared response: 'My overcoat doesn't leak. And even if it did, I enjoy working in such weather! It's both cool and refreshing!'
> Meanwhile, I made sure not to let it slip that my overcoat was English. And indeed, it was English. And if by any chance I mentioned that it was English, who knows what kind of story some unfortunate soul would weave. At best, that I was agitating for capitalism, just because I praised my English overcoat, that socialist countries are incapable of producing quality goods, that socialism was losing the battle against capitalism. God forbid! (Aleksiev 2000: 108-09).

Despite the severity of his experience, on a subjective level, Aleksiev has managed to work through his past: although the memory of the terror and violence he endured persisted, he distanced himself from the trauma and actively engaged in the healing process, not only by writing about his experiences, but also by building a successful professional career – despite being under constant scrutiny by the Yugoslav state apparatus during the later period of Yugoslavia – and in the independent Republic of Macedonia that followed. However, relying solely on the concepts of acting out and working through the trauma in Aleksiev's case could lead to overinterpretation. Although the Goli Otok period officially ended in 1956, its political repercussions were felt strongly for decades afterward. Considering the broader political context, Aleksiev's prolonged silence was due to the Yugoslav Secret Services forbidding former inmates from speaking about their expe-

riences at Goli Otok: they remained objects of scrutiny, even long after their release (Calic 2024: 215). One should not neglect the fact that Goli Otok prison was active until 1988, long after the decommissioning of the labour camp system and reimprisonment was a very viable option for former inmates. As the former inmate Najčeski maintains:

> Those released from Goli Otok continued to live in a state of unfreedom. They remained under constant surveillance by the UDBA. They faced significant difficulties in securing even the most basic forms of employment and were continually subjected to harassment and provocation by 'loyal' party members – supporters of the USSR – as well as by the 'newly minted' communists (in reality, sycophants and unscrupulous careerists). The old, anathematized communists, even after regaining their so-called 'freedom,' remained targets of mistreatment and social ostracism by the officials of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) and other socio-political organizations (Najčeski 1999: 16).

Only after Macedonia's independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, and with the emergence of lustration as a public discourse, prior to its institutionalization as a legal mechanism, did Aleksiev feel free to write his testimony. Whether in Aleksiev's case or of the other few authors who wrote about Goli Otok, alongside their intuitive process of working through their trauma, they struggled to bring this issue to the public forefront and ignite a debate that would initiate the collective process of addressing this trauma. Their articulatory practice means engaging with history, testimony, and narrative in a way that allows for ethical and responsible engagement with the past rather than an uncritical or purely emotional response. These testimonial forms of storytelling are also significant in social and political contexts where there is a reluctance to confront the past critically, as it remains a challenging and arduous endeavour.

Aleksiev's personal suffering on Goli Otok, while deeply individual, cannot be separated from the collective trauma endured by thousands of Yugoslav citizens branded as 'enemies of the people.' His testimony functions not only as a record of personal anguish but as a medium

through which the shared experiences of silenced inmates are preserved. In articulating his memory, Aleksiev performs what Adorno describes as the ethical obligation to confront the past: he refuses to allow the trauma to be reified, and instead renders it in narrative form that demands reflection and moral engagement. As such, his narrative exemplifies LaCapra's notion of *working through* trauma, whereby individual memory becomes inseparable from the social and political conditions in which it was formed. By structuring his recollections and making them coherent, Aleksiev transforms private suffering into a collective testimony, enabling a broader societal apprehension of the mechanisms of repression, humiliation, and fear that characterized the Cominform period. In this way, individual trauma is simultaneously a lens for understanding and articulating collective trauma, highlighting the ethical and historical imperative to reckon with the past not only as a personal experience but as a shared wound requiring acknowledgment and integration into collective memory. This intertwining of personal and collective trauma not only illustrates the long-lasting impact of Goli Otok on individual lives but also underscores the persistent challenge for post-Yugoslav societies: without acknowledging and integrating these experiences, both private and shared, the legacy of repression continues to shape social and political realities long after the formal end of the camp system and its consequences.

3. Working through Collective Trauma: Is a 'Decent Society' Possible?

The consequences of Yugoslavia's split from the Cominform bloc were felt throughout the entire Federation, and especially in Macedonia, which was already burdened by an underdeveloped economy. The ambitious plans for large-scale infrastructure and industrial development – initially laid out as part of the first five-year plan – were ultimately undermined and fell apart. This collapse was largely because the planning had been heavily modelled on, and overly dependent upon, the structure and logic of the Soviet economic system. As a result, when broader political and economic conditions shifted – or when the inherent flaws of that system became apparent – the very foundation of the project was destabilized (Veljanovski in Najčeski 2006: 67). Moreover, the break had significant conse-

quences for the political status of Macedonia. On a personal level, it affected interpersonal relationships, and, perhaps most critically, it threatened the political unity within the Macedonian federal state.

With the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Macedonian society embarked on a path toward consolidating democratic institutions grounded in the rule of law and the development of a civil society. Among the processes encompassed by the broader framework of transitional justice – a process through which society was meant to confront and work through the darker periods of its past – the newly established political elite sought to confront the dark legacies of the previous regime, marked by significant violations of human rights. One of the components of this transitional justice agenda was the lustration process, which aimed to verify historical records and disqualify individuals from holding public office if they were found to have collaborated with the former secret services and contributed to the persecution or suffering of their fellow citizens during that period.

Although the lustration process is generally considered to have unfolded between 1991 and 2015, Macedonia did not adopt a lustration law immediately after independence in 1991. At that stage, lustration existed only as an idea, while a formal legal framework was introduced much later. During the first phase of this period (1991–2008), Macedonian authorities were unable to implement lustration, largely due to the generally positive public memory of the Yugoslav period, but also because a significant portion of the political elite leading the process of independence had previously held positions within the former system. This continuity was reinforced by the fact that the newly established Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), which played a predominant role during the transition, was widely regarded as the successor to the Communist Party. Even the right-wing VMRO DPMNE that won the elections in 1998 did not go through the lustration process. The same occurred when the government was formed again by SDSM in 2002.

This lack of capacity and/or the unwillingness to work through the past had its negative effects when the second phase of the lustration process (2008-2015) was followed by a number of controversies. The primary impetus for a comprehensive lustration act emerged in 2006, coinciding with the political transi-

tion from the former socialist government to the conservative party VMRO-DPMNE. The initiative of the Liberal party resulted in the introduction of a legislative proposal that was unanimously adopted in January 2008. This led to the establishment of the Commission for Verification of Facts in the subsequent year. The Commission was mandated to investigate individuals holding, or aspiring to hold, high public office, with the aim of identifying any affiliations with the former intelligence services. However, following the adoption of the legislation, public discourse primarily centred on the potential accountability of the elite and beneficiaries of privileges under the former Yugoslav regime. In contrast, issues concerning the victims of the regime – particularly the plight of Goli Otok detainees – were largely marginalized and never given prominence in the national conversation. In addition, in 2010 and again in 2012, the Constitutional Court ruled parts of the law unconstitutional – particularly criticizing the overly broad scope and the unequal treatment of citizens. As a result, certain provisions were repealed. Despite these rulings, the government introduced a second Lustration Law in mid-2012, this time without opposition support and in defiance of the Court's prior decisions, reintroducing previously struck-down provisions, thus raising serious legal and democratic concerns. These actions of the political elite created an atmosphere of distrust and paved the way for political retribution and the silencing of vocal opponents of the ruling party. Over time, lustration came to be widely perceived as a highly politicized process, increasingly used by dominant political figures as a tool to create political polarization and marginalize their opponents – including individuals who had themselves been victims of the Yugoslav regime. It proved to be a powerful instrument in the hands of the ruling elite – one that ultimately served to consolidate their power while sidelining political adversaries (Krtolica 2013). Following the ruling of the Constitutional Court that the lustration laws were unconstitutional, and under pressure from Brussels – since the laws contradicted the recommendations outlined in the European Council Resolution – lustration was eventually abolished in 2015.

This troubling episode in Macedonian society – which, at least nominally, aspires to establish governance grounded in respect for human rights and freedom of

expression – was, ironically, carried out by a political party that itself condemned and rejected the Yugoslav socialist regime. It serves as a symptom of a deeper societal malaise: a persistent attachment to unresolved trauma and an enduring inability to adequately work through the past. The detrimental effects of a society's unwillingness to develop the maturity required to move beyond its tendency to obscure or disregard past issues – rather than confront and resolve them transparently – are evident not only in the forgetting and consequent loss of developmental continuity, but also in the creation of fertile ground for the manipulation of unresolved collective trauma. Since this has never been fully acknowledged, it has never been genuinely worked through at the societal level. In the final volume, published in 2006, of the three-volume work *Голооточки сведошта* [Testimonies from Goli Otok, 1999, 2002, 2006], edited and annotated by Dimče Najčeski, the author/editor argues:

> Macedonian historical science is still gathering strength to undertake serious research into this period of Macedonian history. The few monographs on prominent individuals who suffered during the era of Goli Otok and the few academic gatherings on certain figures are not so much a confirmation of unpreparedness as they are a lack of courage to objectively speak about these historical events. Time writes its own history, older and more recent events come to light, new facts are revealed, but there is no one to record and explain them (Najčeski 2006: 6).

Nearly two decades later, the situation remains largely unchanged: a public, state-of-the-art debate among historians – conducted objectively and free from ideological bias – has yet to take place. Consequently, the issues surrounding the Cominform period and Goli Otok have remained largely marginalized. This marginalization has led not only to the erasure of these events from the memory of younger generations, but – more alarmingly – to their instrumentalization as a tool of political revanchism by the ruling elite in the country's recent past.

Furthermore, the reluctance to bring the history of Goli Otok to the forefront is evident within the education system itself. In

secondary school history textbooks, the topic is only marginally addressed under the broader theme 'The Cominform and its consequences for relations among the Balkan states,' which appears in the curriculum for the third year of general secondary education (Bureau for the Development of Education 2005). In the fourth-year syllabus, students are merely tasked with explaining the goals behind the formation of the Cominform and its consequences, yet the term 'Goli Otok' is not mentioned at all. Given this minimal and superficial treatment – this topic, for example, is largely absent from literature curricula – it is evident that an interdisciplinary approach to the topic – which I argue is essential for any meaningful societal process of 'working through' trauma – remains more an aspiration than a reality. One potential point of departure for such a process could be Aleksiev's *Nine Circles of Hell*, which offers a powerful narrative capable of initiating a collective confrontation with the trauma of Goli Otok. As Adorno asserts, 'A working through of the past understood as enlightenment is essentially such a turn toward the subject, the reinforcement of a person's self-consciousness and hence also of his self' (Adorno 2005: 102). In my view, this assertion applies not only to the individual, but also to the collective dimension of 'working through,' which requires conscious engagement with the past as a prerequisite for historical and moral understanding, a process that should be carried out primarily through the educational system.

Philosopher Avishai Margalit contends that the way societies engage with their past – particularly traumatic and morally charged events – is integral to the ethical fabric of those societies. For Margalit, collective memory transcends the mere preservation of historical facts; it is deeply implicated in shaping the moral identity and cohesion of a community. At the very beginning of his work *The Decent Society* he provides a clear definition of the concept: 'A decent society is one whose institutions do not humiliate people. I distinguish between a decent society and a civilized one. A civilized society is one whose members do not humiliate one another, while a decent society is one in which the institutions do not humiliate people' (Margalit 1996: 1). Recent historical events in Macedonia have demonstrated that institutions are not only capable of humiliating individuals but are structurally oriented towards production of humiliation

as a mode of governance. Not only were the calls for the rehabilitation of former Goli Otok inmates ignored, but an additional layer of irony emerged: the process of lustration – intended as a democratic safeguard – was instead weaponized to silence political opponents by falsely labelling them as collaborators with the former Yugoslav regime (Musai 2016).

A decent society, in Margalit's view, is not one that is flawless, but one that demonstrates a sustained commitment to confronting its historical injustices, acknowledging past wrongs, and ensuring that the remembrance of these events does not become a vehicle for perpetuating hatred, exclusion, or oppression. Such a commitment presupposes a process akin to the process of working through: an ongoing, critical engagement with the past that resists both repression and the false consolation of moral closure. Rather than seeking to resolve historical trauma definitively, a decent society must remain willing to inhabit the unresolved tensions and ethical discomforts that accompany an honest confrontation with injustice. Margalit also warns against the dangers inherent in selective memory, whereby dominant groups manipulate collective narratives by omitting or distorting aspects of the past that threaten prevailing power structures or national myths. This form of mnemonic control forecloses working through by transforming trauma into an instrument of ideological stabilization, thereby inflicting moral injury on marginalized groups and eroding the trust necessary for a functioning, pluralistic society. The suppression or denial of traumatic histories – particularly those involving systemic violence or exclusion – produces an aporetic condition in which the past remains simultaneously present and unacknowledged, generating unresolved ethical claims that continue to disrupt the social fabric.

Furthermore, Margalit emphasizes the decisive impact of collective memory on intergroup relations. In contexts marked by historical trauma, whether colonialism, occupation, genocide, or other forms of collective suffering, the way societies remember and narrate these experiences plays a critical role in either fostering dialogue and healing or reinforcing cycles of resentment and division. A refusal to engage with the aporia of traumatic history, to acknowledge both the necessity of remembrance and its inherent limits, risks allowing historical grievances to be instrumentalized in

the service of ongoing injustice. For Margalit, therefore, the ethical obligation of a decent society lies not only in what it remembers, but in *how* it remembers: through practices that sustain critical reflection, preserve the dignity of victims, and keep open the difficult but necessary work of ethical and political responsibility.

Can Macedonian society evolve into a decent society, in the sense proposed by Avishai Margalit? Unless we engage in meaningfully working through our past simultaneously within the educational system and the political sphere, we risk preserving a mentality that obfuscates and suppresses past traumas, along with their causes and consequences. Such avoidance fosters a culture resistant to confronting historical contingencies and, in doing so, perpetuates patterns that render society continually vulnerable to repeating them. As Adorno asserts: 'The past will have been worked through only when the causes of what happened then have been eliminated. Only because the causes continue to exist does the captivating spell of the past remain to this day unbroken' (Adorno 2005: 103). This, in turn, explains the vicious circle in which our society remains trapped.

The ethical significance of acknowledging both individual and collective trauma becomes evident when considering the foundations of a decent society. Societal institutions cannot claim moral legitimacy if they fail to recognize past injustices and the suffering they inflicted on both individuals and communities without instrumentalising it. Aleksiev's testimony exemplifies how personal narratives can illuminate broader patterns of oppression, providing a necessary foundation for public reflection and moral reckoning. Only when societies engage with history – through education, public discourse, and institutional accountability, can they begin to fulfil the ethical imperative of creating a society in which humiliation, exclusion, and the manipulation of collective trauma are actively resisted.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that Aleksandar Aleksiev's testimonial narrative constitutes more than an account of individual suffering: it functions as a critical site where personal trauma, collective memory, and societal ethics intersect. Situated within a microhistorical framework and read through Adorno's notion of

'working through', as further elaborated by Dominick LaCapra and informed by Cathy Caruth's understanding of trauma as a challenge to historical reference, the analysis has shown how individual testimony can mediate – under conditions of tension rather than resolution – between lived experience and collective historical understanding. In LaCapra's terms, such mediation unfolds within a 'double bind': testimony is ethically imperative in order to resist denial and erasure yet remains constrained by the limits of representation and the risk of retraumatization.

Unlike many traumatic narratives that foreground fragmentation or unresolved aporia, Aleksiev's account is characterized by coherence, temporal awareness, and reflective distance. This coherence does not signal the absence of trauma, but rather a sustained process of working through that acknowledges suffering without remaining captive to it. At the same time, the narrative does not eliminate aporia; instead, it negotiates moments of opacity and ethical tension without collapsing into silence or premature closure. In this sense, Aleksiev's testimony exemplifies narration as an articulatory practice that inhabits the double bind of traumatic memory while preserving its ethical weight and rendering it intelligible within a broader historical framework.

At the same time, individual working through cannot be disentangled from collective responsibility. Trauma produced by systemic political repression – such as that embodied by Goli Otok – extends beyond individual lives, shaping collective memory, institutional practices, and political culture. The marginalization of victims' experiences and the politicization of lustration in post-socialist Macedonia reveal a persistent failure to work through this legacy at the societal level, leaving the past suspended in an unresolved aporia and vulnerable to instrumentalization.

It is here that Avishai Margalit's concept of a 'decent society' becomes particularly salient. Defined not by moral perfection but by institutions that refuse to humiliate, a decent society requires an honest and inclusive engagement with historical injustice. Aleksiev's testimony offers a point of departure from this impasse. Seen as a microhistory, his account does not resolve the aporia of trauma but renders it ethically productive, challenging society to confront repression, recognize the dignity of victims, and resist the repeti-

tion of exclusion and violence. Ultimately, the path toward a decent society necessarily passes through memory, testimony, and critical self-reflection – processes in which literary witness narratives play an indispensable role.

The research presented in this article was conducted within the framework of the PRIN 2022 PNRR project “Literature of Socialist Trauma: Mapping and Researching the Lost Page of European Literature (LOST)”, ID: P2022Z45X8, CUP: B53D23029360001, Principal Investigator: Andrea Gullotta (University of Palermo). The project was funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research (MIUR) under the 2022 PRIN PNRR Call for Proposals, Directorial Decree No. 1409 of September 14, 2022.

Bibliography

Adorno 2005: Adorno, Theodor. 2005. *Critical Models. Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press).

Agamben 2005: Agamben, Giorgio. 2005. *Homo Sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (Torino: Einaudi).

Aleksiev 1999: Aleksiev, Aleksandar. 1999. *Devette kruga na pekolot* (Skopje: Sigmapres).

Aleksiev 2003: Aleksiev, Aleksandar. 2003. *Čardak ni na nebo, ni na zemja* (Skopje: Sigmapres).

BRO 2018: Biro za razvoj na obrazovanie (BRO). 2018. <https://www.bro.gov.mk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/02/Nastavna_programa-Istorija-III_GO-mkd.pdf> [accessed 15 20 November 2024].

Calic 2024: Calic, Marie-Janine. 2024. *Tito – Večniot partizan. Biografija*, trans. Ksenija Čočkova (Skopje: Ili-ili).

Caruth 1996: Caruth, Cathy. 1996. *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).

Friedlander 1992: Friedlander, Saul. 1992. 'Trauma, Transference and 'Working through' in Writing the History of the 'Shoah', *History and Memory*, 4 (1): 39–59.

Ganteau 2020: Ganteau, Jean-Michel. 2020. 'Working-through' in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, ed. by Colin Davis and Hanna Maretoja (London and New York: Routledge), 131–40.

Krtolica 2013: Krtolica, Marko. 2013. 'The Process of Lustration in Republic of Macedonia: Facing the Past or Facing Political Opponents', *Iustinianus Primus Law Review*, 4 (2), 1-13.

LaCapra 2001: LaCapra, Dominick. 2001. *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).

Lebl: 1990 Lebl, Ženi. 1990. *Ljubičica bela: vic dug dve i po godine* (Beograd: Kultura).

Margalit 1996: Margalit, Avishai. 1996. *The Decent Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

Musai 2016: Musai, Semra. 2016. 'Desetici tuzbi protiv odlukite na lovcite na spioni' <https://prizma.mk/desetitsi-tuzhbi-protiv-odlukite-na-lovtsite-na-shpioni/> [accessed 15 November 2024].

Najčeski 1999: Najčeski, Dimce (ed.). 1999. *Golootocki svedostva,* Tom 1 (Skopje: Menora).

— 2002. *Golootocki svedostva,* Tom 2 (Skopje: Menora).

— 2006. *Golootocki svedostva,* Tom 3 (Skopje: Menora).

Vujic 2013: Vujic, Jelena. 2013. *Dosije: Goli Otok* <https://www.noviplamen.net/dosije-o-golom-otoku/> [accessed 15 November 2024].

Ekaterina Gurtovaya

The Remains of the Self: Trauma, Gender, and the Residue of Soviet State Violence in Nina Bardina's *My Life*

This paper examines the representation and interconnection of trauma and identity in the memoir *My Life* [Moia zhizn'] by Nina Bardina. It focuses primarily on sexual violence as an essential aspect of women's gendered experience in the Gulag. The article demonstrates how Bardina's narrative overcomes the taboos that surround the issue of violence as well as the silence and inability to speak linked with trauma. Using the approaches of trauma studies, it aims to trace the textual presence of trauma and to examine how the process of writing might become a means of coping with it. It shows how, on the one hand, the narrator's identity is destroyed by the impact of state violence and, on the other hand, is reasserted through the very act of writing and recording her own experiences and the crimes of the Soviet state.

Between the 1920s and the 1950s, few families in the USSR were not affected by the widespread repressions taking place across the country. Throughout this period, millions of people were executed, sent to labour camps, exiled, deported, stripped of their right to vote, and persecuted in other ways. In the post-Stalin years, the regime began to weaken, and mass releases of political prisoners from labour camps and indefinite exile started. People resumed a relatively normal life: they sought rehabilitation, restrictions on residing in major cities were lifted, and many were able to see their families for the first time in years. However, the traces left by decades of repression could not be erased or ignored: millions had been executed or had died in the camps, children grew up without their parents, years of imprisonment had taken a toll on the health of the repressed, and returning to freedom was a major challenge for many.[1]

Already in the 1950s, many former prisoners started documenting their experiences in prisons and camps after their release or even while still in exile. In 1962, *One Day in the Life of*

[1] For more information on the difficulties concerning counting the number of victims ofrepressions, see Applebaum 2003: 578–86.

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-005
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Ivan Denisovich [Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha] by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was printed in *Novyi Mir*, raising hopes that memoirs of the camp experience might at last be published openly. Although these hopes were not fulfilled, the appearance of the work itself sustained a sense of possibility and inspiration for the authors of the Gulag, lingering even after the end of the Thaw and the establishment of Brezhnev's authority (Barenberg 2022: 221–22). Besides, some literary texts of the Gulag (for example, *Journey into the Whirlwind* [Krutoi marshrut] by Evgeniia Ginzburg, *My Recollections* [Moi vospominania] by Ekaterina Olitskaia, and *Brief Tales* [Kratkie povesti] by Lev Konson) were distributed through samizdat (Toker 2000: 52, 55, 62). For the most part, however, people wrote privately, with no hope of publication and even in fear of being persecuted for their testimonial texts. Nonetheless, despite the horrors of imprisonment, they felt the urge to return to those memories. Some of them were motivated to write, on the one hand by a sense of duty toward those who were executed or perished in camps, and on the other hand, by a desire to prevent similar events from happening again, which is explicitly articulated in some texts.[2] Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that there are other, unspoken reasons for returning to painful memories of imprisonment that are connected less with the intended audiences of these accounts and more directly with the authors themselves. Other purposes of the act of writing are likely to be witnessing one's experience, giving agency to one's life, and processing trauma.

Until recently, it was uncommon to view Gulag literature through the lens of trauma studies. However, in the last few years, this approach to Gulag texts has become increasingly popular.[3] This paper is based on the works of Cathy Caruth, who, drawing on Freud's ideas, explores reflections of trauma in history, literature, and culture. In this article, I aim to identify traces of trauma in Nina Bardina's camp memoir *My Life* [Moia Zhizn'] (composed presumably in the late

[2] This kind of motivation can be found, for example, in memoirs by Evgeniia Ginzburg *Journey into the Whirlwind* and by Ol'ga Adamova-Sliozberg *My Path* [Moi put'].

[3] Only in the past two years have two thematic journal issues appeared: *Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny* (vol. 71, no. 4, 2024) and *AvtobiografiЯ* (no. 13, 2024, published 15 November 2025), both devoted to trauma in the literature of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

1980s, published in 2004) and to show what narrative strategies are used to represent violence in her text.[4] I also intend to show how, in this regard, the identity of the narrator is constructed in Bardina's writing. When discussing identity, I refer to the main concepts of life-writing listed by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, namely memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment, and agency (Smith et al. 2010: 21–62).

Caruth argues that the nature of trauma is that the event occurs a moment before the mind can comprehend it, so that in order to grasp it, it returns later in the form of nightmares, flashbacks, and painful repetitions of the victim's actions. What matters is not so much the horror of the event itself as the impossibility of comprehending it; trauma emerges because of the gap between the experienced threat of death and the fact of unexpected, almost accidental survival (Caruth2009: 571–72). As will be demonstrated in this paper, this perspective appears to align with Bardina's memoir, which is focused on the issue of survival in a state of incapacity to preserve one's identity due to traumatic experiences.

Bardina describes her childhood in the traditional idyllic manner as the only truly happy time of her life. She depicts it as joyful and loving, filled with parental affection and the remnants of pre-revolutionary life – things especially dear to the narrator: encounters with the members of the Golitsyn family, one of the noblest Princely Houses in pre-revolutionary Russia; visits from her grandmother who lived in the United States; life in a historic mansion in Perm'. The text is filled with longing for old Russia – a world Bardina herself never lived in, yet one she still feels to be her own.

When speaking about the author, it is important to take into account the milieu from which she came. The social groups

[4] The SIEC Memorial Archive contained a typewritten copy of the memoir, brought by the author herself, presumably in the late 1980s or early 1990s. At the time, Bardina's memoir was titled *About Time and About Myself* [O vremeni i o sebe] (Bardina n.d.), but in 2004, when it was published in print, it appeared under the title *My Life* [Moia Zhizn']. Such an adjustment seems meaningful. Since the memoir covers the author's life from her childhood in the 1920s up until her rehabilitation in 1955, it might be assumed that Bardina claims that a life-defining part of her story took place during the period of her formative years and incarceration. Moreover, the later events are not only considered unworthy of being recounted, but it is also as if they were of no significance to her life. In 2026, SIEC Memorial was closed due to court prosecution.

which the authors of the memoirs represent are discussed in detail by Irina Shcherbakova in her article 'Remembering the Gulag: Memoirs and Oral Testimonies by Former Inmates' (Shcherbakova 2003: 195–97). A significant number of Gulag memoirists were former Party officials and activists who, for many years, had felt that they were an integral part of the Soviet state, enthusiastically building the new world, and their memoirs reflect this position. Many of these texts consist of memoirs written in the 1950s – 1960s when the official narrative placed all responsibility for political persecutions on Stalin's cult of personality. These accounts frequently combine, on the one hand, the assertion of one's own innocence and, on the other hand, the preservation of loyalty to the Communist Party and faith in Soviet principles and ideals opposed to the lawlessness established by Stalin.[5] This allows narrators to preserve their identity as communists and maintain a sense of belonging to the Soviet state while in camps, even though that state rejected them.[6]

Bardina, however, came from a different milieu: she was the daughter of a man alien to the Soviet regime from the beginning, a White officer who had served in Alexander Kolchak's army. From early childhood, Bardina observed not only how her parents and their circle of former nobility had to adjust to a new state system in order to survive and work within Soviet society, but also how their rights and opportunities were restricted because of their social background.[7] After Kolchak's defeat, her entire family decided to settle in the Urals, far from the capitals, since they feared being arrested. Yet despite this precau-

[5] A similar position can be found in the memoirs of Miriam Antsis, Mariia Gol'dberg, Iadviga Verzhenskaia and others. These texts could be consulted in the SIEC Memorial Archive.

[6] Nanci Adler proposes several possible mechanisms that can explain the survivor's loyalty to Soviet ideology after their release from the camp. Her main argument is based on the well-established idea that the Communist Party was viewed as a church-like organisation, while the belief in state ideology was faith-based. Alternative explanations include the theory of cognitive dissonance, traumatic bond, and other. For more on the reasons why victims of repression remained loyal to the Soviet regime and what mechanisms were used to maintain this allegiance, see Adler 2012.

[7] For example, in the wake of his arrest, Bardina's father decided to burn his diploma from England, which immediately limited his chances of securing a good job.

tion, her father was arrested twice in the 1920s but was released each time. The depiction of her father's arrest is associated with awakening from sleep, both literally and figuratively: on the one hand, the arrest takes place at night, when Bardina is asleep; on the other hand, it marks an awakening from the peaceful, idyllic dream that is Bardina's childhood:

> Вдруг все это обрывается. Приходят ночью какие-то люди, меня сонную уносят на кухню, утром в доме все перевернуто, мама плачет, папы нет, его увели, арестовали. Мой папа архитектор, но за нехваткой строителей в городе, да и вообще в первые годы пятилеток, он работает на строительстве. «Горит на работе» – часто слышу я. У него иностранный диплом, и это ему не прощают. Мы больше не живем в этом особняке, ютимся с мамой на одной кровати в бедной еврейской семье (Bardina 2004: 9).[8]

Caruth emphasizes that trauma can return in the form of nightmares. In this case, Bardina's father is arrested at night while she is asleep, thereby transforming the situation into a waking nightmare. Furthermore, the narrator's state of somnolence mirrors the state of memory lapses, a trauma symptom. Bardina's morning awakening to a world in which her father has disappeared for reasons that are unclear to a child, and in which the domestic space around her has become distorted, mirrors the mechanism of trauma described by Caruth: a traumatic event occurs moments too early for the mind to comprehend it.

The new Soviet world was being built on the ruins of the old one, leaving no place for the values nurtured in pre-revolutionary Russia – a clash that Bardina continually underscores. Her

[8] 'Suddenly, it all comes to an end. In the middle of the night some men arrive; half-asleep, I am carried into the kitchen; in the morning, the house is turned upside down, my mother is crying, my father is gone; he has been taken away, arrested. My father is an architect, but because of the lack of construction workers in the city, and in the early years of the five-year plans in general, he works on construction. "He burns the candle at both ends" I often hear people say. He has a foreign diploma, and that is something he is not forgiven for. We no longer live in that mansion; my mother and I huddle together in a single bed in a home of a poor Jewish family'. All translations from this text are my own – E.G.

happy memories are linked to people persecuted by the Soviet state: a Jewish family, mentioned in the quote above, whose father is arrested after the end of the NEP; a group of nuns to whom Bardina's father takes her to study; and the impoverished Golitsyn family, one of whose young princesses becomes the narrator's English teacher. Therefore, although the author portrays a child's world filled with love and care that appears to protect her from external threats, constant reminders of Soviet reality are nevertheless ever-present and accompany the family's life.

Her recollection of family memories combines affection and pain that arises from her awareness of what lies ahead: her father's execution, two arrests of her mother, and her own two arrests. In her text, there is a ghostly presence of a life she might have had, not only in the imagery of old Russia, but also in the decisions her parents made: her father chose not to emigrate during the Civil War; her mother refused to send Bardina to live in the United States with her grandmother; and Bardina herself, persuaded by her friends and ignoring her own instincts, agreed to let a woman stay with her who would later report her to the authorities. These episodes are perceived as turning points in life, moments when the narrator's fate could have taken a different path, and these unrealized life scenarios continue to haunt her. In a sense, Bardina's life mirrors the history of the country itself: just as Soviet Russia still bears traces of its pre-revolutionary past, Bardina's life unfolds along two possible trajectories, yet remaining predetermined from the very beginning.

The attempted rape by NKVD chief Lavrenty Beriia can be viewed as the pivotal episode of the narrative. It should be noted that physical and sexual abuse often appears in women's memoirs of the Gulag, despite the fact that sexual practices in general, and sexual violence in particular, were taboo topics (Shapovalova 2012). It is noteworthy that when discussing physical violence, many women do not write about themselves but about incidents they heard of or witnessed. This might be one of the symptoms of trauma, since trauma is often surrounded by silence, as described by Caruth. She suggests that trauma lies not only in the traumatic event itself, but also in the inability to articulate it and in the failure of others to believe (Caruth 2009: 575–78). In the case of women's memoirs of the

Gulag, many victims themselves remain silent and do not talk about the abuse they experienced, but the accounts of their fellow prisoners bear witness to this violence.

In Bardina's *My Life*, on the other hand, there are no omissions in her description of sexual assault, only precise, harrowing details of everything from the moment of her arrest to her escape from Beriia's private room in NKVD headquarters at Lubianka square. Structuring this episode, the narrator does not name Beriia until the very end, calling him 'a general' (Bardina 2004: 59–64); however, the reader can guess who is in front of her based on distinguishing features and a recognizable image. This makes it possible, on the one hand, to construct the victim's state of consciousness, and on the other hand, to let the reader know more than the narrator. The reader anticipates the development of events, thereby reinforcing the naivety and immaturity of the narrator, who fails to comprehend the general's intentions.

The scene is constructed on the contrast between two figures and two worlds: a naïve girl and a cunning NKVD chief. He attempts to seduce her with luxury – a lavish dinner, rich furnishings, warmth – all sharply contrasting with rationed, starving wartime Moscow and the devastation of Bardina's family. By that time, Bardina's father has already been arrested and executed, though she herself does not know it yet; and her mother has already been arrested twice. The narrator believes that her own transfer to Lubianka is linked to her mother's persecution. She emphasizes her own childlike consciousness and naivety, as she is not aware of Beriia's intentions. His harassment only deepens Bardina's sense of disorientation and alienation.

Bardina's encounter with Beriia undoubtedly carries a symbolic meaning. It marks a clash between two worlds that are completely detached from one another. At the beginning of her memoir, Bardina describes her encounters with former aristocrats and members of noble families. She underlines that despite poverty, hunger, and humiliation they endured in the early Soviet years, they preserved their honour, dignity, and education. In Beriia, however, the narrator faced the new ruling elite that appears to be lustful, insatiable, and deceitful.

As has already been noted, Bardina's text places considerable emphasis on the theme of the narrator's lack of control over her own life. Several times, cru-

cial decisions were made for her or against her own will. The episode with Beriia, however, reflects one of the few moments when the narrator demonstrates active resistance precisely at the moment of the greatest danger, absolute vulnerability, and complete powerlessness in front of another person:

> Я сопротивлялась молча, отчаянно, но удавалось только вертеть головой – грудь, шея, живот были в его распоряжении. Видя свою беспомощность в таком привычном, вероятно, для него деле, он стал душить меня, но, видимо, овладеть мною он желал все-таки живой, а не мертвой, и поэтому временами отпускал меня – прислушивался, жива ли, и продолжал снова, видимо хотел обессилить. Но я была молода и хорошая спортсменка, а он был стар и пьян. Я боролась за честь, а он за удовлетворение своей похоти, что он имел, по-видимому, в большом количестве и без сопротивлений. В какой-то момент он прижал меня так, что я, видимо, потеряла сознание (Bardina 2004: 65–66).[9]

In this fragment of confrontation, the text contains no trace of despair. On the contrary, this scene represents a moment of complete concentration of the narrator's inner strength and capacity for resistance, the point of the highest tension in the entire text. This portrayal is in sharp contrast to the rest of the memoir, where Bardina consistently emphasizes her lack of personal agency.

The appearance of Beriia in this episode is not a mere coincidence. Beriia, the NKVD chief, was the person to whom the petitions for case reviews were addressed and was consequently the figure with absolute authority. During the Khrushchev

[9] 'I resisted in silence, desperately, but all I could do was twist my head – my chest, my neck, my stomach, were at his mercy. Seeing my helplessness in what was likely for him a familiar act, he began to strangle me. Yet he seemed to want to take me alive rather than dead, and so from time to time he let me go – listening whether I was still breathing – and then resumed, apparently trying to exhaust me. But I was young and a good athlete, and he was old and drunk. I was fighting for my honour, and he for the satisfaction of his lust, which he had likely enjoyed in plenty and without resistance. At some point he pressed me down so hard that I must have lost consciousness.'

Thaw, Stalin was the symbol of absolute evil, bearing full responsibility for the terror; some figures from the Soviet security services were also held responsible, and Beriia, executed in the end of 1953, became an embodiment of this evil as well. Thus, his appearance in this episode is significant, as the narrator confronts not an ordinary investigator, but a personification of the repressive system.

Bardina's time in the camp is also depicted as traumatising, marked by humiliation, beatings, illness, and isolation. She describes her legs deteriorating from untreated disease, a suicide attempt, and two forced abortions, not hiding any unpleasant physiological details. It seems that she tries to shock the reader with bodily details in order to overcome the indescribability of the traumatic experience and thus convey the suffering she has endured. The issue of the inexpressibility of the camp experience has been addressed in the research literature on numerous occasions, for example, by Luba Jurgenson (Jurgenson 2003) and Renate Lachmann (Lachmann 2024: 298–314). The issue of employing voice to verbalize the unspeakable, or on the contrary, of silences connected to specific themes and experiences in some narratives, is also discussed in studies of autobiographical writing (Smith et al. 2010: 83–85).

Moreover, Bardina seeks to document her physical state as evidence of her experience. The description of physiological details and symptoms is comparable to that of a medical examination, thereby contributing to the documentary nature of the text. Bardina's inclusion of diary entries from 1949 in her autobiography serves the same purpose. This enables her to document her condition at the time, namely the consequences of her imprisonment and her post-release state. Jurgenson's research places particular emphasis on the timing of the testimony's composition and, consequently, on the distance between the author and the events they recount. On the one hand, the gap between the author and the lived experience makes evaluation and comprehension possible: it allows not only for portraying reality but also for reflecting on the experience. On the other hand, this very distance inevitably alters the representation of reality, as interpretations accumulate over time and memory cannot retain every detail of events (Jurgenson 2003: 13–16). The incorporation of diary entries within the narrative serves to diminish the perceived distance between Bardina and her

traumatic experiences, thereby emphasizing the factual nature of her testimony.

A recurring theme in women's camp memoirs is the significance of female friendship within the confinement. Such friendly communities were formed at different stages of imprisonment: in investigative prisons, during transport (*etap*), and in camps. Rosalind Marsh states that women's literature in Russia, in contrast to that written by men, is distinguished by an emphasis on female friendship and notes that this topic is particularly prevalent in the unofficial camp and prison literature of the late Soviet Union (Marsch 1998: 21). Women describe how they, for example, helped each other while they were working, read letters from home together, sang songs, recited poetry, and made crafts from improvised materials. Zhanna Popova explains that clandestine crafts performed by women in camps became a means of resistance, a way of maintaining ties to home, and a source of emotional support (Popova 2024: 899). However, in contrast to many other memoirists who highlight the role of the female community and the mutual support in confinement, camp life in Bardina's narrative is presented as lonely and isolated.

The conditions in the labour camps were extremely harsh for both men and women. Prisoners endured exhausting physical work, poor nutrition, and widespread illnesses. Work quotas for both genders were calculated according to male standards and were unrealistic even for healthy individuals, let alone for debilitated prisoners (Popova 2024: 891). This issue is widely covered in Gulag memoirs, with women writing extensively about forced labour in the camps. They described being assigned to logging, agricultural work, and peat harvesting, despite having no training and being weakened by hunger and severe fatigue. For instance, Bardina recounts her first work in the camp: 'Я была совершенно не приспособлена к тяжелому физическому труду, а приходилось таскать тяжелые "окарята" – деревянные ящики с четырьмя ручками, наполняемые бетоном. Полный ящик весил 80 кг' (Bardina 2004: 89).[10] Food rations depended on the fulfilment of the labour norm: exceeding the norm meant a larger portion, while failing to meet it resulted in a reduced ration. Memoirists

[10] 'I was completely unaccustomed to hard physical labour, yet I had to carry heavy "okariata" – wooden boxes with four handles that were filled with concrete. A full box weighed 80 kilograms.'

highlight the vicious circle whereby unrealistic norms combined with a decline in strength due to lack of nutrition led to failure to fulfil the norm, resulting in the prisoners receiving a smaller portion, feeling even weaker and consequently being unable to fulfil the norm. This is how a Gulag prisoner Khella Frisher writes about agricultural works in the camp in her memoir:

> Уборочная все еще тянулась. Это потому, что всерьез трудились только «58-я», кормящие матери и беременные. А мужчины – уголовники – это преимущественно люди без профессии и трудовых навыков. Поэтому и без всякой дисциплины. Работать они согласны лишь на «выгодных» местах или единолично. В бригаде они придерживались «туфты» – видимости работы (Frisher 1989: 377).[11]

Frisher places particular emphasis on the challenges faced by mothers and pregnant women, who not only did not receive any special working conditions in the camp, but also found themselves among those prisoners who bore the brunt of the hardest labour.[12] At the same time, criminals, who were in a privileged position in the camp compared to political prisoners and were not constrained by moral notions of honesty and conscientious work,[13] were described by Frisher and other memoirists as having easier conditions.[14]
Another aspect of women's existence in the camp, that was also directly related to labour, is

[11] 'The harvest was still going on. This was because only political prisoners, nursing mothers, and pregnant women were working in earnest. The men – criminal offenders – were mostly people without a profession or any real work skills. As a result, they lacked discipline. They agreed to work only in "advantageous" positions or on their own. In the brigades, they resorted to *tufta* – the mere pretence of work.'

[12] To learn more about motherhood in the camp, one may consult the article by Elaine MacKinnon, who draws on women's camp memoirs for her research (MacKinnon 2019).

[13] For more on the position of criminals in the camp, and the ways in which they are portrayed in camp memoirs, see Renate Lachmann's book *Lager' i literatura: Svidetel'stva o GULAGe* (Lachmann 2024: 188–218).

[14] However, it is important to note that the testimonies presented are not those of criminals themselves, but rather the recollections of members of another social group, which are frequently written through a lens of bias. Consequently, it is needed to approach these testimonies with a critical eye.

the fact that they faced the constant threat of sexual violence, which was a gender-specific aspect of their experience. This violence occurred at all levels, whether it was perpetrated by investigators, camp administration or fellow prisoners. Popova recalls the case of Elena Markova, who rejected the proposition of a camp doctor and was sent to work in a coal mine for that (Popova 2024: 895). Tamara Petkevich also recollects her time in Sevzheldorlag when the head of the Culture and Education Unit, abbreviated as KVCh, forbade the doctors to release her from hard labour at the logging site, despite her severe scurvy, because of her resistance to his abuse (Petkevich 1993: 208–09).

Although communication between men's and women's barracks was officially prohibited, connections between men and women nevertheless existed and the camp administration created the conditions that made such interactions possible (Bell 2015: 199). These relationships played different roles: some arose from genuine feelings, others from coercion, and others from the desire to gain privileges and survive. Most women's accounts of incarceration contain scenes of violence, whether they recount their own experiences or describe violence they have witnessed. Shapovalova in her article 'Sestrenki, mamki, damki: tema nasiliia v zhenskikh lagernykh memuarakh' cites and references dozens of memoirs and interviews by the former female Gulag victims which provide descriptions of sexual violence (Shapovalova 2012). The sheer volume of texts mentioning violence, despite the taboo nature of the topic, demonstrates the extent to which it permeated camp life.

Many women told stories in their memoirs of love and devotion to an imprisoned or executed husband, but an equally important subject in women's narratives becomes the theme of camp love. For example, such a storyline emerges in the memoirs of Tamara Petkevich, Evgeniia Fedorova and Evgeniia Ginzburg. A similar plot appears in Bardina's writing; however, it seems to be quite uncomfortable and to bear signs of trauma. While in the camp, Bardina forms a relationship with another prisoner, Vsevolod Vasil'evich, which is her first experience of male attention and protection, something she desperately needs. The image of her lover and of their entire relationship seems deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, the narrator refers to this man's love as

a source of happiness: 'Мало-помалу я стала зализывать свои раны, и вот Бог послал мне это счастье – любовь Всеволода Васильевича, которую я меньше всего ожидала' (Bardina 2004: 112).[15] The camp is depicted as a place of complete despair, cruelty, and isolation; therefore, the encounter with a person willing to demonstrate human compassion and attentiveness is portrayed as a form of moral support that helped her survive in harsh conditions. On the other hand, nearly all the episodes involving him that Bardina recounts are connected with pain, discomfort and violence. While she verbally affirms the love and happiness associated with Vsevolod Vasil'evich, the text provides no actual confirmation of these feelings. On the contrary, it clearly reveals a dissonance between the desired image and the actual experience:

> Наши отношения очень долго оставались невинными. Вспышка влюбленности прошла, и я снова стала девочкой. [...] Когда я плакала, он вытирал мне нос своим платком и часто гладил меня по голове, как ребенка. Я очень привыкла к нему и уж почти не могла обходиться без него. Понадобился год, чтобы наше знакомство перешло в дружбу, затем в привязанность, и еще год – в любовь.
>
> Встречи наши были уродливы, а близость оскорбительна. Мне это не приносило никакого удовольствия – одно только: сделать для него радость, хоть этим украсить его жизнь. Кроме того, вечный страх – застанут, накроют, стыд, позор перед всеми, а в первую очередь перед нашими друзьями (Bardina 2004: 116).[16]

[15] 'Little by little, I began to lick my wounds, and then God sent me this happiness – the love of Vsevolod Vasil'evich, which I least of all expected.'

[16] 'Our relationship remained innocent for a long time. The outburst of being in love passed, and I became a girl again. [...] When I cried, he would wipe my nose with his handkerchief and often stroke my head like if I was a child. I grew deeply used to him and could hardly do without him. It took a year for our acquaintance to turn into friendship, then into affection, and another year – into love.
Our encounters were ugly, and our intimacy humiliating. They brought me no pleasure – only the wish to bring him some joy, to brighten his life at least in this way. Besides, there was the constant fear – of being caught, ex-

Bardina's descriptions of this relationship are filled with both gratitude and revulsion, as his attention also carried expectations she did not wish to meet, including sexual relations and dangerous abortion that they had to perform themselves, without any professional medical assistance. This bond is primarily associated with feelings of disgust and shame, stemming from the taboo surrounding sexual intimacy.

After the first abortion, which was performed by Vsevolod Vasil'evich himself, the narrator became pregnant a second time, shortly before her release from the camp. The decision of whether to keep the child or to terminate the pregnancy fell entirely on her. The complexity of this decision seems to originate from two interrelated motifs. First of all, it is linked to Bardina's childlike position. She entered the camp at a very young age, as a student, and kept a naïve, immature worldview, in part because the camp reality severely limited opportunities to gain new experiences. Describing her relationship with Vsevolod Vasil'evich, she calls herself 'a girl,' recognizing her own need for his care and desire to feel like a child in his presence. Secondly, as has already been mentioned, she had almost always found herself in situations where decisions were made for her, which reflects loss of personal agency and the persistent conditions of captivity. For this reason, she likely felt the need to share the responsibility for the child's fate with its father. Nonetheless, even though Bardina attempted to perceive Vsevolod Vasil'evich as a mature, reliable figure, the narrative consistently undermines this image. While she secretly waited for him to choose to keep the baby, he responded with silence and unwillingness to either take responsibility for the child's future or to make the decision to terminate the pregnancy. His failure to share this responsibility with her left her isolated, and this isolation mirrors the broader logic of captivity that shaped her existence in the camp.

It is important to note that the relationship between Bardina and Vsevolod Vasil'evich is represented in the text through the intersection of two conflicting dynamics: a parental one and an intimate one. This is reflected even in the form of the name she uses in her narrative, calling him by his first and patronymic names, as if to emphasize the

posed, the shame, the disgrace to everyone, and above all to our friends.'

difference in their experience and age. Upon meeting Vsevolod Vasil'evich, the narrator observes that he shares her father's qualities, namely his 'subtle humour, bright mind and kindness' [чувство тонкого юмора, светлый ум и доброту] (Bardina 2004: 104). While she describes herself as 'a girl' protected by him, this childlike dependence is simultaneously overlaid with an element of physical intimacy. Perhaps this role mismatch is one of the reasons why the intimate aspect of their relationship is depicted so repulsively. While Bardina seeks to describe the connection as an experience of love, the narrative reveals it as a form of dependence shaped by unequal power and an element of coercive, unwanted intimacy.

Significantly, the decision to undergo an abortion coincides with the moment of Bardina's liberation, marking a transition into a new life, which, paradoxically, proves to be even more difficult than life in the camp and is represented not as resolution but as another form of constraint. Many memoirists explain that release did not mean freedom – life had been destroyed, and a new one had to be built from scratch. Former prisoners were subject to limitations regarding their choice of residence and employment opportunities. Moreover, encounters with families are frequently described not only as joyful but also as an emotionally challenging experience. Deprived of social status as a former prisoner, psychologically scarred by violence and unaccustomed to independent existence and decision-making, Bardina finds herself unable to adapt to life outside the camp and describes the emptiness and numbness that filled her existence. Having spent her formative years in captivity, the narrator essentially remains a child throughout. Entering the camp at such a young age, she had no examples of friendship, family, or romantic relationships and no opportunity to gain experience of forming such bonds. Upon leaving the camp, she finds herself helpless and just as lonely as before.

Even her reunion with her mother brings no relief. Memories of childhood, home, and the warmth of family ties remain one of the central motifs of the memoir; yet these too are shattered by the state, which separated the mother and the daughter and executed the father. The unsettled existence of the mother and the daughter after the camp is a clear contrast with Bardina's childhood memories, which also contain poverty and

deprivation, but which are at the same time full of love and happiness. It is evident that in her childhood the centre of the family was her father, with whom, as the author herself puts it, she was figuratively 'in love:'

> С позиции сегодняшнего возраста я могу сказать, что уже тогда я любила, была влюблена в своего отца. Никогда ни ласковый взгляд, ни теплое слово моей матери не наполняло мое маленькое сердечко такой неодолимой любовью и счастьем, как это было от прикосновения папиных рук, звука его голоса, его взгляда (Bardina 2004: 11).[17]

Despite the fact that there is no mention of the father in the post-camp part of the narrative, the attempts of the mother and the daughter to rebuild their life together is a tacit expression of the void left by the absence of the man who had formerly harmonized their family life. All that remained of their family world were fragments that could no longer be pieced together, for the repressed mother and daughter had been profoundly transformed by the years of separation. They had endured too many traumatic experiences apart, and instead of uniting them, this experience created a gap between them. This is how Bardina portrays the first moments of meeting again after years apart:

> По дороге мама ласкала меня взглядом, словами и руками, сколь позволяли условия, я же оставалась каменной, не могла ничем ответить на ее ласку. Спазм сжимал мне горло, и только какой-то хрип время от времени вырывался у меня. Как удар молнии, пронзило нас обеих сознание того, что мы теперь совсем другие, что прошлого, о котором мечтали все эти годы, прошлого нет, а есть другое, и мы совсем, совсем другие, из других молекул сделаны теперь. Только теперь мы поня-

[17] 'From the standpoint of my present age, I can say that already then, I loved, I was in love with my father. Never did a tender glance or a warm word from my mother fill my little heart with such irresistible love and happiness as the touch of my father's hands, the sound of his voice, or his gaze.'

ли, что с нами сделали (Bardina 2004: 128).[18]

It is the encounter with her mother that becomes the moment of reflection on Bardina's camp experience, since this scene of reunion highlights the changes that occurred in both characters. Bardina feels an obligation to take an adult position and provide a source of support for her mother, while still needing maternal guidance and occupying a child's position. At the same time, she comes to the realization that the past that united them before is lost forever and that the destructive camp experience separates them.

In despair, after another suicide attempt, Bardina asks a local KGB chief to be sent back to the camp. Even after experiencing all the horrors of imprisonment, she still feels that life there, despite its traumatizing nature, may be preferable to freedom, because the camp's system is familiar to her and she has known no other way of living. For all the striking effect of this scene, it must be noted that such a motif appears not only in Bardina's memoir. A similar scene is presented, for example, in the recollections of Iadviga Verzhenskaia, who, having lost a job, went to the local NKVD and demanded to be returned to the camp together with her son and mother (Verzhenskaia 1992). After release, former prisoners were usually subjected to residence restrictions in major cities or were sent into exile. Many continued to live near the camp and even to work there, but as free labourers. Therefore, even after being discharged, people remained in a situation of unfreedom, and the state systematically prevented their reintegration into society, which reinforced their isolation and loneliness.

In Bardina's text, a profoundly marginalized, gendered, and deeply isolated subject is presented. The final sentence of the memoir reads as an admission of the complete destruction of identity: 'Так прочно жила во мне тюрьма. Она сделала меня другим человеком, состоящим

[18] 'On the way, my mother caressed me with her gaze, with words, and with her hands, as far as the situation allowed, while I remained stone-still, unable to respond in any way to her tenderness. A spasm tightened my throat, and only a kind of rasp would escape me from time to time. Like a lightning strike, the realization pierced us both that we were now completely different, that the past we had dreamed of all these years, the past was gone, and that there was something else instead, and we were entirely, entirely different, as if we were now made of different molecules. Only then did we understand what had been done to us.'

из других молекул, и даже кардинальные перемены в моей жизни не вырвали страха тюрьмы из моего сердца и всего, чем я была' (Bardina 2004: 157).[19] Therefore, the text concludes with an acknowledgement of the narrator's failure in the face of state authority and of the loss of everything that seemed to be valuable in the past. Unlike many authors who, alongside depicting the harsh working and living conditions of confinement, also describe ways of coping and surviving, such as love, friendship, and bonds with family, Bardina offers no such counterbalance. In her memoir, the destruction of the family world and the experience of state violence (both personalized in the figure of Beriia and institutionalized through imprisonment in the camp) become the predominant theme.

Nevertheless, despite the small manifestation of agency in the text, it can be argued that not only the physical repulsion expressed by the narrator in Beriia's private room, but also the act of writing itself, can be regarded as a way of resistance. Andrea Gullotta convincingly demonstrates, through the examples of Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov, how writing can serve as a means of processing trauma in some cases, while in others it can lead to retraumatization. From the descriptions of their creative work, Gullotta concludes that for Solzhenitsyn writing was a way of reflecting on the past, while Shalamov was never able to distance himself from his camp existence. Analyzing the ways in which the present and past tenses are used in the writings of both authors, Gullotta concludes that Solzhenitsyn was clearly aware of the difference between present and past experience, while Shalamov presumably suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and experienced severe re-traumatic flashbacks during the creative process (Gullotta 2021).

Bardina speaks with unusual openness for the genre, confronting taboo topics, medical and bodily details, vivid scenes of violence, depression, and multiple suicide attempts. This readiness to face such emotionally difficult themes, often disapproved by society, that might be retraumatising triggers as well, can be viewed as a way of resisting and recording the

[19] 'This is how firmly embedded prison lived within me. It made me a different person, composed of different molecules, and even the most radical changes in my life did not tear the fear of prison out of my heart or out of everything that I was.'

crime. Undoubtedly, alongside its literary nature, the genre of Gulag memoirs is inherently testimonial, and in Bardina's case this characteristic at times clearly comes to the forefront. Thus, she records in detail the trauma symptoms she had after the traumatic events she experienced (for example, after the attempted rape or after release from the camp) such as unaccountable fear, failure to go outside, memory lapses, and others. Another previously mentioned feature that reinforces the documentary and testimonial nature of the memoir is the inclusion of excerpts from the author's diaries, which she kept in the period after her release. This incorporation of documentary fragments into a later reflection on trauma through life writing allows the author to capture these symptoms by looking at them from a distance. It seems that although the text explicitly asserts the impossibility of overcoming trauma, writing the memoir nevertheless constitutes an attempt to process it, as the very act of writing becomes a means of resisting violence.

In conclusion, it can be stated that Bardina's memoir corresponds with Caruth's claim that 'survival becomes for the human being, paradoxically, an endless testimony to the impossibility of living' (Caruth 1996: 62). The narrative unfolds through the juxtaposition of two worlds: one associated with family life and pre-revolutionary Russia, and another shaped by the social and political realities of the Soviet period. From the beginning, however, these worlds are deeply intertwined, yet their interaction unfolds as a process of gradual repression that leads to the disappearance of family, home, and, in the end, the narrator's very sense of self. One of the indications of trauma may be the fact that release from the camp, that is, from a space that restricted freedom and was associated with physical suffering and emotional loneliness, is even more of an ordeal than being in conditions of unfreedom. The culmination of the impossibility of living is reached at the moment of attempting to return to the camp, to the situation of being on the verge of death. The failure to establish a sense of self and to grasp her own survival is asserted through the manifestation of a desire to return to the traumatic yet familiar situation of the camp.

At the same time, despite the narrator's own assertion of the total destruction of the self and the impossibility of living, the text reclaims her agency and becomes her main means of re-

sistance to violence. Documenting her experiences in detail and unafraid to address sensitive and taboo topics, Bardina regains her voice by confronting the imperative 'not to tell' generated from trauma.

The research presented in this article was conducted within the framework of the PRIN 2022 PNRR project "Literature of Socialist Trauma: Mapping and Researching the Lost Page of European Literature (LOST)", ID: P2022Z45X8, CUP: B53D23029360001, Principal Investigator: Andrea Gullotta (University of Palermo). The project was funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research (MIUR) under the 2022 PRIN PNRR Call for Proposals, Directorial Decree No. 1409 of September 14, 2022.

Bibliography

Adler 2012: Adler, Nanci. 2012. *Keeping Faith with the Party: Communist Believers Return from the Gulag* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

Applebaum 2003: Applebaum, Anne. 2003. *Gulag: A History* (New York: Doubleday).

Bardina 2004: Bardina, Nina. 2004. *Moia zhizn'* (Moscow: Vigraf).

Barenberg 2022: Barenberg, Alan. 2022. '"I Would Very Much Like to Read Your Story about Kolyma": Georgii Demidov, Varlam Shalamov, and the Development of Gulag Prose, 1965–67' in *Rethinking the Gulag: Identities, Sources, Legacies*, ed. by Alan Barenberg and Emily D. Johnson (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press), 220–42.

Bell 2015: Bell, Wilson T. 2015. 'Sex, Pregnancy, and Power in the Late Stalinist Gulag', *in Journal of the History of Sexuality*, XXIV, 198–224.

Caruth 1996: Caruth, Cathy. 1996. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).

Caruth 2009: Caruth, Cathy. 2009. 'Travma, vremia i istoriia', in Sergei Ushakin and Elena Trubina (eds.), *Travma: punkty. Sbornik statei* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie), 561–81.

Frisher 1989: Frisher, Khella. 1989. 'V nashei zhizni mnogo raz – "tak trudno eshche ne bylo"', in *Dodnes' tiagoteet. Vyp. 1: Zapiski vashei sovremennitsy*, ed. by S. Vilenskii (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel'), 356–439.

Gullotta 2021: Gullotta, Andrea. 2021. 'More Than a Cat: Reflections on Shalamov's and Solzhenitsyn's Writings Through the Perspective of Trauma Studies' in *The Gulag in Writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov: Memory, History, Testimony*, ed. by Irina Karlsohn and Fabian Heffermehl, *Studies in Slavic Literature and Poetics* (Leiden: Brill), 70–96.

Jurgenson 2003: Jurgenson, Luba. 2003. *L'expérience concentrationnaire est-elle indicible?* (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher).

Lachmann 2024: Lachmann, Renate. 2024. *Lager' i literatura: Svidetel'stva o GULAGe*, trans. by N. Stavrogina (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie).

MacKinnon 2019: MacKinnon, Elaine. 2019. 'Motherhood and Survival in the Stalinist Gulag', *Aspasia*, 13: 65–94.

Marsch 1998: Marsh, Rosalind. 1998. 'An Image of Their Own? Feminism, Revisionism and Russian Culture' in *Women and Russian Culture: Projections and Self-Perceptions*, ed. by Rosalind Marsh (Providence, Rhode Island: Berghahn Books), 2–41.

Petkevich 1993: Petkevich, Tamara. 1993. *Zhizn' – sapozhok neparnyi: Vospominaniia* (Saint Petersburg: Astra-Liuks; ATOKSO).

Popova 2024: Popova, Zhanna. 2024. '"Good fortune in the camps never lasted": Gendered experience of carceral labour in the Soviet Union, 1930–1953', *Gender & History*, 36(3): 890–903.

Shapovalova 2012: Shapovalova, Veronika. 2012. 'Sestrenki, mamki, damki: tema nasiliia v zhenskikh lagernykh memuarakh' in *Bytovoe nasilie v istorii rossiiskoi povsednevnosti (XI–XXI vv.)*, ed. by Marianna Murav'eva and Nataliia Pushkareva (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo Universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge), 142–68.

Shcherbakova 2003: Shcherbakova, Irina. 2003. 'Remembering the Gulag: Memoirs and Oral Testimonies by Former Inmates', in Elena Dundovich, Francesca Gori and Emanuela Guercetti (eds.), *Reflections on the Gulag: With a Documentary Appendix on the Italian Victims of Repression in the USSR* (Milan: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli), pp. 187–207.

Smith et al. 2010: Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. 2010. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

Toker 2000: Toker, Leona. 2000. *Return from the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press).

Archives

Bardina n.d.: Bardina, Nina. [n.d.]. *O vremeni i o sebe: vospominaniia*, Fonds 2. Collection of memoirs and literary works, RU12707902-arch-doc-688800, Archive of SIEC Memorial.

Verzhenskaia 1992: Verzhenskaia, Iadviga (Irena-Iadviga). 1992. *Vospominaniia*, Fonds 2. Collection of memoirs and literary works, RU12707902-arch-doc-689909, Archive of SIEC Memorial.

Andrea F. De Carlo

The Gulag of Polish Poets. Shame and Guilt in Poetry Born from Traumatic Experiences

Drawing on several poetic texts written in Soviet labour camps, this paper aims to identify and investigate the functions and determinants of moral emotions, with reference to the so-called evaluative self-conscious emotions (shame and guilt) and to the differences between them in terms of cognitive evaluation and regulation strategies. More specifically, the article deals with the role of these emotions on the cognitive processing of the traumatic event in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

From Komi to Kolyma

The trauma of World War II, deportations to concentration camps and the Gulag has been the subject of a wealth of testimonial literature, including a vast number of documents, autobiographies, and memoirs by Polish survivors (see Świetlikowski 1997; Tołczyk 2009; Sariusz-Skąpska 2012; Kopka 2019; Knyt 2022; Ciborowska 2024). Writers and poets who experienced firsthand deportation to various forced labour camps throughout the USSR felt compelled to write, and the form best suited to the difficult conditions of the camps was undoubtedly poetry. From testimonies, we know that poetry was a widely practiced medium and enjoyed the greatest popularity among exiles. In fact, while the most famous literary works on the concentration camp universe in prose were mostly composed sometime later, it was mainly compositions in verse that were written in the camps, as poetry served various functions and, first and foremost, responded to the prisoners' need not to succumb to spiritual annihilation (Jaworska 2022: 73). It is no coincidence that, as Danish American psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk states, 'While trauma keeps us dumbfounded, the path out of it is paved with words, carefully assembled, piece by piece, until the whole story can be revealed' (Van Der Kolk 2014: 276). This statement is particularly apt in the case of the Poles deported to the Soviet Union between 1939 and 1941, who included poets, prose writers, scholars, journalists, and publicists. Writing alone or in a group became not only necessary in order to bear

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-006
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

witness to the hell of the Gulag, but it was also a way to resist and survive the pain and trauma of imprisonment, to save one's individuality from being levelled and annihilated. Although their creative drive was stifled by unfavourable circumstances (malnutrition, disease, and lack of resources), we know from testimonies that for those deported to labour camps, writing was an excellent remedy for escaping their terrible reality. Polish writer Jerzy Stempowski learned from a German witness who spent eleven years in the Gulag that in the most crowded Soviet camps piles of manuscripts were hidden and ended up in the archives (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 6-7; see also Morawiec 2011, 2023).

Today we know that in prisons and labour camps, the need for words was no less distressing than the hunger for bread (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 6). According to Janusz Kowalewski, prisoners in Zamarstyniv were sometimes willing to trade their bread and sugar rations for writing paper, smuggled-in newspapers, and scraps of books. In the absence of paper, oral creativity certainly played an important role, but birch bark could always be used, or sometimes even the wall of the cell or hut could become a medium on which to record one's words. For example, in the prison in Lukiškės Square in Vilnius, the poet Józef Bujnowski (1910-2001) wrote a poem entitled 'Polonez' [Polonaise] on the wall. He remembered it by heart and was only able to write it down when he arrived in Persia with Władysław Anders' army (see Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 7; Jaworska 2019).

The first poem by poet Ludwika Biesiadowska (1911-1989) was also composed in a Vilnius prison. She later wrote her testimony about the long journey that took her from the Lithuanian capital to Siberia in a freight car. The most eloquent example is the case of the poet Lech Piwowar (1909-1940) who was arrested by the NKVD and began to write down his experiences as early as October 20, 1939, while traveling in a wagon. In Starobil's'k, he continued to write in neat, uniform handwriting on cigarette papers. He folded these papers, bearing the Russian inscription 'Краснофлотец — Курительная бумага — Союзкультторг' [Red Navy Sailor – Smoking Paper – Soiuzkul'ttorg], into a small, pink-covered book, which he managed to save despite numerous searches. In a crowded camp, in the wet snow at sunset, he read the poem 'Ojczyzna która zewsząd idzie' [The Homeland that Comes from Everywhere] standing up, at a time

when they were still far from understanding what was happening to them (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 8).

A new creative period began after the Sikorski-Maiskii agreement and the so-called 'amnesty,' following the opening of the Polish Embassy in Kuibyshev in the Novosibirsk Oblast and the Polish Army headquarters in Buzuluk in the Orenburg Oblast. From all over the Soviet Union, tens of thousands of former Gulag prisoners, who would later become soldiers, flocked to the vicinity of Totskoe and Tatishchevo (see Gross 1983: 15-24). Józef Czapski (1896-1993) recalls how Władysław Broniewski (1897-1962) obsessively recited his last verses 'Zamieć' [Snowstorm] and 'Ujdi' [Go Away]. Teodor Parnicki recited a series of poems by Juliusz Słowacki, Julian Tuwim, Jan Lechoń, Aleksandr Blok, Andrei Belyi, and even Józef Wittlin's translation of Homer, arousing great enthusiasm among his comrades. The formation of the Polish army in the USSR led to the creation of the first songs and the publication of a series of military magazines, such as *Wracamy do kraju* [We Return to Our Country], *Niech żyje nasza Armia* [Long Live Our Army!], *Marsz Polaków* [Poles' March], and *My Legiony* [We are the Legions]. The camp magazine, handwritten and richly illustrated, *W marszu* [On the March], was published in eighteen copies. Handwritten periodicals were also distributed: *Żołnierz w polu* [The Soldier on the Battlefield], *Dojdziemy* [We Shall Arrive], *Ochotniczka* [The Volunteer], *Wznieś się, orle małe!* [Rise Up, Little Eagle!], *Łącznik* [Connector], *Łazik* [The Command Car], *Ulan nadwołżański* [The Uhlan on the Volga], *Ryś* [Lynx], and *Sitwa* [Clique]. In December 1941, the magazine *Orzeł Biały* [White Eagle] began to be published by the Polish Embassy in Kuibyshev, thanks to which poems by Antoni Słonimski, Stefan Baliński, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, Władysław Broniewski, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, and many others were disseminated. The works of Felix Konarski ('Myśmy w obronie wolności' [We Defend Our Freedom]), later sung by marching units, as well as those of Czesław Dobek ('Jesteśmy znowu wojskiem' [We Are an Army Again]) and Witold Szyfer ('Żelazny marsz' [The Iron March]) were created. Ludwika Biesiadowska wrote 'Hymn Ochotniczek' [The Volunteers' Anthem] and other texts that were composed in Buzuluk. In Totskoe, Maksymilian Baranowski (1913-2008) wrote entertaining and

patriotic poems to lift spirits, while others composed the musical accompaniment (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 9-10; see also Folejewski 1951, 222).

Poetry was written primarily at the request of the public, and it flourished and enjoyed the fervent support of Józef Czapski, then head of military propaganda. In Iangi-Iul, against the backdrop of the Tian Shan mountains and the distant Pamir range, writer and publicist Herminia Naglerowa (1890-1957) gave lectures on the poetry of the new Polish emigration. Among the military, Słonimski's poem Alarm [The Air-Raid Warning] enjoyed the greatest popularity: in the capital of the Komi Republic, during a Polish ceremonial gathering, it was even recited in Russian translation (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 10).

After Russia, Iran experienced another literary explosion of above-average quality. Polish poetry increased in Iraq and Palestine, where publishing houses worked through the night, preparing volumes of verse, even though printing presses with Latin characters were difficult to find. Baghdad then became a paradise for poet-soldiers, whose main press organ was *Kurier Polski* [The Polish Courier] (Gross 1983; Beaupré-Staniewicz et al. 1987). However, the publication of texts was affected by British censorship. One example was the order to leave a blank space where Jerzy Bazarewski's poem 'Droga na Północ' [The Road to the North] was to appear, which was only allowed to be published a year later. Józef Czapski's memoirs on Starobil's'k, for example, did not receive immediate approval for publication (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 14).

The Need to Write

The traumatic experience in the Soviet Gulag awakened in many the need to write and recount what they had experienced. Many of the Poles who arrived with General Anders' 2nd Army Corps on Persian soil wrote books about their experiences in the Soviet Union (see Gross 1983; Jaworska 2019). The poet and former prisoner Jan Olechowski (1917-1956) criticized the works of his fellow sufferers for their egocentric lamentations and self-martyrdom (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 19). Some intellectuals and writers who had remained silent began to write again: for example, the former exiles Paweł Hertz, Tadeusz Pieper, Anatol Stern, and others. Even those who remained in the West gave voice to their Siberian experiences, thus providing a model not only for émigré litera-

ture, but also serving as a counterpart to the literature of the Nazi concentration camps, since, according to Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, the Soviet and Nazi camps were 'totalitarian twins.' Or, as Shalamov stated in his story *Zhitie inzhenera Kipreeva* [The Life of Engineer Kipreev], Kolyma is defined as 'Освенцим без печей' [Auschwitz without ovens] (Shalamov 2004: 153).
This literature constitutes one of the most important branches of Polish writing in exile, suffice it to think of the great prose of Herling-Grudziński and Józef Czapski, authors of 'wicked books' that educated several generations of dissidents in Poland (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 19-20). For a long time, most of the poems produced in the labour camps were almost documentary in nature. Jerzy Święch defines this poetry as 'wiersze świadectwa' [testimonial poems] (Święch 1997: 271). In this regard, Nina Taylor-Terlecka observed:

A significant part of Gulag poetry is considered documentary, utilitarian literature: with the passage of time, it has had no influence. Abstracting from its artistic value, it was necessary, even indispensable, created with consciously practical purposes at the request of society [...] it testifies how even in the depths of despair, poetry allows one to live and survive (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 18).[1]

Beyond its aesthetic value, poetry was written out of necessity and was considered indispensable, even if for consciously utilitarian purposes. It was an inevitable conditioned reflex, an irreplaceable mental hygiene procedure for overcoming trauma. Therefore, it is largely a phenomenon on the borderline between psychology and sociology. Nevertheless, even the sparsest poetry takes on a collective, universalistic dimension. Undoubtedly, it was a priority for prisoners to communicate their thoughts and feelings, to ensure that what was written was easy to memorize and share, and this perhaps explains the choice of traditional metrical measures and the renunciation of innovative formal research.[2] Sometimes religious models are even adapted to the theme of the Gulag, such as the form of the psalm. Examples include

[1] Here and where not indicated, the translation is mine (AFDC).
[2] Regarding the characteristics of Soviet concentration camp poetry, see Pieralli 2013: 235, but also the studies by Gullotta 2012, Gullotta 2021, and Sucharski 2018.

'Modlitwa w drodze na zesłanie' [Prayer on the Way to Exile] by Halina Terlecka, 'Suplikacje' [Supplications] by Beata Obertyńska, and 'Modlitwa' [Prayer] by Janusz Wedow.

As these are poetic texts produced largely during a period of extreme hardship, they are more direct and spontaneous, allowing us to explore emotions such as shame, guilt, pride, and so-called self-consciousness (Lewis 2000), i.e., emotions in which self-reflection and self-evaluation are fundamental. They have moral effects in that they give rise to immediate feedback on the moral or social acceptability of behaviour and its effects. The idea that morality fails in extreme situations is a complex theme that runs through philosophy, psychology, and sociology. Evidence suggests that critical situations do not necessarily nullify morality, but often transform it, forcing people to redefine the boundaries between good and evil in order to survive. The silence that surrounded the experiences of the Soviet Gulag system for decades, combined with the deep sense of shame felt by many survivors, is a complex phenomenon rooted in trauma, fear, and the very nature of Stalinist repression.

Shame and Guilt

Many former prisoners suffered from a deep sense of guilt for having survived while millions of others died of starvation, cold, and forced labour. 'Survivor's guilt,' or paralyzing guilt, can arise for two reasons: a) because of living in a privileged situation at the expense of others or in comparison with others who appear to be more damaged (Kubany 1994); b) 'for actions or inactions that have increased the sense of threat to one's survival,' i.e., the perception of not having done enough to prevent the catastrophe and its consequences (Parson 1986). The tendency to feel guilty because of a traumatic event can be considered an externalization of feelings of fear and is rooted in feelings of helplessness and loss of control at the time of the catastrophe (Hendin et al. 1984). Clinical psychologist and psychotraumatologist Yael Danieli, defines guilt as 'an unconscious attempt to deny or "cancel out" powerlessness' (see Prot 2009: 83). This need applies to both survivors and their children. Guilt also functions as loyalty to the family or to the homeland. Aleksander Wat wrote in 'Wierzby w Ałma-Acie' [The Weeping Willow Trees in Almaty], 'Jeśli was zapomnę / Jeśli

cię zapomnę miasto rodzinne / […] / Jeśli cię zapomnę, walcząca Warszawo / w krwi spieniona Warszawo' [If I forget you / If I forget you, my hometown / […] / If I forget you, fighting Warsaw / Warsaw foaming with blood], Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 56-57). For deportees, guilt is a complex emotion that expresses assessments in relation to the self-model, with reference to a past state (similar to nostalgia and regret). Like all complex emotions, it is based on a fundamental emotion, which, in the case of guilt, is sadness. Even the theme of struggle is sometimes intertwined with nostalgia (Bellelli et al. 2009: 146). As proof of this, we quote a few lines from the poem 'Co mi tam troski' [I don't care] by Władysław Broniewski, published in the collection *Bagnet na broń* [The Gun Bayonet] (Broniewski 1943), which brings together poems written between 1939 and 1943:

> Byleby w garści karabin,
> taki co w boju nie chybi –
> Co mi tam śniegi Syberii,
> co mi tam piaski Libii!
>
> Co mi tam obóz, więzienie, głód, poniewierka, szkorbut –
> radość żołnierską ładuję, jak chleb i naboje, do torby.
>
> Na nic mi wszelkie nagrody, na nic mi wieńce sławy,
> potrzebne mi mocne buty, żeby w nich dojść do Warszawy.
> (Broniewski 1943: 21)

> As long as I have a rifle in my hand, one that will not miss in battle,
> I don't care about the snows of Siberia, I don't care about the sands of Libya!
>
> I don't care about the camp, the prison, the hunger, the poverty, the scurvy:
> I put a soldier's joy in my bag like bread and bullets!
>
> I don't care about honours, I don't care about crowns of glory,
> I need sturdy shoes to walk all the way to Warsaw.

The poem is closely linked to Polish history and Broniewski's biography. On January 24, 1940, the poet was arrested in Lviv. He spent eighteen months in vari-

ous Soviet prisons. Most of the Poles released during that period thanks to the Sikorski-Maiskii agreement joined the forces assembled under the command of General Władysław Anders, which would soon be sent to the front. The optimistic tone of the poem mentioned above stems from the hopes that Poles placed in the creation of Anders' army. They hoped for a fast victory, a return to their homeland, and its liberation from the German occupiers. The poem describes a state of euphoria, in anticipation of an improvement in their fate and that of their loved ones. As the title suggests, all worries cease to matter. Tirtaic themes are present, and the lyrical 'I' strives to inspire the struggle. He emphasizes his love for his homeland and hopes that his compatriots share it. He gradually regains his faith in victory and proudly observes the army, composed of soldiers previously held in prisons and labour camps. The opportunity to join the fight is the greatest joy for the lyrical 'I.' He shows no fear but infects others with optimism and energy for action. Faced with the possibility of regaining freedom, all worldly concerns cease to matter. The soldier in the poem has only one goal: to reach Warsaw. The poet uses metonymy, and the capital becomes a symbol for all of Poland. The soldier's boots and rifle symbolize the determination and strength of the Polish people. The lyrical subject pays no attention to anything else. He ignores difficulties and expects neither fame nor rewards. He may be one of many anonymous soldiers, as long as he achieves his goal. The good of his homeland motivates him to continue traveling the world. He has survived a long journey, captivity, hunger, and disease, so his experiences have left deep wounds, but the lyrical 'I' describes them in simple, military terms.

Those deported to the camps are humiliated people who feel they have been unjustly wronged and believe that others are to blame for the damage done to them. This experience should also provoke anger directed at others, an externalization of guilt (Lewis 1971; Scheff 1987) and strong feelings of revenge. This feeling emerges in the poem 'Homo sapiens,' in which Broniewski predicted, in the name of the fundamental principles of the French Revolution (1789-1799), who would drop the bombs when he became one of the horsemen of the Apocalypse who would ride across the earth. On Berlin, for its war crimes, on those who incited other peoples against each other to build for-

tunes in wars, as well as on those guilty of the Katyn massacre.

> Niechaj rycerze zmartwychwstaną
> I świecąc każdy piersi rana,
> Świadectwo dadzą krwi męczeńskiej,
> Tej krwi niewinnej, z ręki kata
> Przelanej w obca ziemie czerstwa,
> Ze zgrozą, lecz milczeniem świata
> Za wolność, równość i braterstwo.
> (Broniewski 1945: 31)

> May the knights rise from the dead
> And, each chest shining with a wound,
> Bear witness to the blood of the martyr,
> That innocent blood, from the hand of the executioner
> Shed in foreign lands,
> With horror, but with the silence of the world
> For liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The extreme, negative, and generalized experiences of the self that accompany them are unbearable, and shame easily turns into humiliation (Bellelli et al. 2009: 145). When this happens, an attribution shift occurs, whereby responsibility is abruptly externalized, thus triggering anger (Lewis 1971). Shame is strongly associated with anger in its most destructive forms (Tangney 1995), of which it can be considered a mediator. In the poem 'Synkowi' [To My Son] by the poet Jerzy Woszczynin (1907-1976), the vengeful tone, while not predominant, is associated with a messianic message, a vision of rebirth:

> A jeśli nie powróci… Wtedy ty, z kolei
> Gdy urośniesz, zrozumiesz, skupisz wszystkie siły
> I uderzysz i zniszczysz. A potem zasiejesz
> Nowe ziarna wolności na starych mogiłach
> (Woszczynin 1944: 21)

> And if he doesn't come back… Then you, in turn,
> When you grow up, you will understand, you will focus all your strength
> And you will strike and destroy. And then you will sow
> New seeds of freedom on the old graves.

Scheff (1990, 1994) and Retzinger (1991) have shown that

shame triggers feelings of anger, which are followed by destructive retaliatory behaviour. Responses of anger and resentment are followed by expressions of blame and vindictiveness, which reinforce shame. Many prisoners in prisons or labour camps were often unclear about the reason for their conviction. As theatre and radio director Wacław Radulski (1904-1983) wrote to literary critic Tymon Terlecki (1905-2000), former camp prisoners focused on their own wrongs (see Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 14). Anger, for example, in its primary form, basically arises from a situation in which goals are blocked and the resulting frustration. Oatley and Johnson Laird (1987) consider anger to be an emotion that arises in unexpected, unpleasant situations that hinder the achievement of goals, caused by other people and which may be perceived as unfair. Anger can also fulfil moral functions when it prompts redress. It can be considered, in a sense, as a 'guardian of morality,' in the same way as other emotions that, according to Izard (1977), constitute the 'hostility triad:' disgust and contempt. In Jerzy Woszczynin's poem 'Sprzymierzeńcom' [To the Allies], the desire for revenge is a clear sentiment: only the soldier's anger can repay the wrongs suffered.

Aby wyrównać ofiary,
Tułaczkę, krzywdy i ból,
Nie starczy twojego złota,
Ni lasów twoich, ni pól.

Jedynej rekompensaty
Żąda żołnierski gniew:
Złotem się płaci za złoto,
A krew się daje za krew.
(Bielatowicz 1944: 341; Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 66)

To compensate for the sacrifices,
the exile, the wrongs and the pain,
your gold will not suffice,
nor your forests nor your fields.

The only compensation
The soldier's anger demands:
Gold is paid for gold,
and blood is given for blood.

Shame is a complex emotion that expresses self-evaluations in relation to others, and it is the basic emotion to which fear is linked. The reference to sadness and fear, respectively, involves a fundamental difference. For Oatley and Johnson-Laird (1987), sadness is linked to the attachment system; fear, on the

other hand, is associated with separation (social isolation), a threat from a predator or a dominant conspecific, or physical danger. In the lyric 'Pieśni' [The Songs] by Artur Międzyrzecki (1922-1996), a state of profound anguish emerges. Hopelessness, fear, and the awareness of a tragic fate led to a loss of rational control: uncontrollable impulses arise from illogical actions dictated by a deep state of sadness.

> Żmudna jest droga do siebie, gdy szlak się gubi w ciemności,
> Gdy płaczą uschnięte kwiaty, gdy wyje noc urągliwie,
> Kiedy nie można ogarnąć, kiedy nie można uprościć
> Zmierzchów przeklętych rozpaczą i zwyciężonych porywem.
> (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 155)

> The journey back to oneself is arduous when the trail is lost in the darkness,
> When withered flowers cry, when the night howls mockingly,
> When one cannot comprehend, when one cannot simplify
> Twilights cursed by despair and conquered by impulse.

Janoff-Bulman and Wortman (1977) demonstrated that the more people believed they could have acted differently to prevent the accident, the more they blamed themselves for what had happened, and that the more time passed since the traumatic event, the more they tended to project the blame onto environmental factors. They are distinguished between two types of self-blame: characterological and behavioural. Characterological self-blame focuses on the individual's character: they use the present tense to describe themselves in the present and tend to give an overall, general assessment of themselves. The behavioural form, on the other hand, is linked to the perception of control and focuses on one's specific behaviour, on those actions and omissions that caused the event, which is why the individual often repeats to themselves 'if I had done' etc. Those with characterological self-accusatory traits tend to feel global guilt, while those with behavioural self-accusation feel guilty because of the specific experience. This cognitive strategy reflects survivors' efforts to make sense of their victimhood, to understand 'why it happened' and 'why to them,' to find the deeper meaning that the event has for their lives and for the lives

of all those involved (Bellelli et al. 2009: 150). Those who had some influence on their own liberation are marked by guilt. A certain sense of 'guilt' shines through in Janusz Wedow's (1921-1982)[3] poem 'Pożegnanie obozu' [Farewell to the Camp], where the poet's happiness at being liberated from the labour camp cannot be complete, not only because the memory of that experience cannot be erased, but also because others behind him will remain in that place to perish and perhaps never see freedom:

> Dzisiaj żegnam ten obóz z pogodnym uśmiechem,
> te druty, które wolność odcięły od roku…
> Czy nic też nie zostało tutaj po mnie echem,
> czy nic nie wstrzyma krótko mych pospiesznych kroków?
>
> O, nie! zostały w drutach krwawe chwil Golgoty
> ciągnące się swym pasmem na smutku gdzieś krańce,
> zostały groby bólu i zgliszcza tęsknoty
> i cichych łez ukryte przed ludźmi różańce…
>
> Lecz wszystko to upadło jak jesienne liście,
> gdy z brzękiem wreszcie pękły niewoli obręcze
> i dzisiaj już w mym sercu nie ma nienawiści,
> bo dzisiaj w chmurze źrenic zalśniły mi tęcze!
> (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 144)
>
> Today I bid farewell to this camp with a serene smile,
> these barbed wires that have cut off freedom for a year…
> Is there nothing left here that echoes behind me,
> nothing that will briefly halt my hurried steps?
>
> Oh, no! Bloody moments of Golgotha remain in the barbed wire,
> stretching their threads across the borders of sadness,
> remaining tombs of pain and ruins of desire

[3] He was deported to Russia and served in places such as Gryazovets and, later, in the Middle East: in Palestine, Syria, Damascus, and on the Suez Canal. He served as an officer in the 2nd Army Corps. After the war, he settled in Southampton, New York. Poet, head of the program production department of the Polish broadcaster Radio Free Europe. He is the author of a series of poetry anthologies: *W drodze do ojczyzny: wiersze wybrane* (Tel-Aviv 1942); *Wracające żagle: wiersze* (Rome 1944); *Czterolistna koniczyna* (London 1957).

and rosaries of silent tears
hidden from the people…

But all this has fallen like
autumn leaves,
when the circles of slavery
finally broke with a noise,
and today there is no ha-
tred in my heart,
because today rainbows
have shone in the clouds
of my eyes!

The sense of guilt that arises from powerlessness in the face of evil is present in the poem 'Suplikacje' [Supplications] by Beata Obertyńska (1898-1980), placed at the end of the poetic appendix to the second edition of her memoirs *W domu niewoli* [In the House of Slavery]. It is an appeal to God, and it is in God that hope is placed for escape from those inhuman conditions and earthly hell. For this reason, *Suplikacje* echoes the language of the Holy Scriptures (especially Psalms 22 and 130), just as her memoirs *W domu niewoli* owe their title to a passage from the Bible (Exodus 20:1-14) (see Jaworska 2022: 87; Jaworska 2013: 207-18; Sucharski 2006).

[…]
My grzeszni,
my zmęczeni,
my obszarom wydani,
my zamarłej przestrzeni
na żer żywcem rzuceni,
my wyjęci spod prawa, z
człowieczeństwa wyrzuci,
my deptani jak trawa, za-
ganiani i szczuci -
my nędzarze zawszeni,
my, co głód nas ogłupia,
my rzesza bezimienna
do dna krzywdą otruta,
my brudni, my obdarci,
my aż śmieszni chwilami,
my pocieszni,
my grzeszni,
[…]
(Obertyńska 1972: 69; Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 53-54)

[…]
We sinners,
we exhausted ones,
we condemned to desolate
lands,
we thrown into a dead
space,
we removed from the law,
emptied of humanity,
we trampled like grass,
pulled and incited,
we flea-ridden beggars,
we stupefied by hunger,
we nameless crowd,
poisoned by injustice,
we dirty, we ragged,
we sometimes even ridicu-
lous,
we comforters,
we sinners
[…]

In this poem, the author abandons literary artifice to address God directly, asking for comfort, forgiveness, strength, or guidance. Guilt overlaps with sin: 'my grzeszni' [we sinners]. Unlike guilt, which remains personal, sin is universal – it is not I who am guilty, but the community. For the poet – as a deeply religious person – life in the camp was a manifestation of moral decay, a sin, proof of the depravity of the *häfltlings*. As researcher Olga Orzeł Wargskog argues, 'moral purity in [such] texts is linked to bodily purity; texts that strive to clearly define the boundaries of dignity are distinguished by the presence of self-censorship, which eliminates from the narrative what is vile, purely physiological' (Orzeł Wargskog 2011: 32). In fact, Obertyńska's verses are much more restrained than her memoirs *W domu niewoli*, in which she expresses with all her emotional involvement and without filters the years of humiliation, hunger, and degradation she suffered and witnessed (Sucharski 2006; Jaworska 2022: 80; Jaworska 2013: 207). The journey undertaken by the poet is a journey to the underworld.

Between Nature and Anti-Nature

The image of Siberia as a boundless, frozen, lifeless hell has been present in Polish literature since the deportations of 1831 (see Trojanowiczowa 1993: 96; Jaworska 2022: 83; Kaczyńska 1991). In his *Lecture XXIII* of the second course on Slavic Literature at the Collège de France, on May 6, 1842, Adam Mickiewicz, reflecting on the fact that the number of Poles deported to the Far East of Russia and Siberia was increasing every day, states that the name Siberia, which had entered Polish literature since the time of Tadeusz Kościuszko, had now become a symbolic place of the constant Tsarist threat hanging over the Poles (see De Carlo 2022: 85).[4] And again, the poet observes:

This Siberia, which Russian writers make no mention of – although there are some odes to the glory of Russian victories in this land – that Siberia, so remote and totally foreign, now enters the realm of Polish poetry. Siberia is a political hell: it

[4] In the same lecture, Mickiewicz recognizes within the 'literature of exile' a genre that he defines as 'Polish-Siberian literature' ([literatura polsko-sybirska], Mickiewicz 1865: 240-41; see also Marinelli 2022: 66-67).

fulfils the same role in poetry as medieval hell, so well described by Dante. All books of contemporary Polish literature mention Siberia; there are excellent descriptions of the torments of the Poles; we even have a work by Słowacki, whose subject unfolds entirely in Siberia (Mickiewicz 1842: 167-68).

For Obertyńska, Siberia is hell on earth, a place of suffering where evil reigns supreme, and those who enter it – as Justyna Chłap-Nowakowa (Chłap-Nowakowa 2004: 82) points out – are victims of human injustice, but not of eternal damnation (Jaworska 2022: 83). The surrounding landscape is terrifying, not only because death reigns there, but also because of the awareness that it is an instrument of violence. According to Nina Taylor-Terlecka, for the deportees, all of nature, 'primordial and deaf,' 'contradicted traditional values. It was rather anti-nature or nature in reverse' (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 15). Polish critic Wojciech Ligęza argues that in Obertyńska's work, the northern landscape is complicit in the crime being committed (see Ligęza 1990: 157). For the poet, the Taiga appears as a rotting corpse in a swamp, an abyss where even God has forgotten man. The rivers on which the prisoners are transported on barges take on gloomy and threatening tones, as in the opening lines of 'Pechora' [Pechora]:

> Ssie nas północ powoli z tą rzeką,
> Jak bezkarna tu zbrodnia rozległą,
> Przelewając podstępnie dalekość
> W zaumarłe, bezimienne piekło.
> (Obertyńska 1972: 63; Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 48)

> The north slowly sucks us down with this river,
> like a vast crime unpunished here,
> stealthily pouring the distance
> into a dead, nameless hell.

The Pechora River is depicted as a snake, and its waters, symbolizing death, lead to the realm of evil (see Jaworska 2022: 83). Like the poet, for the writer, journalist, and prisoner of the Soviet labour camps of Kolyma, Anatol Krakowiecki (1901-1950), the taiga is a deadly landscape that chains the body, suffocates the heart, and torments the mind to the point of madness. The snow-covered Siberia of the poet-soldier Bolesław Redzisz is also steeped in death, where bodies

and graves appear in the snowy infinity.

> Od iluż wieków, jak długie warkocze,
> plecione z męki, kajdan i żałoby,
> W wielkie bezkresne, śniegowe roztocze
> Idą kibitki i ludzie i groby?
> [...]
> W miejsca, gdzie sobie śmierć wybrała leże,
> I gdzie wiatr tylko smutny snuje żale
> Padają ciała, jak święte szkaplerze
> I krew szkarłatna, jak wielkie korale.
> (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 131)

> For how many centuries, like long braids,
> woven from torment, chains, and mourning,
> Into the immense, endless snowy expanses,
> Do kibitkas and people and graves go?
> [...]
> To the places where death has chosen its lair,
> And where only the sad wind weaves its sorrows,
> Bodies fall like holy scapulars,
> And scarlet blood like great beads.

Although the Siberian landscape is associated with death, and every abyss leads to an ever-deeper abyss, like Dante's underworld, as in Redzisz's poem 'Obłęd' [Madness] 'U stóp przepaści są otchłanie. / Runę w nią głową. Niech się stanie! / Niech na me myśli śmierć położy' ('At the foot of the abyss there are abysses. / I will fall headlong into it. Let it be done! / Let death fall upon my thoughts') (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 133). At that depth, however, the Polish exiles experienced a kind of epiphany. Krakowiecki was captivated by the song of the larks and the dazzling beauty of the Kolyma's flora. Surrounded by imposing mountains, the poet Alexander Wat (1900-1967) felt immersed in the secrets of colour, while an incredible symphony of violets and almond blossoms resounded accompanied by a rushing green stream. Even Obertyńska, despite all the elements of this landscape being tinged with death (the river is alien, frozen, colourless, joyless, the whole world a hostile abyss), was deeply struck by the beauty of the distant, almost abstract Ural Mountains. Józef Czapski was struck by the light colours of the Karakum Desert, the turquoise of the sky, and the sight of a man on a donkey against the backdrop of the lemon and lilac-

coloured landscape (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 17-18). In his Paris lectures, Mickiewicz spoke of the fundamental importance of the Siberian experience in moral and religious renewal and the need for soul-searching. He emphasized that the literature of exile constitutes a mass, collective, highly democratic, almost popular, universal, and pan-Slavic testimony, ultimately anonymous, because it speaks on behalf of all the fallen and missing.

Shame and Stigma

This paralyzing trauma made it extremely painful to recall the past, often experienced as a 'dehumanizing' experience that transformed the person into an object. Despite being victims, many survivors felt shame for the humiliations they suffered or for the moral compromises necessary to survive in extreme conditions (the 'struggle for life' that led to selfish behaviour). Furthermore, in the post-war period, former prisoners often suffered discrimination and social marginalization, being branded as 'enemies of the people' or untrustworthy individuals. The silence of the Gulag, therefore, was the result of a combination of deep psychological trauma, the need to protect oneself from a distrustful society, and the shame induced by a system that sought to destroy human dignity.

Those who had not experienced the Gulag viewed the returnees with mixed emotions, often failing to recognize them as their loved ones. As early as 1919, the young Osip Mandelstam confessed to his future wife that two things were most important to him: death and recognition (Żejmo 2018: 49). Years later, Nadezhda Mandelstam recalled, 'И снаружи, и за колючей оградой все мы потеряли память' [Both outside and behind the barbed wire fence, we all lost our memory] (Mandel'shtam 1972: 22). Meanwhile, on both sides of the barbed wire, this loss of memory progressed in different ways, causing misunderstandings, breakdowns in communication, and a mutual inability to recognize each other. The victim returned from the camp a different person. The bitter irony of the whole situation lay in the fact that both the family and the returnees felt alienated now by their long-awaited reunion (Żejmo 2018: 49-50). Considering that family life is based on a deep understanding of the individual identities of each member of the community, and that this mutual recognition continues over the years, it is

obvious that the failure to recognize a person belonging to a family casts a deep shadow over all those who do not recognize them or are not recognized. This lack of recognition triggers mutual fear and guilt. This leads to an internal fracture within the community, breaking the bonds of solidarity and trust. In the personal narrative of the unrecognized person, the loss of identity reveals the degree of transformation of a person subjected to the destructive power of the state (see Weiner 2014).

The system of terror drew millions of citizens into its machinery, both as silent witnesses and active participants. In a society where all aspects of human life were subject to ideological pressure, people 'learned to speak softly' (Figes 2007: XXIX). Those who returned to their families after years in the Gulag found it difficult to feel reintegrated. Numerous studies in the literature assess the psychological consequences of various types of man-made trauma (e.g. war, deportation, genocide, etc.). Different types of traumatic events seem to have different impacts on mental health (Norris et al. 1996). Reactions to such events can include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depressive disorder (MDD), alcohol abuse, anxiety and somatization disorders, behavioural problems, performance disorders, and psychological reactivity. However, although fear and horror are the dominant emotions associated with PTSD, they are not the only ones (Bellelli et al. 2009: 154). For example, Power and Dalgleish (2004) have highlighted the presence of other emotions in PTSD, such as guilt and shame, whose symptoms seem to express not so much the destruction of external security (as in the case of fear) as the fragmentation of an internal sense of security.

Moral emotions play a fundamental role in the assessment and treatment of people who have experienced trauma. A traumatic event is defined as an extremely violent factor, beyond the limits of normal human experience, concerning direct experience, witnessing, or facing events that involve a real or feared threat of death or serious harm to oneself or others (Bellelli et al. 2009: 147). Polish writer Gustaw Herling-Grudziński's reflection on morality in extreme situations, particularly in the context of the Soviet Gulag described in *Inny świat* [A World Apart], is central and complex. The Polish writer does not argue that it is a case of a simple absence of morality but describes how Soviet totalitari-

anism and the struggle for survival actively destroy the very possibility of moral choice, reducing man to the state of a beast. In the camp, traditional moral categories (good/evil, honest/dishonest) lose their meaning in the face of extreme hunger and the need to survive. 'Morality' is replaced by physical 'necessity.' For Herling-Grudziński, the extreme situation does not eliminate morality in an absolute sense but subjects it to such pressure that its application becomes almost impossible, leading the individual to an ethical collapse, which is the true goal of totalitarianism.

The research presented in this article was conducted within the framework of the PRIN 2022 PNRR project "Literature of Socialist Trauma: Mapping and Researching the Lost Page of European Literature (LOST)", ID: P2022Z45X8, CUP: B53D23029360001, Principal Investigator: Andrea Gullotta (University of Palermo). The project was funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research (MIUR) under the 2022 PRIN PNRR Call for Proposals, Directorial Decree No. 1409 of September 14, 2022.

Bibliography

Beaupré-Staniewicz et al. 1987: Beaupré-Staniewicz, Irena, Waszczuk-Kamieniecka, Danuta, and Jadwiga Lewicka-Howells (eds). 1987. *Isfahan. Miasto polskich dzieci* (London: Koło Wychowanków Szkół Polskich Isfahan i Liban).

Bellelli et al. 2009: Bellelli, Guglielmo and Anna Gasparre. 2009. 'Emozioni morali e processi cognitivi: vergogna e colpa nelle esperienze quotidiane e traumatiche', *Cognitivismo clinico*, 6 (2): 141-60.

Bielatowicz 1944: Bielatowicz, Jan (ed). 1944. *Azja i Afryka. Antologia poezji polskiej na środkowym wschodzie* (Palestine: Biblioteka Obserwatora Wojennego).

Broniewski 1943: Broniewski, Władysław. 1943. *Bagnet na broń. Poezje 1939-1943* (Jerusalem: Wydwanictwo w „Drodze").

Broniewski 1945: Broniewski, Władysław. 1945. *Drzewo rozpaczające. Poezje* (Jerusalem: Wydwanictwo w „Drodze").

Chłap-Nowakowa 2004: Chłap-Nowakowa, Justyna. 2004. *Sybir, Bliski Wschód, Monte Casino, Środowisko poetyckie 2. Korpusu i jego twórczość* (Kraków: Arcana).

Ciborowska 2024: Ciborowska, Blanka. 2024. 'Na Syberię i z Syberii. Motyw wygnania i repatriacji w polskiej literaturze. Wybrane przykłady', *Wolni i Solidarni. Między ideą a praktyką. Kwartalnik Społeczno-Polityczny*, 1 (5): 85-105.

De Carlo 2022: De Carlo, Andrea F. 2022. '*Et in Inferno ego!* Sulle narrazioni di anabasi e catabasi d'ispirazione dantesca nelle opere dei romantici polacchi', in G. Siedina (ed.), *Itinerari danteschi nelle culture slave* (Firenze: Firenze University Press), 81-96.

Figes 2008: Figes, Orlando. 2008. *Szepty. Życie w stalinowskiej Rosji* (Warszawa: Magnum).

Folejewski 1951: Folejewski, Zbigniew. 1951. 'Polish Poetry during the Last War', *The American Slavic and East European Review*, 1 (3): 216-25.

Gross 1983: Gross, Jan Tomasz (ed). 1983. *„W czterdziestym nas matko na Sybir zesłali... Polska a Rosja 1939-42* (London: Aneks).

Gullotta 2012: Gullotta, Andrea. 2012. 'Trauma and Self in the Soviet Context: Remarks on Gulag Writings', *AvtobiografiЯ*, 1: 73-87.

Gullotta 2021: Gullotta, Andrea. 2021. ‘More than a Cat. Reflections on Shalamov’s and Solzhenitsyn’s Writings through the Perspective of Trauma Studies’, in *The Gulag in Writings of Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov: Memory, History, Testimony*, ed. by Fabian Heffermehl and Irina Karlsohn (Leiden: Brill), 70-96.

Hendin et al. 1984: Hendin, Herbert, and Ann Pollinger Haas. 1984. *Wounds of War: The Psychological Aftermath of Combat in Vietnam* (New York: Basic Books).

Izard 1977: Izard, Carroll E. 1997. *Human Emotions* (New York: Plenum Press).

Janoff-Bulman et al. 1977: Janoff-Bulman, Ronnie and Camille B Wortman. 1977. ‘Attributions of Blame and Coping in the “Real World”: Severe Accident Victims React to Their Lot’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35: 351-63.

Jaworska 2013: Jaworska, Krystyna. 2013. *I confini violati nella prosa di Herminia Naglerowa e Beata Obertyńska*, in *Linee di confine. Separazioni e processi di integrazione nello spazio culturale slavo*, ed. by Giovanna Moracci and Alberto Alberti (Firenze: Firenze University Press), 199-220.

Jaworska 2019: Jaworska, Krystyna. 2019. *Dalla deportazione all’esilio. Percorsi nella letteratura polacca della Seconda guerra mondiale* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso).

Jaworska 2022: Jaworska, Krystyna. 2022. ‘«Come potrei oggi scrivere poesie…». La lirica di Beata Obertyńska di fronte al Gulag e alla guerra’, in *Traumaturgie. Tre voci poetiche dell’Europa centro-orientale: Marija Malinovskaja, Beata Obertyńska, Matei Vişniec. Saggi e testi poetici con traduzione a fronte*, ed. by Krystyna Jaworska, Massimo Maurizio and Roberto Merlo (Bari: Stilo), 73-95.

Kaczyńska 1991: Kaczyńska, Elżbieta. 1991. *Syberia największe więzienie świata (1815-1914)* (Warszawa: Warszawska Oficyna Wydawnicza „Gryf”).

Knyt 2022: Knyt, Agnieszka. 2022. *Bunty w łagrach. Relacje polskich więźniów Gułagu* (Warszawa: Ośrodek Karta, Centrum Polsko-rosyjskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia).

Kopka 2019: Kopka, Bogusław. 2019. *Gułag nad Wisłą. Komunistyczne obozy pracy w Polsce 1944-1956* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie).

Kubany 1998: Kubany, Edward S. 1998. 'Cognitive Therapy for Trauma-Related Guilt', in *Cognitive-Behavioral Therapies for Trauma*, ed. by Victoria M. Follette, Josef I. Ruzek and Francis R.R. Abueg (New York: Guildford Press), 124-61.

Kucmin et al. 2016: Kucmin, Tomasz, Kucmin, Adriana, Nogalski, Adam, Sojczuk, Sebastian, Jojczuk, Mariusz. 2016. 'History of Trauma and Posttraumatic Disorders in Literature', *Psychiatria Polska*, 50 (1): 269-81.

Lewis 1971: Lewis, Helen B. 1971. *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (New York: International University Press).

Ligęza 1990: Ligęza, Wojciech. 1990. '«Rok polski» w liryce Beaty Obertyńskiej', *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 1 (81): 55-73.

Linguido 2020: Linguido, Valentina. 2020. *Le relazioni psicologiche adattive all'esperienza traumatica dei campi di concentramento nazisti* (n.p.: Book Sprint Edizioni).

Mandel'shtam 1972: Mandel'shtam, Nadezhda. 1972. *Vtoraia kniga* (Paris: YMCA-Press).

Marciniak 2014: Marciniak, Wojciech Franciszek. 2014. *Powroty z Sybiru. Repatriacja obywateli polskich z głębi ZSRR w latach 1945-1947* (Łódź: Księży Młyn Dom Wydawniczy).

Marinelli 2022: Marinelli, Luigi. 2022. Noster hic est Dantes. *Su Dante e il dantismo in Polonia* (Roma: Lithos).

Mickiewicz 1842: Mickiewicz, Adam. 1842. 'Lekcya dwudziesta trzecia (6 maja 1842)', in *Kurs drugoletni (1841-1842) literatury sławiańskiéj wykładanéj w Kollegium Francuzkiém przez Adama Mickiewicza*, by Adam Mickiewicz (Paris: Bourgogne et Martinet), 167-76.

Mickiewicz 1865: Mickiewicz, Adam. 1865. *Literatura słowiańska wykładana w Kolegium Francuzkim przez Adama Mickiewicza, II: Rok drugi, 1841-1842* (Poznań: Nakładem Księgarni Jana Konstantego Żupańskiego).

Morawiec 2011: Morawiec, Arkadiusz. 2011. *Literatura w lagrze. Lager w literaturze. Fakt – temat – metafora* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Akademii Humanistyczno-Ekonomicznej w Łodzi).

Morawiec 2018: Morawiec, Arkadiusz. 2018. *Literatura polska wobec ludobójstwa. Rekonesans* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego).

Morawiec 2023: Morawiec, Arkadiusz. 2023. *Polska literatura obozowa. Rekonesans* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego).

Moszyński 1989: Moszyński Adam (ed). 1989. *Lista Katyńska. Jeńcy obozów Kozielsk, Ostaszków, Starobielsk. Zaginieni w Rosji sowieckiej* (London: Gryf).

Mróz 1998: Mróz, Tadeusz Kazimierz. 1998. *Stalin umarł w polskim „gułagu" i Wiersze więzienne z lat 1950-1956* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo – Biuro Tłumaczeń).

Nagy 2009: Nagy, László Kálmán. 2009. 'Polska literatura łagrowa jako literatura tendencyjna', *Postscriptum Polonistyczne*, 2 (4): 185-201.

Nazimek 2015: Nazimek, Joanna. 2015. 'Dwa rodzaje dyskursów w polskiej literaturze lagrowej', *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Historicolitteraria*, XV: 55-63.

Norris et al. 1996: Norris, Jeanette, Nurius, Paula S., Dimeff, Linda A. 1996. 'Through Her Eyes: Factors Affecting Women's Perception of and Resistance to Acquaintance Sexual Aggression Threat', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 20: 123-45.

Oatley et al. 1987: Oatley, Keith, Johnson-Laird, Philip N. 1987. 'Toward a Cognitive Theory of Emotions', *Cognition and emotion*, 1: 29-50.

Obertyńska 1945: Obertyńska, Beata. 1945. *Otawa. Wiersze dawne i nowe* (Jerusalem: Nakładem sekcji wydawniczej jednostek wojska na środkowym wschodzie).

Obertyńska 1972: Obertyńska, Beata. 1972. *Miód i piołun* (London: Veritas).

Orzeł Wargskog 2011: Orzeł Wargskog, Olga. 2011. 'Granice godności. Granice literatury', in *Porzucić etyczną arogancję. Ku interpretacji podstawowych pojęć humanistyki w świetle wydarzenia Szoa*, ed. by Beata Anna Polak and Tomasz Polak (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM), 31-54.

Pieralli 2013: Pieralli, Claudia. 2013. *La lirica nella 'zona': poesia femminile nei GULag staliniani e nelle carceri*, in *Linee di confine. Separazioni e processi di integrazione nello spazio culturale slavo*, ed. by Giovanna Moracci and Alberto Alberti (Firenze: Firenze University Press), 221-46.

Pogonowska 2020: Pogonowska, Ewa. 2020. 'Krajobrazy post mortem. O Sołowkach, Kołymie (i nie tylko) we współczesnej polskiej prozie podróżniczej', *Wielogłos. Pismo Wydziału Polonistyki UJ*, 3 (45): 105-35.

Power et al. 2004: Power, Michael J., Dalgleish, Tim. 2004. 'Emotion-Specific and Emotion-Non-Specific Components of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Implications for a Taxonomy of Related Psychopathology', *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 42: 1069-88.

Prot 2009: Prot, Katarzyna. 2009. *Życie po Zagładzie: skutki traumy u ocalałych z Holocaustu. Świadectwa z Polski i Rumunii* (Warszawa: Instytut Psychiatrii i Neurologii).

Retzinger 1991: Retzinger, Suzanne M. 1991. *Violent Emotions: Shame and Rage in Marital Quarrels* (Newbury Park: Sage).

Sariusz-Skąpska 2012: Sariusz-Skąpska, Izabella. 2012. *Polscy świadkowie Gułagu. Literatura łagrowa 1939-1989* (Kraków: Universitas).

Scheff 1987: Scheff, Thomas J. 1987. 'The Shame-Rage Spiral: A Case Study of an Interminable Quarrel', in *The Role of Shame in Symptom Formulation,* ed.by Helen Block Lewis (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum).

Scheff 1990: Scheff, Thoms J. 1990. *Microsociology: Discourse, Emotion, and Social Structure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

Scheff 1994: Scheff, Thoms J. 1994. *Bloody Revenge* (Boulder: Westview Press).

Shalamov 2004: Shalamov, Varlam. 2004. *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh, II: Kolymskie rasskazy. Anna Ivanovna: p'esa* (Moskva: Terra).

Sucharski 2006: Sucharski, Tadeusz. 2006. 'Poddana «dławiącej nienawiści»? Rosja Beaty Obertyńskiej', *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 2 (XCVII): 31-50.

Sucharski 2017: Sucharski, Tadeusz. 2017. 'Jak opisać „świat piramidalnego absurdu"? – czyli o grotesce w literaturze łagrowej', *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia litteraria polonica*, 4 (42): 92-118.

Sucharski 2018: Sucharski, Tadeusz. 'Kobieta w łagrze stalinowskim w tekstach polskich pisarek', *Konteksty Kultury*, 1: 116-33.

Świetlikowski 1997: Świetlikowski, Paweł. 1997. *Gułag Workuta. Raport oficera Armii Krajowej* (Warszawa – Wrocław: Polskie Towarzystwo Urząd d/s Kombatantów i Osób Represjonowanych).

Tangney 1995: Tangney, June Price. 1995. 'Shame and Guilt in Interpersonal Relationships', in *Self-conscious Emotions: Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, and Pride*, ed. by June Price Tangney and Kurt W. Fisher (New York: Guilford Press), 114-42.

Taylor-Terlecka 2001: Taylor-Terlecka, Nina (ed.). 2001. *Gułag polskich poetów. Od Komi do Kołymy. Wiersze* (London: Polska Fundacja Kulturalna).

Tołczyk 2009: Tołczyk, Dariusz. 2009. *Gułag w oczach Zachodu* (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka).

Trojanowiczowa 1993: Trojanowiczowa, Zofia. 1993. *Sybir romantyków* (Poznań: „W drodze").

Weiner 2014: Weiner, Amir. 2014. 'Widmo imperiów: powracający z Gułagu a wschodnioeuropejskie rebelie i sowiecka polityka pogranicza', *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, 13/2 (24): 341-85.

Woszczynin 1944: Woszczynin, Jerzy. 1944. 'Synkowi', *Ochotniczka*, 5 (II): 21.

Żejmo 2018: Żejmo, Bożena. 2018. 'Imperium traumy, czyli między szeptem a milczeniem (*Dziewczyna moich marzeń* Bułata Okudżawy)', *Przegląd Rusycystyczny*, 3 (163): 48-64.

Giovanni Magliocco

Blood, Stigmata and The Prison Cell: Trauma and Redemption in Radu Gyr's Detention Poetry

Poetry produced in the prisons of communist Romania still represents a lost page in the history of European literature, as it has so far received less attention from critics than prose and memoirs. In this contribution, after some preliminary reflections on Romanian Gulag poetry, I will propose a close reading of Radu Gyr's poetry, focusing in particular on the two posthumous cycles *The Blood of the Prison* [Sângele temniței] and *Stigmata* [Stigmate] and on some recurring themes and motifs in his prison poetry: the infernal space of the prison and the cell, blood and wounds, which converge in the shocking image of the stigmata. By analysing how these themes evolve and change in the author's poetic universe, I will demonstrate that Radu Gyr, through his search for a sacred, ritual, and cathartic language, transformed the brutality of imprisonment into poetry, making his poetic art not only a testimony to trauma, but also an act of inner healing.

1. A Brief Introduction to Romanian Gulag Poetry

Poetry produced in the communist prisons of Romania remains largely a lost page in European literary history. Despite embodying an emblematic form of survival and resistance in a violent and hostile universe, it has so far received less attention from critics than prose and memoirs of detention.[1] Composed mentally during the traumatic experience of the Gulag, this poetry has a high value of immediacy. Its placement in the *hic et nunc* of the concentrationary space makes it one of the most appropriate literary genres for studying *in vitro* the direct

[1] The situation regarding studies on Romanian prison poetry is in many ways comparable to that of studies on Russian Gulag poetry. As Andrea Gullotta observed in one of the few articles devoted to Russian Gulag poetry: 'In the cartography of Russian studies, a large area has been almost completely ignored, and that is Gulag poetry. It may be hard to believe, but to date only a limited number of articles have ever been devoted to this huge body of texts. It is quite a surprising fact, if we compare it with the importance that the study of poetry had in scholarly research on literature generated from other traumatic historical contexts, such as Holocaust poetry, Apartheid poetry, or the poetry of African-American authors concerning racism in the USA' (Gullotta 2016: 175).

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-007
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

effects that trauma can have on literary creation. Alongside its value of vivid immediacy, Gulag poetry also takes on a particular function within the concentrationary space. It seems to have not so much the purpose of documenting hell as a more therapeutic/cathartic and even soteriological function. We can consider the vast poetic production of the Romanian Gulag almost as a form of exorcism of pain and suffering, an inner cure for trauma that also aims, spiritually, at a sort of redemption for the condemned. To express and obsessively repeat the trauma and pain in all its brutality within one's verses, sharing it with other condemned people, not only serves the purpose of feeling part of a fallen, dehumanized, and suffering humanity, but also that of projecting evil outward, cauterizing one's wounds. Proof of this hypothesis could be found in the fact that, although some Gulag poets were already writing poetry before their arrest (in particular well-known and established professional poets such as Radu Gyr, Nichifor Crainic, Aurel Ciurunga, Vasile Voiculescu, Ion Caraion, Ionel Zeană, etc.), many poets made their debut in the Gulag (Constantin Aurel Dragodan, Zahu Pană, Ioan Victor Pică, Sergiu Mandinescu, Constantin Oprișan, Dumitru Oniga, Ștefan Vlădoianu, Valeriu Gafencu, Dumitru Bacu, Mihai Buracu, Demostene Andronescu, etc.) and in some cases died in the Gulag. When I say they died in the Gulag, I am not referring only to those poets who died during their imprisonment, but also (and above all) to a specific category of poets who, once they left the Gulag, would never write poetry again. This is a clear example of poetry that arises and is consumed exclusively in the dramatic experience of the Gulag. It only makes sense to exist within that space, as it fulfils a specific function: to survive and to find a possible way out of trauma through the enchantment of words.

The slow emergence of Gulag poetry in the Romanian cultural space began in 1990,[2] owing

[2] I would like to point out that during the communist regime, six anthologies were published between 1952 and 1985, one of which was in English. All the anthologies were published abroad (Portugal, Spain, Brazil, Canada), either independently or through short-lived publishing houses. Due to these circumstances, these publications had little circulation in Romania: Ion Stegaru, *Din Poezia rezistenței românești* / Pușcăriașul Onofrei [Radu Gyr], *Poeme din închisoare,* cu o prezentare de Victor Buescu (Lisbon: Universitatea din Lisabona, Colecția Lectoratului Român, Colecție Românească, 1952); Dumitru Bacu (ed.) *Ofrandă, Poezii din închisori*

above all to the publication of a series of anthologies that made the vast poetic corpus produced in communist prisons available to critics and readers. Between 1990 and 2010 several anthologies were published: *Poets behind Bars (I-IV)* [Poeții după gratii (I-IV)], edited by Constantin Aurel Dragodan between 1993 and 1997 for Editura Ramida in Bucharest; *Poetry in Handcuffs* [Poezia în cătuse], edited by Aurelian I. Popescu (Craiova: Editura Omniscop, 1995); *Last night Jesus entered my cell. Poets Behind Bars* [As'noapte Iisus mia intrat in celulă. Poeți după gratii] edited by Cezarina Bărzoi (Bucharest: Editura Elisavaros, 2005); *Anthology of Detention Poetry* [Antologia poeziei carcerale] edited by Ioana Cistelecan (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Eikon, 2006), author of the first monograph dedicated to prison poetry (*Detention Poetry*, *Poezia carcerală,* Pitești: Editura Paralela 45, 2000) and *Poets behind Bars* [Poeți după gratii] published by Mănăstirea Petru Vodă in 2010. More recently, in 2012, a bilingual Romanian/French anthology was also published, edited by Paula Romanescu (Bucharest: Editura Betta, 2012). Except for the anthology edited by Ioana Cistelecan, published by Editura Eikon, all the other anthologies have had limited circulation, as they were published by small publishing houses. In 2016, Ilie Popa edited a comprehensive anthology for Editura Fundației Culturale *MEMORIA*, now in its second edition (2023): *Anthology of Anti-Communist Detention Lyric Poetry from the Romanian Space* [Antologia liricii de detenție anticomunistă din spațiul românesc].

This is a valuable work that brings together 177 poets and over 1,300 poems, undoubtedly the richest collection of prison poetry published to date in Romania. Reading this monumental work, it is easy to see that the poetry produced in Romanian Gulag, despite the differences in style, can be interpreted as the emergence and irradiation of a great collective work, whose value is not only documentary but has, in many cases, aesthetic value as well. In this poetry, characterized by a remarkable emotional and visual impact, images, themes, and motifs re-

(Madrid: Gráficas Benzal, 1963); Nicu Dima *et al.* (eds.), *Poeme din închisori* (Madrid: Editura Drum, 1970); Arhim. Roman Braga (ed.), *Voi n-ați fost cu noi în celule,* (São Paulo, Brazil: 1972); Zahu Pană (ed.), *Poezii din închisori,* cu un cuvânt introductiv de Vintilă Horia (Canada: Editura Cuvântul românesc, 1982); Zahu Pană (ed.), *Poems from communist prisons,* translated by Mother Alexandra (Hamilton-Canada: Editura Cuvântul românesc, 1982).

cur obsessively, as do words, rhythms, and sounds that migrate from one author to another, from one text to another, in a deep labyrinth of references, allusions and mutual influences. The folkloric substrate present in many texts is unifying and homogenizing, not only from a thematic point of view, but also from a technical and stylistic one. These characteristics align with the literary strategies systematized by Anne Whitehead (see Whitehead 2004: 85-87), which are very common in works focusing on trauma and its consequences: 'obsessive repetition' (of themes, motifs, and images), and 'intertextuality' (in the case of Romanian poets in the Gulag, intertextual practice primarily involves folkloric texts).[3]

The fact that this poetry was produced mentally and spread orally led to the partial revival of specific forms of Romanian popular and folkloric literature, such as the *Baladă* or the *Colind*. Due to their metrical and rhythmical structure, these poetic forms lend themselves well to memorization. It was precisely the pressure of having to create these poems mentally and then disseminate them orally that brought these archaic and traditional genres back to the fore in the middle of the 20th century. Among other things, this rediscovery creates a stark contrast, and incredibly modern hybridization between the imagery of violence expressed by this poetry, which clearly approaches poetical Expressionism, and the traditional forms originating in popular culture. As Ioana Cistelecan states, proposing the formula of *inverted ballads*:

> The images amaze us with their newness; ultimately, we find ourselves reading a poem that is not only modern, but very contemporary even [...] The closed space of detention supposes an annihilation of the natural, even an intrinsic preference for the overturned order. This preference is transposed into the so-called inverted ballads. Reinvented as a form of prison creation, ballads lose their brightness and meaning [...] they gradually become distorted, pertinently inhaling

[3] Although Whitehead has systematized these techniques of representing trauma in post-traumatic fiction, they are also partially applicable to poetry produced within the Gulag.

the ashes of the cell (Cistelecan 2019: 123).[4]

In this vast poetical corpus, the poetical works of Radu Gyr, dark and monolithic, emerge as the most significant and consistent poetry composed within Romanian Gulag. In this contribution, taking into account the preliminary reflections made so far, I will propose a close reading of Radu Gyr's poetry, focusing in particular on the two posthumous cycles *The Blood of the Prison* [Sângele temniței] and *Stigmata* [Stigmate], as well as on some recurring themes and motifs therein: the infernal spaces of the prison and the cell; the blood, and the wound, which converge in the shocking image of the stigmata, analysing how they evolve and modify in the author's poetic universe.

2. Radu Gyr's Poetry in the Gulag and after the Gulag: Circulation and Survival

Before analysing Radu Gyr's detention poetry, it is necessary to provide some biographical details concerning the circulation of the author's poetry in the Romanian Gulag and its preservation and survival after his release from the hell of communist prisons. Radu Gyr spent a substantial part of his life in prisons, suffering detention under three different dictatorships: under the dictatorship of King Carol II,[5] under the dictatorship of Marshal Antonescu,[6] and finally under communist dictatorship. In the 1930s Radu Gyr published in right-wing, nationalist literary magazines and newspapers and joined the Iron Guard fascist movement, becoming in time its commander in the Oltenia region. The Iron Guard [*Garda de Fier*] was a far-right paramilitary organization and a political party founded by Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu[7] as The

[4] All the translations from Romanian to English are my own - G.M..

[5] King Carol II (1893-1953), the most controversial Romanian king. He was King of Romania from 8 June 1930 following a coup that deposed his son King Michael I [Mihai I] until his forced abdication on 6 September 1940. His policy was disastrous for Romania.

[6] Marshal Ion Antonescu (1882-1946) presided over two successive wartime dictatorships as Prime Minister and 'Conducător' [The Leader] during most of World War II. Having been responsible for facilitating the Holocaust in Romania, he was overthrown in 1944 by King Mihai I. He was tried by Communists (under Soviet tutelage) for war crimes and executed in 1946.

[7] Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu (1899-1938) was a fascist Romanian politician, the founder (in 1927) and leader of the Iron Guard or The Legion of the Archangel Michael or The Legionary Movement,

Legion of the Archangel Michael [*Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*] or the Legionary Movement [*Mișcarea Legionară*], an anti-democratic and anti-semitic movement. When the Iron Guard was repressed by the regime of King Carol II, Gyr was arrested and imprisoned. After the Legionary Movement came to power in September 1940, he was appointed General Manager of the Romanian Theatres. Under his administration, the Barașeum Jewish Theatre was founded. The creation of the Jewish Theatre was accompanied by an interdiction against Jewish actors playing anywhere else in Romania, part of a joint effort to purge Jewish people from 'Romanian' (non-Jewish) theatres across the country.

Under communist dictatorship, Radu Gyr's imprisonment took place in two phases: from 1945 to 1956, when he was imprisoned in Brașov and Aiud as an extreme right-wing journalist and writer and then from 1958 to 1964. In 1958, he was sentenced to death by the Military Tribunal of Bucharest for his anti-communist manifesto poem 'Get up, Gheorghe, Get up, Ion' [Ridică-te Gheorghe, Ridică-te Ioane]. The death sentence was then commuted to 25 years of hard labour, and he was imprisoned in Aiud, where he was subjected to a particularly harsh re-education program. As Ilie Popa states, in a brief bio-bibliographical presentation, only after publicly renouncing all of his work and beliefs, he was released in 1964 and once freed he was systematically persecuted by the Securitate until his death in 1975 and he was forced, along with Nichifor Crainic, to write propaganda articles for *Glasul patriei* (*Tribuna României*). In this bio-bibliographical presentation Ilie Popa recalls that:

> In the Aiud prison, Radu Gyr was subjected to an extermination program with unimaginable tortures [...]. Seriously ill, suffering from haemophilia, gangrenous rectal prolapse, hepatitis, and tuberculosis, he was denied all medical care (Popa 2023: 50).

an ultranationalist and violently anti-semitic organization active throughout most of the interwar period. Noted for its mystical and Romanian Orthodox-inspired message, the Iron Guard came into conflict with the political establishment and the democratic forces, often resorting to terrorism. The members of the Iron Guard traditionally referred to Codreanu as 'Căpitanul' [The Captain]. He was assassinated in 1938, at the order of King Carol II.

In the Romanian Gulag, the spread of Radu Gyr's poetry took place in three distinct phases, as reported by Dan Tudorache:

> The first phase took place among intellectuals and high-ranking officers imprisoned in the section reserved for 'war criminals and those guilty of the country's disaster,' where Gyr was also imprisoned in June 1949. During this phase, his poems were disseminated with the help of his poetry notebook, which the poet had brought with him from the Brașov penitentiary and which, until its confiscation in the fall of 1948, contained about 60-70 poems. One of the main disseminators of Radu Gyr's poetry during this period was the philosopher Mircea Vulcănescu, Gyr's cellmate [...]. A second phase was the dissemination of his poems among the legionnaires imprisoned in Aiud, dissemination which gained momentum in the years 1948-1950, with the help of bowls greased with an emulsion of water, soap, and DDT powder, and with writings on the walls of the cells. Finally, a third phase was the dissemination of his poems in other prisons and camps in the country, to all political prisoners, regardless of their political orientation. In this phase, the poems were disseminated either orally, using various means improvised by the prisoners, or through Morse code (Tudorache 2020: 143).

Radu Gyr's poetry, as with most of the poetry composed in the Gulag, often ends up taking on a totally dematerialized aspect, in some cases becoming nothing more than the cold ticking of the Morse code, as Aspazia Oțel Petrescu has evocatively witnessed:

> The walls began to speak in a strange language, the dots and dashes of Morse code. The cold pipes of the radiators became the channels through which hot words passed; the verses and cadences became the beating of brotherly hearts (Oțel Petrescu 2010: 11).

Deprived of its written support, constantly suspended between presence and absence, this poet-

ry seems to reflect the same liminal condition of the imprisoned poet, who is both alive and dead, reduced to the larval condition of a shadow. After his release in 1964, Radu Gyr worked intensely on the poems that he had created mentally during his imprisonment, reorganizing them into various cycles, but he was unable to see them published. Instead, he was forced to hide them from the watchful eyes of the Securitate until his death in 1975. Even after the dramatic experience of the Gulag, Radu Gyr's poems remained in this liminal state of suspension, between existence and non-existence. Their publication could only take place after the fall of the communist regime in Romania, as Ioana Cistelecan notes:

> We owe their preservation and publication in volume to the poet's former fellow in suffering, Dumitru Cristea, who memorized them and, once freed, wrote down over 200 poems signed by Radu Gyr, as well as to the kindness of Simona Popa Gyr, who offered her father's poems for publication to the Marineasa publishing house in Timișoara between 1992 and 1994 (Cistelecan 2019: 113-14).

3. Phenomenology of an Abject Space: The Prison and the Cell

Most of Radu Gyr's poems are mentally born in the cell, which gradually takes on the aspect of an infected and degraded womb. It is a claustrophobic place, contained concentrically within another closed and oppressive space: the prison. These infernal places pervade the life of the imprisoned poet, transforming him into 'beast, hatred, and fog' ('Son of a Thief,' Gyr 2009: 54).[8] Since one contains the other, there is almost a fusion, an overlap between these two places:

> Good morning, cell, / good night, bars, – / I would smash your teeth, like a dog, / cell, I would break you with my teeth / Prison, Prison, rabid bitch / how my heart would set you on fire! ('Days,' Gyr 2009: 12-13).[9]

[8] 'Bestie, ură și ceață' ('Fecior de hoață').

[9] 'Bună dimineață, celulă, / noapte bună, zăbrele, – / sparge-v-aș, ca un dulău, în măsele, / rupe-te-aș cu dinții,

Prison and cell, which in Radu Gyr's poems profoundly shape the poetics of abject space, are always described in a distorted and hallucinatory way. This is a probable effect of the physical and psychological trauma suffered. In the poem just quoted, the poet addresses them with hatred and resentment, personifying the prison as a monstrous female creature ('a rabid bitch'). The poem that opens the cycle *The Blood of the Prison* – significantly entitled 'Preface to Songs from Prison' – already outlines the apocalyptic atmosphere of the entire collection:

> In my fierce shackles, / the stone swallows me, the iron sucks me dry. / I sink into darkness, day after day, and into ugliness, / first to my ankles, then to my neck. // Soon, the slab of the prison, with tiny insects, / will pass my mouth, my forehead, / and I will disappear into its horrible throat, / into its underground roar and into ashes… (Gyr 2009: 8).[10]

The poet's progressive descent into the submerged, mineralized, and metallized, yet visceral world of the prison is rendered with violent and vivid imagery. The 'horrible throat' into which he disappears is a metaphor for the cell, the innermost, most devouring place in the prison.

The personification (or animalization) of the prison and the cell, their representation as evil living creatures, is an almost obsessive constant in Radu Gyr's poetry, in some ways atypical within prison poetry. At a first level of analysis, they are only beasts that brutally attack the poet's body and mind:

> This thieving cell / is squeezing my throat, is strangling me… ('Longing,' Gyr 2009: 10);[11]
> The waking burns me with rods, / gnaws me to the bones. / The cell rushes on me with hammers, / crowbars and saws ('Insomnia,' Gyr 2009: 38).[12]

celulă / Temniță, temniță, turbată cățea / cum ți-ar da foc inima mea!' ('Zile').

[10] 'În aprigele mele belciuge, / piatra mă-nfulecă, fierul mă suge. / În bezne m-afund, zi de zi, și-n urât, / întâi pân' la glezne, apoi pân' la gât. // Curând, o să-mi treacă de gură, de frunte, / lespedea temniței, cu gângănii mărunte, / și-am să dispar în grozava ei gușă, / în mugetul ei subteran și-n cenușă…' ('Prefață la cântece din temniță').

[11] 'Celula asta tâlhară / mă strânge de gât, mă sugrumă' ('Jind').

[12] 'Veghea mă arde cu jordii, mă taie, / mă ronțăie până-n ciolane. / Celula

In the second poem quoted, the poet describes in an anguished way the metallic aggression of the cell during his state of insomnia – which is also personified: 'it hangs from the ceiling, by hooks' (Gyr 2009: 38)[13] – and his mental state through the night, dominated by a deep longing [jind] caused by physical deprivation (even in a sexual sense): 'Ha, my thoughts raise spines / prickly, erect, like wild boars, – / I hear them rubbing against all the walls… / Above me, longing sharpens spits' (Gyr 2009: 38).[14] During the night the cell, reflecting the alienated mental state of the sleepless poet like a distorted mirror, takes on an even more disturbing shape, revealing its most violent and corrupt aspect, as for example in 'Song of Hatred:' 'The cell gurgles in the night, / with the sap of tears that nourishes / evil stems, overripe / with black, malicious fruit' (Gyr 2009: 75).[15]

In some poems, Radu Gyr even goes as far as to talk to his cell, asking it for news of his loved ones who have remained in the world of the living, as for instance in 'Postcard:' 'Here, I talk to my cell slowly, / I ask about you, I caress it, then I scratch it, I bite it, I curse it' (Gyr 2009: 33).[16] These verses not only testify to the poet's extreme isolation but could also be a sign of anxiety and dissociative disorders caused by the psychological and physical trauma suffered in the dehumanizing space of prison. Another alienating association that falls into this category is that between the cell and the prisoner himself:

> We never see autumn in prison. / But at night, next to us, we hear the cells coughing ('Autumn in Prison,' Gyr 2009: 60);[17] And at night, / when the wild air burns, / my thieving whistle gathers / all the cells with sleep of em-

năpustește pe mine ciocane, / răngi, fierăstraie' ('Nesomn').

[13] 'Atârnă-n tavan, de cârlige' ('Nesomn').

[14] 'Ha, gândurile mele ridică spinări / țepoase, sculate, cum au mistreții, – / le-aud cum se freacă de toți pereții… / Deasupra mea, jindul ascute frigări' ('Nesomn').

[15] 'Celula gâlgâie, în noapte, / de seva plânsului ce-ngrașă / hainele tulpini răscoapte / cu pârgă neagră și vrăjmașă' ('Cântec de ură').

[16] 'Aici, stau de vorbă cu celula mea pendelete, / o-ntreb de voi, o dezmierd, apoi o zgârii, o mușc, o blestem' ('Carte poștală').

[17] 'Toamna, în temniță, n-o vedem niciodată. / Dar noaptea-auzim cum tușesc celule, alături' ('Toamnă în temniță').

bers (‘Hallucinations,’ Gyr 2009: 81).[18]

In these two poems, ‘the cells’ are personified, becoming metaphors *in absentia* for the prisoners themselves. In the verse ‘at night we hear the cells coughing,’ the cells are represented as subjects capable of ‘coughing,’ an action that can be interpreted as a sign of illness and suffering. This process of substitution, between ‘prisoners’ and ‘cells,’ achieved through personification, creates a mixed, complex image in which cells are no longer simple containers. It is, in fact, a metonymic metaphor, through which the subjects (‘the prisoners’) are replaced with their containers (‘the cells’), based on a relationship of contiguity between the people and the place where they are locked up. This hybrid and highly layered image, suggests the suffering and sickness not only of the people, but also of the abject and rotten concentrationary space itself.

In other poems, the prison is shockingly personified in the figure of a monstrous, vampiric bride who prepares the wedding bed in the darkness of the cell in order to suck the ‘bridegroom flesh’ of the imprisoned poet:

> And you, Prison-bride, / waited for me with a large table: / only tears in the glasses, / and thick bile in the bowls. // Prison, ugly bride, / may the wind blow away your dust, / for you bid death and its band / to play us lute chords. / […] / The bedbugs are your wedding guests; / you danced my wedding *sârbă* / alongside lifers and thieves… // And in this cell you breezily laid out / a bed of wedded lovemaking, / twelve years in darkness / to suck my bridegroom’s flesh (‘Wedding Song,’ Gyr 2009: 47-48).[19]

In her well-known essay *Journey to the Center of Hell. Memoirs and the Literature of Communist*

[18] ‘Și noaptea, / când arde văzduhul sălbatic, / tâlhărescul meu șuier adună / toate celulele cu somn de jăratic’ (‘Halucinații’).

[19] ‘Și tu, Temniță-mireasă, / m-așteptai cu masa mare: / numai lacrimi în pahare, / iar în bliduri fiere deasă. // Temniță, mireasă slută, / spulbera-ți-ar vântul praful, / c-ai pus moartea cu taraful / să ne zică din lăută. / […] / Fă, mireaso, fă, spurcato, / ploșnițele ți-s nuntașii; / sârba nuntii mi-ai jucat-o / cu tâlharii, cu vietașii… // Și-n celulă-ntins-ai lesne / pat de nuntă și-ndrăgire, / doisprezece ani în bezne / să-mi sugi carnea mea de mire’ (‘Cântec de nuntă’).

Prisons and Labor Camps [Călătorie spre centrul infernului. Memorialistica și literatura închisorilor și lagărelor comuniste, 2018], Ruxandra Cesereanu, focalizing on the violent erotization of the prison space, speaks about a vast and complex allegory in Gyr's poetry, an allegory in which imprisonment is represented as a black wedding:

> Radu Gyr is original [...] especially for his brutal sexualization of the prison, projecting the cell as a space of instincts and erotic frustrations: the bran bread becomes a woman's black breast, the moon is a young lady who tempts with her carnality, the blanket becomes the body of a gypsy woman, life itself is personified as the 'whore' of the guards. [...] Erotic fantasy and frenzy are generated by the evil of the cell ('... I laugh like a madman, /I scribble thighs and sex on the wall') (Cesereanu 2018: 256-57).

The metamorphosis of the prison and the cell into living creatures is specific to Radu Gyr's poetry, but in some poems, we can observe a symbolic association, which is much more obvious and common in Gulag poetry, that is between the cell and the grave (or coffin):

> From the depths of senseless torment, / from the cells, from the graves, / we still want to tear ourselves a piece / of the days with burning bodies ('Song from the swamp', Gyr 2009: 43);[20] From the cells, as from the coffins, / Lord, we ask You for lockpicks, / for pincers and tools, to burst / the dungeon like amadou, / to smash its beasts, / to crack the latch / to break the lock (*Colind*, Gyr 2009: 72-73).[21]

The cell, represented as a coffin, is a liminal space suspended between life and death, reflecting the prisoner's own condition as undead. The folkloric figure of the *strigoi* (the undead), which reemerges insistently in Gulag poetry, symbolizes precisely this liminal condition of prisoners in

[20] 'Din adânc de chin bezmetic, / din celule, din morminte, / tot le-am smulge câte-un petic / zilelor cu trup fierbinte' ('Cântec din mlaștină').

[21] 'Din celule, ca din racle, / Doamne, Îți cerem șperacle, / clești și scule, să trosnească / ocna ca o iască, / să-i plesnească fiarele, / să crape zăvoarele, lacătul să sară' ('Colind').

comparison with the outside world, with the world of the living.

As Emanuela Ilie has demonstrated in an essay about alterity and terror in Gulag poetry, it is precisely the hostile space of the prison that degrades prisoners, transforming them into *strigoi*: 'In this case, a specific lyrical motif is that of the *living dead*, the *revenant*, or the *ghost*: after several tortures, often combined [...] the prisoners are transformed into *ghosts*, or rather, shadows in stripes destined to experience an eternal death' [Un motif lyrique spécifique, dans ce cas, est celui du *mort-vivant*, du *revenant* ou du *spectre*: après les tortures diverses, souvent combinées [...] les détenus se transforment en *spectres*, sinon des *ombres rayées* qui doivent expérimenter une mort éternelle] (Ilie 2015: 29).

In Radu Gyr's poetry (and in general in Romanian Gulag poetry), the *strigoi* can take on an ambiguous and ambivalent aspect. On the one hand, he embodies the poet himself and his fellow prisoners, now reduced to the state of undead: 'With dead hands, with mummy faces, / undead in earth-colored uniforms, / in the geometry of the circle of silence, / we remain silent, as our jailers command us' ('Walk in a Circle,' Gyr 2009: 93).[22] On the other hand, the *strigoi* seems to materialize all those demonic apparitions that haunt the closed and dark space of the cell like, for example, in the poem 'When I will die:'

> When I will die in this filthy prison, / crushed by the vampires of the cell and by millennia, / or alone, putting a noose around my neck, / in my death there will not be tenderness, nor holiness (Gyr 2009: 61).[23]

Cold, Hunger, Terror, and Iron, are the four demons that haunt the concentrationary space. As Adrian Popescu evocatively defines them, they are the 'four horsemen of the prison Apocalypse' (Popescu 2013: 112, see also Cistelecan 2019: 118-19):

> Everywhere, in bones, in veins, / the prison cold spurs on the hounds [...] / My fingers break with dry

[22] 'Cu mâini de mort, cu fețe de mumie, / strigoi în uniformă pământie, / în geometria cercului tăcerii, / tăcem, cum ne ordonă temnicerii' ('Plimbare în cerc').

[23] 'Când voi muri în temnița asta spurcată, / strivit de strigoii celulei și de milenii, / or singur punându-mi o sfoară de beregată / în moartea mea nu vor fi duioșii, nici sfinții' ('Când voi muri').

> cracks, / stalactite splinters. / Over my feet, / trucks and tractors have passed, / and my ankles have fallen, somewhere, in a cellar. / I am cold, I am cold ('Cold,' Gyr 2009: 66-67);[24] At night in iron cells, stealthily / Hunger gnaws, lurks, / [...] / and demands Food ('Hunger,' Gyr 2009: 87).[25]

In this infernal space, there is a fifth horseman of the Apocalypse, the stench that always has a cadaverous connotation, indicating putrefaction and decomposition: 'From pillows, from blankets, from straw, / a stench rises like a blaze / and the prison stinks, through old walls, / of yesterday's dead and of tomorrow's dead' ('Pestilence', Gyr 2009: 92).[26] As Ruxandra Cesereanu states, in the universe of the prison 'the putrid, the fetid, and the gangrenous element are true obsessions of smell, cosmically projected' (Cesereanu 2018: 256).

Memory, Sadness, and Despair, form a fallen, decayed trinity that visits the poet's tormented psyche, embodying not only different mental states, but even disturbing and almost demonic characters:

> Every night, from liquid spaces, / at the cell door, a chariot stops, groaning / A hooded shadow gets out from it: – I am Memory, open up... / [...] // Every night, at the iron bars, / Sadness comes and, grinning, sets its dogcatcher's trap towards me [...] // And every night, in the feverish cell, / thundering, roaring, on purple rails, / Oh Despair, I hear your black train / coming over me, loaded with darkness ('Every Night,' Gyr 2009: 26).[27]

[24] 'Peste tot, în ciolane, în vine, / frigul temniței asmute zăvozi / [...] / Degetele mi se rup cu pocnete seci, / așchii de stalactită. Peste picioare, / mi-au trecut camioane, tractoare, / și gleznele mi-au căzut, undeva, într-un beci. / Mi-e frig, mi-e frig' ('Frig').

[25] 'Noaptea-n celule de fier, tâlhărește, / Foamea scrâșnește, pândește, / [...] / și cere Mâncare!' ('Foamete').

[26] 'Din perne, din pături, din paie, / urcă un duhnet ca o vâlvătaie / și temnița pute, prin ziduri bătrâne, / a morții de ieri și-a morții de mâine' ('Molimă').

[27] 'În fiece noapte, din spatii lichide, / la ușa celulei oprește, gemând, o cotiugă / Din ea se dă jos o umbră cu glugă: – Sunt Amintirea, deschide... / [...] // În fiece noapte, la gratii de fier, / vine Tristețea și lung își întinde, spre mine, rânjind, zbilțul ei de hingher [...] // Și-n fiece noapte, în celula cu febre, / tunând, uruind, pe vinete șine, / ți-aud, Deznădejde, venind peste mine / trenul

Alongside these ghostly presences, which become increasingly concrete, there is also a degraded bestiary that populates the darkness of the cell. These are the poet's little 'companions in loneliness' ('cumetri de singurătate'): insects (bedbugs, fleas, cockroaches, beetles, lice, spiders) and rodents (mice, rats) that Radu Gyr evokes obsessively, through a lexical field characterized by popular and regional terms, as he constructs vast scenarios that convey all the ambivalence of the poet's relationship with these creatures. They are 'blood relatives,' 'accomplices of darkness,' by whom the poet consciously allows himself to be devoured in a final act of bodily communion:

> Dear friends of loneliness, / when the cell is filled with darkness, / sister bug, brother-in-law mouse, / aunt beetle // And you, beast sisters, / spiders, lice, and cockroaches, / only you, from the gloomy walls, / with brotherly hearts / cross my poisoned hours. // [...] // Spiders, weave, weave for me in the web / a thick tear. / Come, louse, come and drink / my soul, my mourning // You, bedbug, suck me, suck me dry / the dog rose of my blood, thorn after thorn, / and you, rat, come and tell me / what my sigh tastes like, / and what this sick heart smells like – of flowers? of poison? ('Companions of Loneliness,' Gyr 2009: 18-19).[28]

The obsession with the damned space of the cell reaches its peak in 'Even up There in the Sky.' Here, the sky deteriorates in a sort of ontological reversal, reflecting the earthly condition of the condemned. It is a decayed Paradise, invaded by iron because, as Radu Gyr reveals, even up there, prisons and cells, bars

tău negru, încărcat cu tenebre' ('În fiece noapte').

[28] 'Dragi prieteni de singurătate, / când celula cu beznă se-ncarcă, / ploșniță soră, guzgane cumnate, / mătușă libarcă. // Și voi lighioane surate, / păianjeni, păduchi și gândaci, / numai voi, din pereții posaci, / călcați cu inimi de' frate / prin orele mele înveninate. // [...] // Înnoadă, înnoadă, păianjene-n plasă / și pentru mine o lacrimă deasă. / Vino, păduche, vino și bea / sufletul meu, jelania mea // Tu, ploșniță, suge-mi, suge-mi din plin, / măcești din sânge, spin lângă spin, / iar tu, șobolane, vino să-mi spui / care mi-i gustul oftatului, / și cum miroase – a flori? a otravă? – inima asta bolnavă' ('Cumetri de singurătate').

of fire, and peepholes, chains, and padlocks are everywhere:

> Even up there, in the sky, / there are, of course, plenty of prisons and dungeons, / and behind granite and copper doors / locked cells lie…// In space, sometimes, slow cries are heard, / at night, above, on the vault of the sky, bars of fire materialize / and condemned eyes peer through peepholes, / shedding tears and misfortune. // Other times, the clanking of chains descends / from the heavens, over our foreheads. / Keys turn in blue locks / and aerial latches creak (Gyr 2009: 55).[29]

4. Among Trauma, Redemption, and Language: Blood, Wounds, and Stigmata

In the cycle *The Blood of the Prison,* the title itself reveals a powerful symbolic association that links blood and concentrationary space. This ambivalent image pervades all of Radu Gyr's prison poetry. As Ioana Cistelecan has already observed, 'the blood of the prison' is an obsessive 'leitmotif […] that invades and dominates the entire universe, producing disgust' (Cistelecan 2019: 123). Blood is in the center of a vast thematic constellation that radiates to another posthumous cycle with an emblematic title: *Stigmata*. Closely connected to the image of the wound, blood is mainly the obsessive and concrete sign of the torture suffered by the poet; it is also a mediating element between the wounded body and concentrationary space, between the subjectivity of the condemned and the oppressive prison system. In this perspective, the body appears as a map and a liminal surface – always suspended in limbo between life and death – on which the traumas caused by imprisonment are inscribed in blood.

In '281,' where the reduction of the condemned to a simple number – 'the number of my

[29] 'Și-acolo sus, în văzduh, de bună seamă / temnițe sunt și ocne destule, / și după uși de granit și aramă / zac, ferecate, celule…// În spații se-aud, uneori, plânsete-ncete, / noaptea, apar sus, pe boltă, dreve de foc, / și ochi osândiți se ivesc la vizete, / lacrimi să verse și nenoroc. // Alteori, zăngăt de lanțuri stă să coboare / din slăvi, peste frunțile noastre. / Chei se-nvârtesc în lacăte-albastre / și scârțâie-aeriene zăvoare' ('Și-acolo sus, în văzduh').

tears / the number of my blood' – is told in a repetitive and hallucinatory way, the poet drags himself along, barks and growls through 'the blood of the cage' (Gyr 2009: 77). In 'The Devil's Journeyman,' a poem based on the great theme of *nostos,* the crowd surrounding the poet, seeing his wound pulsing, asks him: 'Where do you come from, tell us, covered in blood, / from what raging forests? / […] / Where do you come from? Who tore your flesh with pincers / In what devilish workshop?'[30] Even after his return from concentrationary hell, the poet continues to bear on his body the traumatic marks of his imprisonment, symbolized by the persistence of bloodstains. In 'The Mirror,' the poet represents himself as a two-faced Janus whose cursed countenance, eternally split and disfigured, is half-covered in blood: 'My heavily condemned face, / what splintered mirror reflects you… / One cheek laughs, the other cries, / one is azure, the other is blood' (Gyr 2009: 141).[31]

In the close interrelation between the body of the condemned and the prison space, blood not only materializes the physical wounds inflicted by the torturers, but it also is a sign which marks the cold, metallic space, and even objects, as an ambiguous trace, of death and life, of degradation and resistance. In the poem 'Cold,' 'The blood yelps: I am cold, I am cold, / then it drips down onto the concrete' (Gyr 2009: 67);[32] in 'Red Clothes,' after a night 'of insomnia and fever,' looking at the red and black stripes of his clothes, the poet remarks: 'I sprinkled you with the blood from my arteries / and with pitch streams of tears and bile' (Gyr 2009: 52).[33] In 'Prisoners' Graveyard,' the autumn leaves 'tremble in circles, fall on graves, / written in hot blood, / like red, bitter flowers: / prison registration numbers' (Gyr 2009: 89). In this poem there is an evident intertextuality with George Bacovia's poem 'Dusk:'

> With big tears of blood / leaves flow from the branches flow / And, slow-

[30] '– De unde vii, spune, mânjit de sânge, / din ce turbate păduri? / […] / – De unde vii? Cine ți-a rupt carnea-n cleşte / În ce drăcesc atelier?' ('Calfă la diavol').

[31] 'Greu osânditul meu chip, / ce hârb de oglindă mi te răsfrânge…/ Un obraz râde, celălalt plânge, / azur e unul, celălalt sânge' ('Oglinda').

[32] 'Sângele scheaună: mi-e frig, mi-e frig, / apoi se scurge jos, în ciment' ('Frig').

[33] 'V-am stropit cu sângele meu din artere / și cu șiroaie smolite de lacrimi și fiere' ('Haine roșii').

> ly the bloodied dusk / passes through the window/ [...] / At the window, in the sick dusk / A girl coughs / And now her handkerchief / Looks like flowing leaves (Bacovia 2012: 39).[34]

but while in Bacovia the bloody autumn leaves are a metaphor *in absentia* for tuberculosis, in Radu Gyr they are a metaphor *in praesentia* for the prison registration numbers, evoking once again the condition of detention that seems to last even *postmortem*, being forever 'written' even on the graves. In other texts, however, the flowing blood refers, just as in Bacovia's poem, to tuberculosis, from which Gyr himself suffered. In 'Autumn in Prison,' autumn slips into the prison at night, personified as a large reddish bitch, 'to lick the blood, vomited under the blankets' from the 'coughing cells' (Gyr 2009: 60).[35]

Radu Gyr seems to constantly amplify the symbolic ambiguity of blood. In some poems, it is no longer a metaphor for trauma and illness, but becomes a metaphor for the vital force – 'May our blood, lively as petrol, / rise the flames of the stake towards the stars' ('The stake towards stars,' Gyr 2009: 107)[36] – sucked by the small beasts that inhabit the darkness of the cell – 'You, bedbug, suck me, suck me dry / the dog rose of my blood, thorn after thorn' ('Companions of loneliness,' Gyr 2009: 19)[37] – or by the traumatic memories that haunt the poet: 'For a hundred years, red leeches / suck me dry, drain all my blood: / they are memories, they are memories, / I can't take it anymore...' ('Song,' Gyr 2009: 99).[38] Closely connected to this vitalistic aspect, there is a further symbolic value of blood in Radu Gyr's poetry, which is atypical within Gulag poetry. Blood that 'screams' is a metaphor for repressed erotic instincts and, consequently, for the deep frustrations caused by sexual deprivation:

[34] 'Cu lacrimi mari de sânge / Curg frunze de pe ramuri / Și-nsângerat, amurgul pătrunde-ncet prin geamuri/ [...] / La geam tușește-o fată / În bolnavul amurg / Și s-a făcut batista / Ca frunzele ce curg' ('Amurg').

[35] 'Să lingă sângele cald vomitat de sub pături' ('Toamna în temniță').

[36] 'Sângele nostru să întărâte, / viu ca petrolul, rugul spre stele' ('Rugul spre stele').

[37] 'Tu, ploșniță, suge-mi, suge-mi din plin, / măceșul din sânge, spin lângă spin' ('Cumetri de singurătate').

[38] 'De-o sută de-ani, lipitorile roșii / îmi sug, îmi golesc sângele tot: / sunt amintirile, sunt amintirile, / nu mai pot...' ('Cântec').

> Heart, – love calls and plays, / outside, with bare tits, on the streets… / Here, as if crushed under the lid of a box, / blood screams numbly for prey / and flesh grinds, dazed ('Bars,' Gyr 2009: 9).[39]

In some poems, blood no longer belongs only to the physical and biological dimension, but shows clear connections with the sacred and the transcendent. In this perspective, blood and wounds, when they become part of this metaphysical dimension, converge in the shocking image of *stigmata*, as in the poem 'Tonight, Jesus…' This is a visionary and surreal text centered on a Christological apparition which, as Simona Popa Gyr (Gyr 2009: 304) remembers, circulated by word of mouth in the Romanian Gulag more than any other, probably because of its mystical aspect and its intensely cathartic value. Christ's descent into the abject and putrid space of the cell, which is marked by an intense smell of roses ('the straw smelled of roses'), indicates Christ's participation in the suffering of the prisoners. As Alexandru Marchidan stated, one of the most productive and obsessive motifs in Romanian Gulag poetry is precisely the

> Christ-like model of suffering and redemption: the prisoners participate, live, share in the death of Christ, and they are aware that He crucifies himself and suffers with them in their cell (Marchidan 2013: 105).

While on the one hand Jesus Christ seems to humanize himself in order to share the pain of the imprisoned poet, on the other hand his supernatural presence transfigures the visceral space of the cell, which becomes 'a Mount' and 'a Calvary.' It is a place of martyrdom, but also of spiritual elevation and supreme redemption: 'a monk's cell, the place where the prisoner is alone with God, the space of the most eloquent silence' (Marchidan 2013: 105) and where the condemned experiences a total identification between him and God, as these verses from the poem 'Identity' testify:

> You are good, Lord, I am earthly and evil, and in love I do not resemble

[39] 'Inimă, – dragostea cheamă și joacă, / afară, cu țâțele goale, pe străzi… / Aici, ca strivit sub capacu-unei lăzi, / sângele urlă năuc după prăzi / și carnea scrâșnește, buimacă' ('Zăbrele'). See Cesereanu 2018: 256-257.

> You, nor in mercy. / But, if I consider my wounds, I am the image of Your image, / as if I have been molded from heaven, not from clay (Gyr 2009: 278).[40]

In 'Tonight, Jesus…' this identity between the prisoner and the divinity is affirmed through a constellation of images that include the wound, the traces of rust left by the chains and, above all, the marks of the nails that the poet finds on his hands:

> – Put your hand on my wounds, / On his ankles were marks of wounds and rust, / as if he had once worn chains… / […] // – Where are you, Lord? – I screamed to the bars. / Incense smoke came from the moon. / I touched myself, and on my hands / I found the marks of His nails… (Gyr 2009: 22-23).[41]

The stigmata, which synthesize blood and wounds into a single image, are at the center of powerful mystical imagery that appears here, however, in a modified, almost reversed form. In Radu Gyr, a highly layered Christian symbol, encompassing both suffering and salvation, leads to a sort of secular dramatization of trauma and political martyrdom, filtered through Christian imagery.

Within this secular dramatization of trauma and through a process of symbolic transfiguration, blood is transformed into the anatomical manifestation of the poet's (psychic and spiritual) interiority. Thus, the image of blood that 'whimpers,' 'screams,' or 'responds' ('I scream, – the scream seeks only me, / I touch, – My sad blood answers,' 'Darkness,' Gyr 2009: 45),[42] seems to refer not only to the wounds of the body and to sexual deprivation, but also to the movements of the soul: emotions, thoughts, memories. It is as if blood, representing the deepest part of the Self, had replaced, in a pagan and ancestral way, the poet's very soul, desig-

[40] 'Ești, Doamne, bun, eu pământean și rău, și-n dragoste nu-Ți seamăn, nici în milă. / Dar, după răni, sunt chip din chipul Tău, / de par dospit din cer, nu din argilă' ('Identitate').

[41] '– Pune-Mi pe răni mâna ta, / Pe glezne-avea umbre de răni și rugină, / parcă purtase lanțuri, cândva… / […] // – Unde ești, Doamne? – am urlat la zăbrele. / Din lună venea fum de cățui. / M-am pipăit, și pe mâinile mele / Am găsit urmele cuielor Lui..' ('As-noapte Iisus').

[42] 'Strig, – strigătul Mă caută numai pe Mine, / pipăi, – tristul Meu sânge răspunde' ('Întuneric').

nating a primordial principle of life that inhabits the space of his body. In a significant text such as *The Blood of the Prison*, the poet finally transforms blood and wounds into liturgical and cathartic language:

> If I press my ear against the concrete of the cell, / I hear, I hear / the prison's blood, like a great tumult, / like a sudden groan, / flowing beneath, / flowing like a torrent of bitter venom, / held underground beneath latches. // The prison's blood, a prisoner himself, / gurgles in cruel pain / under stone and under iron, / under condemnation, under silence, / through underground arteries. // I press my ear down and hear it: / sometimes it boils with a hot roar, / it cries, it cries at the bottom of graves. // Other times it screams, wild and cruel / like a fierce lust for life, / or hisses like a temptation / that, wandering, incites you / to kill, to plunder… (Gyr 2009: 30).[43]

In this poem, blood reemerges as a word[44] that sings, curses, and invokes, like the tumultuous voice of an underground and unstoppable flow or like a force that demands to return to the outside world, breaking every limit. Paradoxically, the cell materializes the womb in which the possibility of this new language is generated. It is a poetic voice that becomes a vehicle for resistance against annihilation and for memory beyond the degradation of time, since 'the blood of the prison' transforms suffering into collective memory, connecting past and present: 'Under

[43] 'Dacă-mi lipesc urechea de cimentul celulei, / ascult, ascult / cum sângele temniței, ca un mare tumult, / ca un geamăt abrupt, / curge pe dedesupt, / curge torent de veninuri amare, / ținut în pământ sub zăvoare. // Sângele temniței, prizonier, / gâlgâie-n cruntă durere / pe sub piatră și pe sub fier, / pe sub osândă, pe sub tăcere, / prin subterane artere. // Lipesc urechea jos și-l aud: / uneori fierbe un muget fierbinte, / plânge, plânge în fund de morminte. // Alteori țipă, sălbatic și crud / ca o aprigă poftă de viață, / sau șuieră-a ispită răzleață, / cu brânciul ei aţâţător / la jaf, la omor…' ('Sângele temniței').

[44] In another poem, 'We had no youth' [Noi nu am avut tinerețe], the association between blood and language is even more explicit: 'We sang: blood was the poem' ('Cântăm: era sânge poemul' Gyr 2009: 290). Other critics have already noted this association between blood and the poetic word without, however, proposing a more in-depth analysis of this specific theme, see in particular Popescu 2013: 112, and Cistelecan 2019: 123.

bitter and large boulders, / someone has been screaming for a thousand years, / someone has been singing for centuries' (Gyr 2009: 31).[45]

Under the unstoppable drive of the 'blood of the prison' which drags the poet beyond his own limits and toward his total dissolution into matter:

> And when, in the end, the red torrent / draws back from me to the concrete, / with the heavy blood of prison / I draw back from myself too, / and I go with it, with its tremendous flood, / backwards, under the concrete… (Gyr 2009: 32).[46]

the body is no longer just a painful map of trauma, but also becomes the space of metamorphosis and a form of vital resistance:

> And my flesh suddenly cracks, / my limbs begin to open, freed from diabolical locks, / like doors, like windows: / – Come in, blood of the prison, come in, / come, come and overwhelm me, / from otherworldly depths… (Gyr 2009: 32).[47]

Radu Gyr outlines here a bodily mutation that breaks down the boundaries between the individual and the prison. The prison is no longer just a place of confinement and oppression, but also of transformation and redemption, in which the body becomes the very instrument of liberation, embodying a subjectivity that regains value and power through the image of blood. Imprisonment produces a new language and a new identity, since 'the blood of the prison' makes possible a deep reconfiguration of the Self, one that screams, curses, invokes, and sings beyond the cell. I stated earlier that blood is resurrected in the form of sacred, liturgical, and cathartic language. This hypothesis is confirmed by the formal and stylistic aspects of the text analysed. In 'The

[45] 'Sub marii, amari bolovani, / cineva urlă de-o mie de ani, / cineva cântă de-un veac // cineva n-are geamăt, nici leac' ('Sângele temniței').

[46] 'Și când, pe urmă, roșul torent / se trage din mine, îndărăt, în / ciment, / cu sângele temniței greu / mă trag din mine și eu, / și plec cu el, cu grozavu-i șuvoi; / sub ciment, înapoi' ('Sângele temniței').

[47] 'Și carnea mea trosnește deodată, / din zăvoare drăcești, / prind mădularele să se deschidă / ca niște uși, ca niște ferești: // – Intră, sânge al temniței, intră, / vino din funduri nepământești, / vino să mă cotropești…' ('Sângele temniței').

Blood of the Prison,' in fact, a ritual and incantatory rhythm predominates, giving the text a high performative value, bringing it closer to the form of prayer. The figures of repetition give the rhythm its obsessive and hypnotic aspect, while the use of enjambement intensifies the idea of a flow, of blood flowing hypnotically from one verse to another, and beyond the page itself.

5. Conclusions

In the space of the prison, 'the prisoner finally understands that only a return to the sacred and to faith can represent the solution of supreme salvation' (Ilie 2015: 36). In this infernal and violent place, he mentally creates poems that take the form of prayers. The emergence of a poetic word with a sacred character in such a hostile world is, therefore, itself an effect of trauma and can be considered one of those forms of 'internal migration' discussed and analysed by Natalya Lebedyntseva in a recent article dedicated to the Ukrainian poet Vasyl' Stus. The scholar, drawing on the studies of Bohdan Pylypushko, Tetiana Tsymbal, Dzhinna Litinskaia, and Liia Kaufmann, first describes the concept of 'internal migration' as a form of resistance and self-preservation, as a phenomenon of psychological isolation that manifests itself through withdrawal into a mental and spiritual space. She then applies this concept to Vasyl' Stus's poetry of repression, identifying within his work specific forms of 'internal migration' such as the dream and the inner journey (see Lebedyntseva 2024: 45-66). In the case of Radu Gyr, the primary forms of 'internal migration' towards a spiritual space are represented by the Sacred and by the form of 'prayer-poetry.' Gyr has transformed the brutality of imprisonment into poetry, by making his poetic art not only a testimony to trauma, but also a supreme resistance and a profound process of inner healing. Blood, wounds, and stigmata then become a performative language that allows the poet to transcend the alienating logic of prison, to fix in words a memory that remains alive beyond the temporal horizon of traumatic experience, and to transform horror into a form of spiritual and artistic redemption.

The research presented in this article was conducted within the framework of the PRIN 2022 PNRR project “Literature of Socialist Trauma: Mapping and Researching the Lost Page of European Literature (LOST)”, ID: P2022Z45X8, CUP: B53D23029360001, Principal Investigator: Andrea Gullotta (University of Palermo). The project was funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research (MIUR) under the 2022 PRIN PNRR Call for Proposals, Directorial Decree No. 1409 of September 14, 2022.

Bibliography

Bacovia 2012: Bacovia, George. 2012. *Opere* (București: Academia Română / Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă).

Cesereanu 2018: Cesereanu, Ruxandra. 2018. *Călătorie spre centrul infernului. Memorialistica și literatura închisorilor și lagărelor comuniste* (Pitești: Manuscris).

Cistelecan 2019: Cistelecan, Ioana. 2019. *Staze și metastaze carcerale* (Bistrița: Editura Charmides).

Gyr 2009: Gyr, Radu. 2009. *Sângele temniței. Stigmate* (București: Editura Lucman).

Gullotta 2016: Gullotta, Andrea. 2016. 'Gulag Poetry. An Almost Unexplored Field of Research', in *(Hi-)Stories of the Gulag. Fiction and Reality*, ed. by Felicitas Fischer von Weikersthal and Karoline Thaidigsmann (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter), 175-92.

Ilie 2015: Ilie, Emanuela. 2015. 'L'Autre come Face de la Terreur', *Journal of Humanistic and Social Studies*, VI(1): 27-38.

Lebedyntseva 2024: Lebedynsteva, Natalya. 2024. 'The Repressed Body in the Existential Experiences of Vasil' Stus', *AvtobiografiЯ*, 13, 45-66.

Marchidan 2013: Marchidan, Alexandru. 2013. 'Poezia închisorilor comuniste. O epopee a suferinței și a salvării', *Memoria – Revista gândirii arestate*, 84(3): 103-13.

Oțel Petrescu 2010: Oțel Petrescu, Aspazia. 2010. 'Cuvântul unei deținute politice beneficiară din plin a poeziilor după gratii' in *Poeții după gratii*, by Aa. Vv. (Mănăstirea Petru Vodă: Mănăstirea Petru Vodă), 9-13.

Pană 1982: Pană, Zahu (ed.). 1982. *Poezii din închisori* (Canada: Editura Cuvântul românesc).

Popa 2023: Popa, Ilie (ed.). 2023. *Antologia liricii de detenție anticomunistă din spațiul românesc* (București: Editura Fundației Culturale MEMORIA).

Popescu 2013: Popescu, Adrian. 2013. *Lancea frântă. Lirica lui Radu Gyr* (București: Editura Tracus Arte).

Tudorache 2020: Tudorache, Dan, 2020. 'Radu Gyr, de la „cântăreț oficial" al Mișcării Legionare la poetul rezistenței din închisorile comuniste', *Altarul reîntregirii*, 1, 131-50.

Whitehead 2004: Whitehead, Anne. 2004. *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).

Eva Toulouze

The Biography and Poetry of the Udmurt Poet Kuzebai Gerd as an Example of Repression of Ethnic Writers in Soviet Russia

This article focuses on one less known episode in the history of repression in the Soviet Union. The Stalinist terror has been widely investigated. Still, it has been examined most from the point of view of the centre, from the capital cities, and less from the provinces. Moreover, a topic to which not enough attention has been devoted is the systematic attack on Russia's nationalities, which had so much benefitted from the early Soviet system. At some time, they had become a threat, emphasising their differences from the dominant ethnic group, as they had been formerly encouraged to do. Among the first nationalities to suffer were the Udmurts. The present article concentrates on a representative case study, that of the Udmurt poet Kuzebai Gerd, who had acquired the status of a rising star for the newly promoted Udmurtness before being repressed.

The National Question in its Historical Context

Russia, even after the fall of the Soviet Union, is well-known as a multi-ethnic state. It is a historical fact that the Bolsheviks, while they attempted to reorganise the newly formed territory, relied on the principle of ethnicity. Indeed, this pragmatic approach allowed them to find solutions to the conundrums they had to solve. While their main problem at the end of the First World War were the powerful Western nationalities, such as the Poles, Finns and Ukrainians, there were other nationalities occupying some important part of the territory, with only a few intellectuals and almost no political elite. This was the case in the Volga region, a region that had often been problematic for Russia: since it joined the Muscovite state in the 16th century, it had been the origin of several revolts threatening even the central power, from the Cheremis wars in the second half of the 16th century, up to Stepan Razin's revolt in the 17th and Emel'ian Pugachëv's in the late 18th century. Moreover, besides Orthodox Russians, there were also animist Finno-Ugrians and many Muslim Turkic ethnic

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-008
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

groups in the area. Still, the decision of dividing the country according to ethnicity, while promoted by the People's Commissariat for Nationalities [Narkomnats], was not unanimously accepted: in the 'regionalisation debate' they were against those who argued that the country had to be divided into economic-administrative complementary regions, a union-wide plan (Hirsch 2000; Hirsch 2004). However, within the framework of this administrative decision, at the beginning of the Soviet era, an unexpected alliance was contracted between the Bolsheviks and these nationalities, whose main goals were not incompatible with the Party's: the development of their culture and their dignity.

The new administrative system encompassed units dedicated to particular nationalities, mostly dominant in their regions. This process, led by the People's Commissariat for Nationalities, under Stalin's responsibility, included thorough negotiations between neighbouring regions, Moscow being the referee and arbitrating according to the central power's own interests. Indeed, Moscow was interested in avoiding any local subdivision – especially non-Russian – to become strong enough to challenge the centre; moreover, it wanted to keep a 'balance' between ethnic concerns and economic coherence, allowing work division between regions (Carr 1959: 277).

In the 1920s, the official Party policy implied achieving balance between two explicit dangers, called in the Bolshevik's terminology 'Great Russian chauvinism' and 'local nationalism,' while in a document written at the end of 1922 – i.e. not long before the leader's demise – and revealed only at the XX Congress of the PCSU in 1956, the former was the most dangerous and widely represented one inside the Party itself (Pipes 1964: 282-85), and particularly endorsed by Stalin.

Indeed, this is the direction in which the Party policy eventually developed, after a promising start dedicated to supporting the different nationalities it had contributed to awaken. Of course, there were huge differences in the situations of the different regions: in some regions the Bolshevik Party was strong and there were conflicts with the central power (as in Georgia, where the Party officials behaved in chauvinist ways towards the Georgian communists), some regions were more politically aware than others (there were both com-

munists and 'whites' in the Komi area or in the Tatar world); in other regions there were not as many communists and they had but little support among the rural indigenous population. So, the Party reacted pragmatically according to each situation.

But the general pattern responded to coherent logics: at the beginning of the 1920s, the central power was well disposed towards the nationalities and supported them in their tensions with the more chauvinistic tendencies. This tendency was confirmed even when the Party leadership was not well disposed towards the indigenous group, as was the case in Udmurtia. At the beginning, this approach was well illustrated by the notion of 'indigenisation,' in Russian *korenizatsiia,* which was theoretically the official position of the leading organs until the 1930s. This was a centrally decided policy, whose idea had already been expressed by Stalin as soon as 1918 (Pesikina 1956: 48) – the core idea was to give some formerly unknown privileges to the local indigenous population. The local language was to be given a status similar to Russian, and not only legally, but in practice as well; moreover, positive discrimination was implemented in working life to support indigenous leaders, by the establishment of compulsory quotas. This policy was supposed to be implemented everywhere; but there was resistance, and this is particularly clear in the Udmurt case (Toulouze 2006; Toulouze 2016).

This did not make it possible to obtain the expected results. Another factor contributing to the failure of *indigenisation* were also the changes within the Party, which had a huge influx of new members (Pipes 1964) who had not known exile and life abroad and were mostly Russian-centred; they were 97.3% in 1922. This was felt at the 12th Party Congress in April 1923, where centralisation dominated over self-determination (Pipes 1964: 293) and strengthened the position of those hostile to reducing the influence of ethnic Russians.

The Formation of Udmurt 'Statehood'

In this context, the Udmurt example is remarkable, the Udmurt being a community in central Russia, between the rivers Cheptsa and Kama, who spoke a Finno-Ugric language and practiced an animist religion before they were forcibly converted to Orthodox Christianity from the 16th century onwards.

An Udmurt unity, at the beginning an autonomous oblast', was created at the end of 1920. The new Udmurt ethnic unit faced internal challenges from the very beginning. The Udmurt cause, in this region, had few supporters in the Party and many detractors. The region had a strong industrial basis, two big metallurgical plants (Izhevsk and Votkinsk), in which Party organisations were hostile to the local agricultural population and were strongly pro-Russian.

Thus, at the beginning of the 1920s, the powerful local communist unit acted as a brake on the overall Party policy, especially on the measures aimed at supporting the local population, namely the 'indigenisation' (Sidtikova 1990: 38-42; Egorov 1929: 8 for the Udmurt case). This led to serious incidents, in which the Udmurt leaders were victims and were repeatedly defeated in local conflicts (Kulikov 1997: 40-43). While the central Party clearly supported the Udmurt until 1925, afterwards the attitude of the centre became more and more suspicious towards the non-Russians and eventually totally hostile.

One of the first indications of the change in the Party's policy at the local level was certainly the open hostility of the local Party towards the indigenisation measures such as the promotion of local people for roles of political and economic responsibility. The lack of Udmurt politicians was to be felt already in the preparation of autonomy, when some local administrations refused to communicate the data about their Udmurt inhabitants (Pavlov 1968a: 80), attempting thus to sabotage the creation of an Udmurt oblast', which was at the time among the priorities of the Narkomnats.

While the Udmurt authorities decided in 1923 to recruit a great number of Udmurts in the administration (Sidtikova 1990: 38), the results were scarce: 'at the end of 1923, not only there are very few Udmurts in the leading institutions of the oblast' and its subdivisions, but also in the institutions close to the Udmurt peasants' (Bobrova et al. 1970: 149). The requirement of civil servants being able to work in Udmurt was totally ignored, so in the 1920s 28.5% of primary school teachers, and 11% of secondary school teachers were Udmurt (Shkliaeva 1991: 90), so were 13% of civil servants, less than 25% of local leaders and 14.4% of 'technical leaders' (Kulikov 1998: 100). Later, the proportion changed for the worse: in the local Ministry of economy, while the percentage of Udmurts was 30.7 in 1933, it be-

came 5.5 in 1935 (Shkliaeva 1991: 29).

The qualitative assessment shows even worse results: while in 1932 the Izhevsk plant recruited 1,000 Udmurt workers, only 2.36% of them remained in the plant in later years (Vasil'eva 1998: 127). The generalised character of these trends and their systematic approach allow us to infer that there was a deliberate sabotage of the Party's official policies by the local leadership.

The decision of 1923 also had repercussions on the Udmurt language: complaints and answers were also to be written in Udmurt. Udmurt language courses were organised, but they failed to reach their target. At the time, this failure was explained by different factors: 'The party indifference, the lack of understanding of the importance of using Udmurt by many party members and the absence of a generally recognised literary language; one author adds the reluctance of many Udmurt to go over to their language, for Russian opens any kind of doors' (Egorov 1929: 15).

While at the political level these processes were being implemented and failed, the intelligentsia worked tirelessly. While some of the small Udmurt intelligentsia was not enrolled in the Party, until the end of the 1920s there was a general agreement with and support for the party's goals (Domokos 1975: 167).

The War against Free Thinking

The first serious attack against free-thinking at a local level was launched in 1926, at the founding congress of the Udmurt writers' union, called then VUARP – the All-Udmurt Association of Revolutionary Writers [Vseudmurtskaia assotsiatsia revoliutsionnykh pisatelei]. The question that started a heated debate in which the head of the local Party fully participated was about the character of the class struggle. Back then only four writers were members of the party (Bobrova et al. 1970: 204). For the (temporary) head of the VUARP, Kuzebai Gerd, there was no class struggle among the Udmurt writers. But this position was rejected by the Party leadership.

This campaign also influenced the fate of the association for the development of Udmurt culture, called 'Bölyak' [Neighbourhood], and created in Moscow by Gerd. In 1928, after having spectacularly increased its membership (Kuznetsov 1994: 429-30), some prominent members were excluded for 'political mistakes,'

while local history was more globally attacked (Kulikov 1997: 164). The Association was later liquidated. In 1931 all the organisations that investigated the Finno-Ugric questions were also liquidated (Domokos 1975: 256; Loikfun 1929; Loikfun 1929a; Loikfun 1930), with the effect that all possibilities of development in this direction were blocked (Kuznetsov 1994: 300, 431).

The first conference of the VUARP in 1930 became a platform of criticism towards Gerd (Shkliaev 1979: 35). It launched the term 'gerdism' [гердовщина, on the model of Eseninism]. Gerd was seen as a nationalist enemy – according to the leadership's analysis, he was a 'wolf hiding under a sheep's hide'. However, not all voices remained silent: a letter from six writers denounced what was happening. This was the very last manifestation of independent thinking. In 1932, the Party called Gerd a 'spokesman for national bourgeoisie, who praises all our enemies, the kulaks we have eliminated, and opposes all our initiatives… He is active against the Russians, against Russian workers and he calls the backward Udmurts not to learn Russian. […] Our main task is fighting against Gerdism' (Kulikov 1995: 75-76). 'Gerdism' became a symbol of everything that was negative.

The SOFIN Trial

The SOFIN trial was a show trial which, as a result, eliminated the most prominent Udmurt intellectuals, as well as other Finno-Ugric intellectuals. The main 'culprits' were Finno-Ugric 'nationals;' mainly Udmurts. In this trial, as well in those that followed, the pattern was similar: the victims were members of minority ethnic groups, and the executioners were Russian. The repressive pattern against non-Russians was clear. The SOFIN trial was the first full-fledged operation against ethnic minorities, launched as early as 1932.

The accusers constructed a whole network, gathering all the initiatives related to Finno-Ugric studies and inventing hierarchies and connections in order to present these different initiatives as linked in a big 'counterrevolutionary' organisation, of which Gerd was supposedly the leader. They called this 'organisation' SOFIN, i.e. the Union of Finnic nationalities. The prosecutors looked also for Finno-Ugric activists in other regions, in Mari, Mordvin and Komi administrative units, in

order to present the judges with a complex body of evidence.
The authorities made several mistakes: they argued that SOFIN was founded on April 19th1932, a period in which most of those accused were already detained (Kulikov 1997: 130-31, 220, 144), while many Finn scholars mentioned by Gerd in his writings and considered as his accomplices, were already dead…
The trial ended with many sentences handed down to so-called SOFIN activists. The non-Udmurts received lighter penalties and some were able to avoid them.

Kuzebai Gerd's Activity

Gerd has already been mentioned in the previous chapter. It is not by chance – I intended to focus on his pivotal role concerning the Udmurt case.
Gerd is an unavoidable personality when writing about Udmurt identity. There are very few personalities of his stature in the whole range of Finno-Ugric regions. It is understandable that he became the focus of the attention of state authorities and that he concentrated all their resentment against the 'foes' of the socialist path. Gerd was sincere in his appreciation of the Revolution and of the opportunities the Soviet power had offered his people, but he took the Bolshevik promises too seriously, since they came more from political opportunism, than ideological principles. When the Party policy changed, he stumbled as many others did. Gerd was also vulnerable: his enthusiasm, his writing skills, and his open and communicative personality sometimes caused envy and jealousy in others. Therefore, Gerd became the main culprit and paid with his life. He was only the first to be targeted: by the end of the war, Udmurt intelligentsia was almost totally exterminated. This fact is interesting in its exemplarity: the same fate touched all the other Finno-Ugric republics in central Russia.
Kuzebai Gerd (1898-1937) incarnates the contradictions of his time. He was born Kuz'ma Chainikov, he was of a large family and was brought up by the mother.[1] He became a schoolteacher, which at the be-

[1] It is difficult to know today exactly the social position of the Chainikov's family: Gerd says it was a family of poor peasants. But at the time it was the right thing to say. Bogomolova asserts that he was of a middle-class peasant family (Bogomolova 1983: 242). As he soon began to be seen as an enemy, it could not be said that he was from modest origins… Nobody really knows…

ginning of the twentieth century was considered the highest achievement for member of ethnic minorities. The revolution triggered his potential for activity and organisation: when he was barely nineteen, he became active in several fields. In politics, he became close to the Bolsheviks, as they were the political force that supported the ethnic intellectuals in their search for recognition and dignity. Gerd did not become a Party member: however, he was among those who attempted to define the borders of the newly created Udmurt administrative unit following the interests of the Udmurt people.

As a literary figure, Gerd was active in political writing. His work was published in the Party's press-poems, but also prose, for example the biographies of revolutionary personalities: his translation of Lenin's biography (January 1920) in Udmurt caused him to be accused later of having betrayed Marxist principles while trying to fit the Udmurt vocabulary to Marxist notions (for example, for translating 'proletarian' with the equivalent word for 'poor' – *kuan'er,* in Udmurt) (Pavlov 1968: 200).

In 1920-22 Gerd organised the orphans' infrastructure in Izhevsk and endeavoured to train childcare specialists (Andreeva 1988: 128). Witnesses confirm his excellent relationship with the children (Romanova 1998: 70; Kirillova 1998: 58). In those troubled years, he found the energy to visit Udmurt villages and instruct peasants mostly through theatre.

Gerd himself wrote didactic plays, particularly in support of education and against the Church's obscurantism: 'in 1918, theatre performances swarmed into Udmurt areas as a huge wave' (Gerd 1925: 227). For example, between 1918 and 1919, only in the Malmyzh region, Gerd organised 47 performances (Shkliaeva 1991: 90).

In the first years of Udmurt statehood, Gerd became quite prominent in the local cultural life. In those years, while attending a meeting in Moscow where Lenin took the floor, he explored the bookshops and discovered a translation of Finnish poetry (Briusov et al. 1917). This book became a path-opening revelation for him. The Finns spoke a language akin to Udmurt; they were not as far ahead in their cultural development, and their latest steps became exemplary for Gerd: on one hand, Elias Lönnrot had given form to the Finnish national epos, which had boosted their self-confidence; on the other hand, proper Finn literature had been

developing with poetry, prose, novels. Gerd decided that this was the right path for the Udmurt and tried to follow it.
Later, when the civil war ended and the Bolshevik power was consolidated, Gerd chose to pursue his studies. He applied to the Literary institute that later took the name of Maksim Gor'kii, studied poetry with Valerii Briusov and concluded his studies successfully. Meanwhile, he was active among the students, organising the Udmurt cultural life in the capital (Lytkin 1998: 74-75), taking responsibility for Udmurt publishing in Moscow, and for the Udmurt scientific activities: in 1923, he launched the already mentioned Association for the study of the Udmurt region (Ermakov 1988: 30; Kulikov 1991: 5-8; Kulikov 1997: 146-53; Kuznetsov 1993: 35-36), which published an important collection of articles on different Udmurt subjects (Gerd 1926). Gerd published himself several relevant books (Tok 1970; Ermakov 1988; Bobrova et al. 1970): he also published a huge collection of poems which turned him into a prominent poet (Gerd 1922). His enthusiastic poetry was open to self-interrogation and doubt. It was not only didactic poetry, aiming at popularising the policy of the Party. It was full of sincerity, enthusiasm, and youthful pathos.

Gerd's Poetry

Since Gerd's poetry was one of the main reasons for his repression, we should not ignore it and the following are some samples that are representative of his style and main themes.
The collection published in 1924, called *The Zither Player* [Krez'chi], is opened by an introduction, the simplicity of which reminds one of folk poetry, and which resonates with the title:

Та кырӟанъёсме -
Шур тулкымъёсме,
Та кылбыръёсме -
Тюрагайёсме
Туж кема люкай,
Туж кема гожъяй.
Удмурт гуртъёсты
Люкаса ветлӥ
Паськыт тэлъёстӥ
Кылзыса калги...

Уин изьыкум
Вӧтаса адӟи.
Пыдйыл ветликум -
Дугдылытэк кылзӥ
Медам вун шуса
Мон сое гожъяй
Крезьме шуккыса,
Калыклы кырӟай, -
Калыклэн сюлмаз

Туж мур ватылӥ.

Куанер гуртъёстӥ
Уйшор дауре
Укно улъёстӥ
Кытысь мар сюре,
Весь лушкем ветлӥ
Весь лушкем люкай.
Калык бӧрдэмез,
Туж курадзёмез
Уйбыт кырзамез
Ас сюлмам ватӥ.

Азвесь гырлыё
Турагаедлэсь
Зарни чыртыё
Ӵуж учиедлэсь
Азвесь куаразэ
Мон аслым басьтӥ
Зарни гуръёссэ
Мон аслым кари -
Соос кадь табре
Луэ кырзаме!

Шунды пуксьыку,
Гурт пуме мынко
Калык бӧрдыку
Кырзаны медко -
Калык кылзыса
Бӧрдэмысь дугдэ
Сюлмыз юнмаса
Серекъян кутске,
Азьлань улыны
Кужым будэтэ.

Тулыс вуыку
Шур жингыртыку
Сяська жужаку,
Шулдыр луыку,
Сяська пӧлын мон
Кырзаса пукко,
Кӧт жож луымон
Крезьме шуккисько -
Куанер калыкез
Весь сайкатӥсько!

These songs of mine,
the waves of our river,
These poems of mine,
my larks -
very long I gathered them
very long I wrote them.
Along Udmurt villages
I went gathering them,
Along dense forests
I wandered listening...

When I sleep at night
Dreaming I see them.
When I go wandering
I listen to them non-stop.
Not to forget them
I wrote them
Playing my zither
I sang to the people,
Into the heart of the people
I hid them very deeply.

Along poor villages
At midnight
Under the window
I was staying,
Secretly I walked
Secretly I gathered.
The weeping of the people,
Its many sufferings
Its nightly singing

I buried in my heart.

With a silver bell
From your lark
With its golden neck
From your yellow nightingale
Its silver voice
I took for myself
Its golden tunes
I made them for myself,
Like them, later
They became my song!

At sunset,
I go to the end of the village
When people weep,
I wander singing:
Hearing it, people
Stop weeping
Strengthening their heart
They start laughing,
To go on living
Their energy grows.

When spring comes
When the river calls
When the flower blooms
When it is nice,
Among the flowers I
sit singing
The sadness inside me
I play my zither,
The poor people,
I elevate them.

This poem seems to offer a good summary of Gerd's first productions: aesthetically, Gerd uses the parallelism characteristic of Finnic folk poetry, using quasi synonyms to enrich his message. There are two agents in interaction, the people and the poet, and the result of their interactions are songs/poems, which express the Udmurt people's sufferings, but at the same time ask us to arise from passivity – these are the main themes of this collection. Many of these issues were later to serve as court charges against Gerd: the individual action by the poet, who singlehandedly led the people – whose agency he despised – to its happiness. In the Bolsheviks' understanding, the central role of the author's 'I,' instead of the agency of the people, was suspect. But this illustrates the sense of mission that filled Gerd and inspired his work. He was the voice of the people and at the same time the voice of the nightingale.

I would like to quote two other significant poems from this collection. The first was much appreciated by Maksim Gor'kii, who commented on its Russian translation by the author and edited it. It reflects on the remains of the sacred grove of the Udmurts' ancient religion, in a melancholic tone, which expresses Gerd's ambiguity about the destruction caused by the Soviet regime.

It is called *Keremet*, the name both of the sacred grove and the ancient deity, borrowed from the Turkic peoples, which was worshipped there.

I
Синэз ворекъятйсь
Йырез учкыса поромытйсь
Туж паськыт лудын
Бусыын
Огназ куашетыса
Оло куректыса, оло бӧрдыса
Оло мӧзмыса
Оло вашкала даурез тодаз вайыса,
Оло ас понназ
Кырӟаса
Чылкак огназ
Керемет сылэ, лулӟылэ

[...]

Кудйз эшъёсы
Арлыдлы чидатэк
Пограллям,
Музъэме вылыса
Кулйллям, сисьмиллям.
Сыло пересьёс, каллен ӵашето -
Валантэм выжыкылъёс вераса
Куашето...

II

Ортчем
Вунэм аръёсы,
Вашкала дыръёсы
Удмуртъёс
Кыӵе татчы лыктыса
Люкаськозы,
Курадӟонзэс вераса
Бӧрдозы вал...
Соку вӧсьлэн
Бадӟымесь, пиштйсь
Тылъёсыз,
Курадӟись каыклээн
Тыл кадь сюлэмез сутйсь
Кылъёсыз
Востэм нылъёслэн
кырӟанъёссы
Шур жингыртэм кадь,
жингырес куараоссы
Туж кыдёке
вӧлдйськыса,
Шуккиськыса,
Ӵукна шунды жужатозь
Кылйськозы вал...

III
Табере Кереметэз
Вунэтйзы
Огназэ куштйзы.
Уноез,
Солэсь кышкаса,
Татын периос, убиръёс
Каръясько шуыса
Кӧшкеманы кутскизы.
Огназ
Уй но нунал Керемет сылэ
Куашетыса
Неноку но быронтэм
Туж чебересь вашкала выжыкылъёс
Ас понназ
Дугдылытэк вераса.

Making its eyes sparkle,
Its head turning while watching
In the very dense grove
On the field
Alone rustling
Either suffering, or weeping
Or pining
Or remembering old times
Or singing
To itself
Totally alone,
Stands the Keremet, sighing,

[…]

Some friends
Giving in to their age
Have fallen
Lying on the earth
Dead, rotten.
The elder, who stay, softly bicker
Telling unclear stories
They rustle…

In the past,
Forgotten years,
In their old times
The Udmurts
While coming here
Gathered
Telling their sufferings
Wept…
Then the ceremony's
Great, shining
Fires,
Of the suffering people,
Burning their heart as the fire
Their words,
The girls' soft songs
Their ringing voices like the singing of the river
Spreading up very far,
Sounding out,
Until sunrise
Were to be heard…

Now the Keremet
Has been forgotten,
Abandoned.
Many,
Afraid of it,
Saying that here evil spirits, vampires
Nest,
Started to fear.
Alone,
Day and night, stands the Keremet
Rustling
Never ending
Beautiful old stories
To itself
Telling unceasingly.

While many of this collection's poems focus on one main idea – i.e. glorifying the revolution – without much ambiguity, this evocation of the old natural sanctuary is much more complex – which is why I have cho-

sen to discuss it in this article. The Soviet power, already in 1924, had clearly declared its hostility to religion. The open rejection of vernacular beliefs was to come later, but religions were already ideologically suspect. The elegiac atmosphere of this poem suggests melancholia in seeing the old sacred place's decay. In Gerd's poem, what happened there was both sad – the people's suffering, a stereotyped characteristic of the tsarist time – and beautiful – the songs, the stories... Gerd was not an apologist of old times: many traditions had to be replaced by new customs (such as the submissive position of women). But he acknowledged the beauty of some of them.

I have chosen the last poem to illustrate Gerd's first collection in order to show that, despite dedicating many poems to the Revolution, to the sunrise, to the fights of the civil war, Gerd also shows that he was a thinker who had doubts. This is an aspect I find endearing in Gerd. He was torn, he was attracted by contrary ideals and a choice for him was, indeed, impossible. He was, as the title of the next poem says, in the middle, halfway, stuck in midstream, in the middle of the ford.

Шоро-куспо

Марлы меда дышетски,
Шулдыр городын улӥ,
Зӥбыт гуртэн люкиськи,
Бадзым карез адзылӥ?

Куанер удмурт гуртъёсме
Уг быгатски вунэтны
Сяськаё бусыосме
Жокыт карен воштыны.

[...]

Мар-о каром, мар каром.
Кудзэ маин мон воштом?
Шоро-куспо улӥсько
Сюрес шоре дугдӥсько.

Марлы меда дышетски,
Шулдыр городын улӥ,
Зӥбыт гуртэн люкиськи,
Бадзым карез адзылӥ?

[...]

Городэ ке мынӥсько
Зӥбыт гуртлэсь
мӧзмисько.
Нош гуртэ ке кошкисько
Бадзым карлэсь
мӧзмисько.

Кугез дыбеч кадь улко
Солань-талань лобасько.
Куддыр вылэ тубисько,
Куддыр улэ лэзькисько.

Укыр вылэ тубыны
Мыным кужым уг тырмы
Укыр улэ лезькыны

Дышетском визь уг
лэзьы!

In the middle

Why did I study
And live in a joyful city,
And leave the quiet village
And see the big town?

My poor Udmurt villages
I cannot forget
My fields covered in flowers,
I cannot exchange them
for the stuffy city.

[...]

What shall I do, what shall I do
Which shall I exchange for which?
I live in-between
I am stuck in the middle of the road.

Why did I study
And live in the big city,
And leave the quiet village
And see the big town?

[...]

If I go to the city,
I miss my quiet village;
But if I leave for the village,
I miss the big town.

I live like a flail
I fly here and there.
Sometimes I rise high,
Sometimes I go down.

To rise too high
My strength is not enough
To go too far down,
The wisdom from my
studies does not allow it.

Even as a young man, Gerd had doubts. Later, expressing doubt became dangerous. He did not allow himself the kind of endearing sincerity that characterised the first collection. In the second one, *Blooming land* [S'as'kayas'kis' muz''em]), he was less problematic, more affirmative and militant, more in line with his time. This is the collection that was published in 1927, curiously not in Izhevsk but in Kazan'. This is probably a sign that the times were becoming critical for him, as he had just come back from Moscow following the denunciation of his Udmurt comrades. There are some 'red' poems, for example about the Komsomol [Communist Youth Organization], but many are dedicated to innocent topics such as nature, the fields, a butterfly... For the scope of this article, the most important topic he touches upon is Udmurtness.

The second poem of the collection is dedicated to it.
While the poetic, lyric dimension remains weaker than in the previous, reflecting poems, this poem conceptually develops important aspects of his 'new life:' the possibility of being himself.

Мон – удмурт

Мон – удмурт. Мон – туж шудо!
Эрказ луи, бурдъяськи.
Сюлмам горд тылъёс будо,
Сьӧд дыннеысь мозмытски!

[...]

Нокинлэсь возьдаськытэк,
Удмурт дйсьме дисяса,
Мон но пото кышкатэк,
Горд кырзанъёс кырзаса.

Танӥ – мон но тӥ пӧлын,
Уно пӧртэм калыкъёс.
Мынам мылкыд – туж вылын,
Котырам – выль сюресъёс.

Та Октябрь ӧй ке лусал,
Пеймыт гуын мон улсал,
«Гожмо шыр» нимы лусал,
Аслэсьтым возьдаськысал.

Горд Октябрь монэ жутӥз -
Калыкъёс радэ пыртӥз...
Мон – танӥ: татын сылко,
Удмурт кылын кырзасько.

Мон – удмурт. Мон – туж шудо!
Эрказ луи, бурдъяськи.
Сюлмам горд тылъёс будо,
Сьӧд дыннеысь мозмытски!

I am Udmurt

I am Udmurt. I am very happy!
I became free, I took wings,
In my heart red fires grow,
I got free of the black world.

[...]

Ashamed of nobody,
Wearing Udmurt clothes,
I also go out without fear,
Singing red songs.

There – I am also among you,
Numerous different peoples.
My spirits are very high,

Around me – new roads.

If October hadn't happened,
I would live in a dark hole,
My name would be
«striped mouse»,
I would be ashamed of
myself.

The Red October made me
grow
Let me enter the ranks of
the peoples…
I am there – here I stand,
I sing songs in Udmurt.

I am Udmurt. I am very
happy!
I became free, I took
wings,
In my heart red fires grow,
I got free of the black
world.

A third collection of poems, *Steps* [L'oget''yos], was published in Izhevsk four years later, in 1931. The atmosphere was becoming stifling for Gerd, and he did not have much time left in his short life.

Rise and Downfall

Gerd was called back from Moscow to Udmurtia in 1925 because of a letter sent by other Udmurt students. But in Udmurtia, despite this heinous attempt, Gerd initially became a prominent figure in different fields of public life (Ermakov 1988: 34). For example, he was one of the first directors of what would become the National Museum and he gave it its scope (Ermakov 1988: 34; Toulouze 2020), organising there some important expeditions – today the Museum bears his name.

As already stated, Gerd was also fundamental for the creation, in March 1926, of the Udmurt writers' union, called the All-Udmurt Association of Revolutionary Writers (VUARP), to the point of being considered as its founder – of course with the support of the Party (Shkliaeva 1991: 37; Domokos 1975: 254; Shkliaev 1979: 31). All the Udmurt writers enrolled in the newly founded organisation (Shkliaev 1979: 33). However, Gerd was its first chairman, although he lasted less than three months before being removed for not being a supporter of drawing lines between Udmurts according to class identification and class interests.

At the VUARP congress, Gerd reviewed the situation in literature and criticised the place left to the Udmurt (Kulikov 1997: 165). This provoked an irate reply from the Party's secretary Baryshnikov, who accused Gerd

of being openly scornful towards the Udmurt (Ermakov 1988: 36). The negative attitude towards the poet, therefore, came from the highest echelon of the local Party. Gerd was deprived of his position as director of the museum, expelled from the literary journal's editorial board and from his position of chairman of VUARP. The Party also attempted to get him to pay back the expenses for his education in Moscow. Later, all of Gerd's activities were criticised, and his achievements annihilated.

According to his contemporaries, Gerd was spontaneous, and expressed himself passionately, not expecting to be surrounded by enemies (Gerd 1998: 27). His mere presence was noteworthy (Tok 1970: 20-21). He was also easily hurt (Lytkin 1998: 76; Kuznetsov 1994: 386). Gerd was undoubtedly disliked by Party officials, who attempted, and were successful in blocking his doctoral studies and his scholarship to travel abroad (Ermakov 1988: 14; Ermakov 1994: 36-37).

I have chosen here not to give samples of more day-to-day political poetry, which Gerd also included in his last collections. However, the last collection, *Steps*, is clearly inspired by the new style of rhythmic, free verse launched by Maiakovskii. I have chosen here a poem that is representative of this style, and at the same time was later to be wildly attacked. It very eloquently illustrates Gerd's ambiguity towards certain aspects of life in his time, a new life that was simultaneously destructive but also bore the wind of change. The poem below sums up very eloquently, even in its vibrant rhythm, the shaking violence of his time and the poet's reflections and palpitation.

Гутрын буран

Гутрын
буран,
Гутрын
пурга,
Вуж гурт
урам,
Питыр
берга.
Буж луд
быре.
Лудын -
выль тӧл.
Выль тӧл
пыре
Юртэ,
гуртэ.
Выль тӧл
шере
Лэчыт
шизэ,
Вань ша-
Ере

[...]

Ой, тӧл
шула.
Ой, тӧл
зола.
Гутрын
буран,
Гутрын
пурга,
Зурка
урам,
Вуж гурт
зурка.
Гидэ,
Корка
Выль тӧл
йыга.
Лымы -
пуля.
Сильтӧл -
пыӵал.
Пыӵал
чиля.
Пуля
Пыӵа
Йыре,
вире,
Йырви-
ыме,
Вань му-
горе,
Вань
улэме.
Лымы
берга,
Инозь
жутске.
Буран.
Пурга.
Вуж гурт
сутске.
«Ми -
Горд
кавале-
ри
но,
Ми
ся-
рысь
Уно
Выль
Крезьчиос
Кырӟан
кырезяло:
Кызьы
Ми
сьӧд уй
пыр,
Кызьы
Ми
тылпу
пыр,
Азьлань,
чик кышкатэк,
Шунды
июры
потӥм!»

[...]

«Эй, кин
со?...»
« Ась!»
Оло
пужым?
Со -
выль
улон!
Со -
выль

кужым!
Со –
Сюрс
миллён!

[...]

Вуж
Сюрестэк
Доре
лыктэ,
Ӵогем
Östэк
Пыре
гуртэ.
Со -
выль
улон!
Со -
выль
кужым!
Со –
Сюрс
миллён!
Со -
выль пужы!
Вань
улонэз
Со
бугыртэ,
Сьӧд
Толонэз
Вие,
вандэ.
Со -
котькытын:
Татын,
отын,
Со -
омырын,
Со -
музъемын.
Выжы
лэзе,
Куарзэ
поттэ,
Выль
шуд сйзе,
Выль
шуд
сёте.

A storm at the village

At the village
there is a storm
At the village
there is a blizzard,
The old village's
street
In a whirlwind
rotates.
The old grove
is dead.
On the grove
a new wind blows.
The new wind
enters
The house,
the village.
The new wind
sharpens
The sharp
bayonet
All my coun-
try

[...]

Oh, the wind
whistles.
Oh, the wind
gets stronger.
At the village
there is a
storm
At the village
there is a
blizzard,
It shakes
the street,
The old village
is shaken.
Into the stables,
into the
house
The new wind
knocks.
The snow
is a bullet,
The hurricane
is a rifle.
The rifle
shines,
The bullet
penetrates
Into the head,
into the blood,
Into the
brains
In all the bo-
dy,
In all
life.
The snow
whirls,
It rises
up to the sky.
The storm.
The blizzard.
The old village
blazes.
'We are
the Red
Caval-
ry

and
About
us
there are
Many
new
songs
zither players
shall play:
How
shall we
go through
the
black night
How
shall we
go through

the fire
Forwards,
fearing nothing
at all
To the
sun
we go'.

[...]

'Hey, who

is it?...'
'What?'
Maybe it's
a pine?
It is
the new
life!
It is
the new
strength!
It is
thousands
of millions!

[...]

Without
the old road
it goes
home,
Without a chopped
door
It enters
the village.
It is
the new
life!
It is
the new
strength!
It is
one thousand
millions!
It is
the new pattern!
All
life
It
disrupts,
The black
yesterday
It kills it,
it slaughters it.
It is
everywhere:
Here,
there,
It is
in the air,
it is
in the earth.
It takes
root,
It breaks
out its leaves,
It promises
a new happiness,
A new
happiness
it gives.

This poem was to be attacked by Gerd's opponents: undoubtedly, Gerd referred here to the disruption of collectivisation, which since 1928 had devastated the countryside in the whole country, including Udmurtia. 1928 was also the year of food crisis, during which the Party organised bread requisitions, arrests and charges for sabotage (Nikitina 1998: 148, 153). In 1930, Stalin acknowledged that mistakes had been made and apparently slowed the process down, but only apparently. While most peasants left the kolkhozes (from 86% to 14.3%, Nikitina

1998: 148, 153), the countryside was depleted of its most active members – not only rich peasants, but also members of the rural middle class were chased and had to leave their homes (around 60% of the families – Vikharev 1962: 158). The consequences were devastating, similar to Gerd's storm…

As seen above, Gerd was involved in the SOFIN trial. At the beginning, before his arrest, the poet was interrogated in Nizhnii Novgorod and forced to write confessions (Kuznetsov 1994: 43-44). He was finally arrested on 1932, May 13th and kept in isolation for one year and seven months (Gerd 1998: 34).

Kulikov argues that Gerd had been subject to 'frightful tortures' in Nizhnii Novgorod (Kulikov 1997: 173; Verner 1998: 227).

The accusations against Gerd were mainly ideological. He was accused of being nationalist, anti-Russian, anti-Soviet and to have sympathies for foreign countries. The main weapon used against him was nevertheless literary criticism. His writings were screened finely, and Gerd's enemies found ideological shortcomings. Gerd's early poems were interpreted as individualistic and denying the people's agency. Some sentences were interpreted as supposedly denying class struggle, or as sympathising with the rich. Any expression of perplexity, of trouble, of doubt was interpreted as a political message.

Other accusations were aimed at Gerd's intentions, i.e. at what he supposedly intended to do.

Thus, Gerd and other people arrested with him were charged and accused of participating in a counterrevolutionary organisation, which spied for Finland and Estonia and whose final aim was to establish a Finnish protectorate over Russia's Finno-Ugric regions. The SOFIN trial was the first time this stereotyped accusation was issued. With some slight variations, it would become a usual pattern in the following fifteen years, and especially in the years 1935-1938. The expression counterrevolutionary had become so widespread, that it appeared in period documents under the abbreviation 'k/r.'

The main individuals accused were Gerd and Burdiukov, the latter confessed throwing bombs into the River Vala and planning to destroy railways (Kulikov 1997: 218). Rumours say that Gerd's death penalty was changed into a term in the fearful camp of Solovki thanks to Gor'kii (Kuznetsov 1994: 67; Gerd 1998: 35): the Russian writer, at that time the main authority in Soviet literature, knew the

Udmurt poet. Gerd was probably sent to the Solovki islands camp in October 1934: the Solovki prison camp, called SLON[2], is today considered by some historians as 'the very first camp in the Gulag network'. It opened in 1923, and in 1936 held around 60,000 inmates (Bogomolova 1998: 108). It was closed in 1939: before it was closed, many of its inmates were executed. Other SOFIN trial victims were sent to the SLON, including Iakovlev and Burdiukov (Kuznetsov 1994: 72, 454).

Gerd's niece managed to investigate his last years in Solovki (Kuvshinova 1990: 3). She discovered that he worked with the famous poet, philosopher, religious thinker and scientist Pavel Florenskii (Zueva 1997: 298-99). Gerd allegedly continued to write, both in Udmurt and in Russian (Fedorov 1998: 132). For many years, Gerd's fate was unknown. Some believed he died in 1941 – even in 1988, Foma Kuz'mich Ermakov, the best specialist of Gerd in Udmurtia, wrote this in his book on the poet. Only Nikolai Kuznetsov's book in 1994 provided the evidence that he was shot on November 1st1937 in Sandarmokh, a mass burial place found in 1997, where more than 400 prisoners had been killed in one night (Loriia 1998: 152).

The Consequences

The consequences of the tragic policies against Udmurt writers, many of whom were victims of repression, were heavy for Udmurt culture.

After World War II, the victims of the repressions in the thirties ceased to exist, as if they had never existed. Their names were deleted, thus making Udmurt literature particularly poor, without the works of repressed writers, such as Gerd, Ashal'chi Oki, Kedra Mitrei, Mikhail Konovalov, Grigorij Medvedev (Kralina 1990: 15). Only after Stalin's death did the victims gradually start to be rehabilitated. In 1956, a court decided that the organisation SOFIN did not exist, and that the affair was fabricated (Kuznetsov 1994: 20-30). Of thirty convicted individuals, twenty-seven were fully acquitted. The others would have to wait two more years (Turkin 1996: 46). Gerd was rehabilitated as a citizen, but still ignored as a poet - the Party's leadership was against it. His full rehabilitation would eventually require the efforts of dedicated scholars, such as Foma Ermakov and others.

[2] Solovetskii lager' osobogo naznacheniia [Solovki Special Purpose Prison Camp].

Within the Party, only Mikhail Kireev's stubbornness made it possible to obtain it. Kireev was a Russian KGB colonel and thus, Gerd was one of the last of the Udmurt intellectuals to be rehabilitated. However, it was not until the 1990s that Gerd's importance was recognised. As the author of the *Essays* [Ocherki], the history of Udmurt literature published in 1957, Kralina acknowledged: 'I discovered all the attractiveness of Gerd's poetry … But I had to keep this discovery to myself. His name was still under the strictest taboo: it was prohibited to quote him, even to mention him. Even a short chapter dedicated to him was expunged. I had to take out the texts I planned for the *Ocherki*, and destroy them' (Kralina 1990:17).

As far as language is concerned, Udmurt was not prohibited and continued to be taught and used in social and cultural life. Endangerment started later, in the Khrushchev era. In Stalinist times, linguists who attempted to create Udmurt words based on Udmurt stems were accused of being nationalists (see Edygarova 2022). Russian had to be the basis of every neologism, as imitating or transposing words from Russian was considered then the only proper way to create them, a way that guaranteed 'people's friendship' and could salvage the leading role of the Russian language, which could enrich the 'backward Udmurt language' (Perevoshchikov 1952: 9). The main period in which flows of Russian words invaded Udmurt was in the 1950s, however the trend continued until the 1970s: "Russian has become to the Udmurt not only a means of interethnic communication, it also functions within their community. It is an endless treasure, the source of lexical development, of phraseology and rich language. Perfect mastering of Russian is for the Udmurt people an internationalist duty and a patriotic obligation' (Ponomarev 1976: 12).

There were also other consequences, less easy to identify. Firstly, Udmurt intellectuals had no possibility whatsoever to express themselves freely. They even had to denounce their companions. The collective experience of state repression shaped a new behaviour model for those who wanted to stay alive and continue a literary career. This model remained active for decades.

Moreover, everyone lived in a state of generalised fear. The Udmurt people learned that their language and culture was dangerous, suspect, and that its promotion could lead to state

repression. Everything the Udmurt had conquered with the Revolution was called into question. Thus, the work for Udmurt values, Udmurt culture, Udmurt language was postponed.
Today, young Udmurts are no longer afraid to defend their culture. But for how long?

The research presented in this article was conducted within the framework of the PRIN 2022 PNRR project “Literature of Socialist Trauma: Mapping and Researching the Lost Page of European Literature (LOST)”, ID: P2022Z45X8, CUP: B53D23029360001, Principal Investigator: Andrea Gullotta (University of Palermo). The project was funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research (MIUR) under the 2022 PRIN PNRR Call for Proposals, Directorial Decree No. 1409 of September 14, 2022.

Bibliography

Andreeva 1988: Andreeva, Anna. 1988. 'Teplo zabotlivogo serdtsa', in *K izucheniiu zhizni i tvorchestva Kuzebai Gerda*, ed. by Vasilii Vaniushev (Izhevsk: Udmurtskii Institut Istorii, Iazyka i Literatury Ural'skogo Otdeleniia Akademii Nauk SSSR), 128-35.

Bobrova et al. 1970: Bobrova, A.I. [Iraida], Korobeinikova, Anna. (eds). *Kul'turnoe stroitel'stvo v Udmurtii. Sbornik dokumentov (1917-1940)* (Izhevsk: Udmurtiia).

Bogomolova 1983: Bogomolova, Zoia. 1983. *Kak ekho dolinoi rodnoi* (Izhevsk: Udmurtiia).

Bogomolova 1998: Bogomolova, Zoia. 1998. 'V temnitse sizhu, na vole gliazhu... II. Ocherk A.M. Gor'kogo "Solovki"', in *Kak molniia v nochi... Kuzebai Gerd. Zhizn'. Tvorchestvo. Epokha*, ed. by Zoia Bogomolova (Izhevsk: Izdatel'stvo Udmurtskogo universiteta), 108-17.

Briusov et al. 1917: Briusov, Valerii, Gor'kii, Maksim (eds). 1917. *Sbornik finliandskoi literatury* (Petrograd: Parus).

Carr 1959: Carr, Edward Hallett. 1959. *Socialism in One Country 1924-1926*, V. II (London: The Macmillan Company).

Domokos 1975: Domokos, Péter. 1975. *Az udmurt irodalom története* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó).

Edygarova 2022: Edygarova, Svetlana. 2022, 'The Udmurt Language between 1920 and 1950', *Finnische-Ugrische Mitteilungen*, 46: 91-139.

Egorov 1929: Egorov, Vasilii. 1929. *O provedenii natsional'noi politiki v Votskoi oblasti* (Izhevsk: Udkniga).

Ermakov 1988: Ermakov, Foma. 1988. *Udmurtskii poet i pisatel'* (Izhevsk: Udmurtiia).

Ermakov 1994: Ermakov, Foma. 1994. *Kuzebai Gerd (Kuz'ma Pavlovich Gerd-Chainikov). Ulemez no tvorchestvoez* (Izhevsk: Udmurtiia).

Fedorov 1998: Fedorov, Vladimir. 1998. 'Vstrechi na Solovkakh. Iz vospominanii uznika', in *Kak molniia v nochi... Kuzebai Gerd. Zhizn'. Tvorchestvo. Epokha*, ed. by Zoia Bogomolova (Izhevsk: Izdatel'stvo Udmurtskogo universiteta), 131-32.

Gerd 1922: Gerd, Kuzebai. 1922. *Krez'chi* (Izhevsk: Oblastnoe upravlenie Gosizdata).

Gerd 1925: Gerd, Kuzebai. 1925. 'A votják színház', *Fenno-ugria*, 224-28.

Gerd 1926: Gerd, Kuzebai. 1926. *Votiaki, Sbornik po voprosam ekonomiki, byta i kul'tury votiakov* (Moskva: Tsentral'noe izdatel'stvo narodov Soiuza SSR).

Gerd 1988: Gerd, Nadezhda. 1998. 'Vospominaniia o moem muzhe, udmurtskom poete', in *Sovremenniki o Kuzebae Gerde*, ed. by Foma Ermakov (Izhevsk: Izhevskii poligraficheskii kombinat), 22-42.

Hirsch 2000: Hirsch, Francine. 2000. 'Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities', *The Russian Review*, 59(2): 201-26.

Hirsch 2004: Hirsch, Francine 2004, 'Towards a Soviet Order of Things: The 1926 Census and the Making of the Soviet Union', in *Categories and Contexts: Anthropological and Historical Studies in Critical Demography*, ed. by Simon Szreter, Hania Sholkamy, and A. Dharmalingam (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 126-47.

Kirillova 1998: Kirillova, Anna. 1998. 'Vospominaniia o Gerde. 2-ia vstrecha', in *Sovremenniki o Kuzebae Gerde*, ed. by Foma Ermakov (Izhevsk: Izhevskii poligraficheskii kombinat), 56-59.

Kralina 1990: Kralina, Nadezhda. 1990. 'K voprosu ob izuchenii tvorchetva K. Gerda', in *Kuzebai Gerd i udmurtskaia kul'tura*, ed. by Aleksandr Shkliaev (Izhevsk: Udmurtskii Institut Istorii, Iazyka i Literatury Ural'skogo Otdeleniia Akademii Nauk SSSR), 14-27.

Kulikov 1991: Kulikov, Kuz'ma. 1991. 'Bor'ba za samoopredelenie udmurtskogo naroda v 1917-1937 gg.', in *Natsional'no-gosudarstvennoe stroitel'stvo v Udmurtii v 1917-1937 gg.*, ed. by Kuz'ma Kulikov (Izhevsk: Udmurtskii Institut Istorii, Iazyka i Literatury Ural'skogo Otdeleniia Akademii Nauk SSSR), 4-40.

Kulikov 1995: Kulikov, Kuz'ma. 1995. 'Politicheskie vzgliady Kuzebaia Gerda', *Finnougrovedenie*, 2: 72-91.

Kulikov 1997: Kulikov, Kuz'ma. 1997. Delo SOFIN (Izhevsk: Udmurtskii Institut Istorii, Iazyka i Literatury Ural'skogo Otdeleniia RAN)

Kulikov 1998: Kulikov, Kuz'ma. 1998. 'Deiatel'nost' komissii "Rud''ia"', in *Udmurt nimkyl"yos"ya no shonyer gozh"yas'kon"ya el'kun öri. 1-tï bichet*, ed. by Aleksei Krasil'nikov (Izhevsk [Izhkar]: n.p.), 78-107.

Kuvshinova 1990: Kuvshinova, Roza. 1990. 'Kuzebai Gerd: gody v nevole', *Udmurtskaia Pravda*, 16(6): 3.

Kuznetsov 1993: Kuznetsov, Nikolai. 1993. '"Delo", kotoroe ne bylo, ili istoriia "Soiuza osvobozhdeniia finskikh narodnostei"', in *Udmurtiia: massovye repressii 1930-1950 godov. Issledovaniia, dokumenty*, ed. by Raisa Martynova, Tamara Urakova, Marina Rupasova, Tat'iana Merzliakova (Moskva: Radio i sviaz'), 31-38.

Kuznetsov 1994: Kuznetsov, Nikolai. 1994. *Iz mraka* (Izhevsk: Izdatel'stvo Udmurtskogo universiteta).

Loikfun 1929: 1929. *Sbornik Leningradskogo Obshchestva Issledovatelei Kul'tury Finno-ugorskih narodnostei (LOIKFUN). Issledovaniia i materialy po finno-ugrovedeniiu* (Leningrad: LOIKFUN).

Loikfun 1929a: LOIKFUN. 1929. *Biulleten*, 2.

Loikfun 1930: LOIKFUN. 1930. *Biulleten*, 5.

Loriia 1998: Loriia, Elena. 1998. 'Karel'skaia Katyn''mì, in *Kak molniia v nochi... Kuzebai Gerd. Zhizn'. Tvorchestvo. Epokha*, ed. by Zoia Bogomolova (Izhevsk: Izdatel'stvo Udmurtskogo universiteta), 151-53.

Lytkin 1998: Lytkin, Vasilii. 1998. 'Pis'ma F.K. Ermakovu' in *Sovremenniki o Kuzebae Gerde*, ed. by Foma Ermakov (Izhevsk: Izhevskii poligraficheskii kombinat), 74-76.

Nikitina 1998: Nikitina, Galina. 1998. Udmurtskaia obshchinia v sovetskii period (Izhevsk: Udmurtskii Institut Istorii, Iazyka i Literatury Ural'skogo Otdeleniia Akademii Nauk RAN).

Pavlov 1968: Pavlov, Nikifor. 1968. 'O rannykh biografiiakh V.I. Lenina na udmurtskom iazyke', *Zapiski*, 20: 197-201.

Pavlov 1968a: Pavlov, Nikifor. 1968. 'Udmurtskii komissariat', *Zapiski*, 20: 68-93.

Perevoshchikov 1952: Perevoshchikov, Pëtr. 1952. 'Vliianie russkogo iazyka na grammaticheskii stroi udmurtskogo iazyka', in *Nauchnoe soveshchanie po voprosam udmurtskogo iazyka i pis'mennosti. 1-4 iiulia 1952 g. Tezisy dokladov* (Izhevsk: Udmurtgosizdat), 8-10.

Pesikina 1956: Pesikina, Ekaterina. 1956. *Narodnyi komissariat po delam natsional'nostei i ego deiatel'nost' v 1917-1918* (Moskva: Akademiia obshchestvennyh nauk pri TsK VKP(b)).

Pipes 1964: Pipes, Richard. 1964. *The Formation of the Soviet Union. Communism and Nationalism 1917-1923* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

Ponomarev 1976: Ponomarev, Karl. 1976. 'Dvukhsotletie udmurtskoi pis'mennosti i razvitie nauki i kul'tury v Udmurtkskoi ASSR', in *200 let udmurtskoi pis'mennosti*, ed. by Vasilii Vakhrushev (Izhevsk: Udmurtskii nauchno-issledovatel'skii Institut istorii, ekonomiki, literatury i iazyka pri Sovete ministrov Udmurtskoi ASSR), 5-14.

Romanova 1998: Romanova, Praskov'ia. 1998. 'Pis'ma F.K. Ermakovu' in *Sovremenniki o Kuzebae Gerde*, ed. by Foma Ermakov (Izhevsk: Izhevskii poligraficheskii kombinat), 70-72.

Shkliaev 1979: Shkliaev, Aleksandr. 1979. *Na podstupkakh k realizmu. Udmurtskaia literatura, literaturnoe dvizhenie i kritika v 1917-1934 g.* (Izhevsk: Udmurtiia).

Shkliaeva 1991: Shkliaeva, Liudmila. 1991. *Formirovanie sovetskoi intelligentsii v Udmurtii 1917-1927* (Izhevsk: Udmurtiia).

Sidtikova 1990: Sidtikova, Larisa. 1990. 'Korenizatsiia gosudarstvennogo apparata v Udmurtii – odin iz putei resheniia natsional'nogo voprosa', in *Narody Sovetskogo Soiuza. Udmurty*, ed. by Iurii Simchenko (Moskva: Institut etnologii i etnicheskoi antropologii im. N. N. Miklukho-Maklaia AN SSSR).

Tok 1970: Tok, Aleksandr. 1970. *Nezabyvaemye gody molodosti (Vospominaniia)* (Ioshkar Ola: Mariiskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo).

Toulouze 2006: Toulouze, Eva. 2006. 'Le danger finno-ougrien en Russie (1928-1932): les signes avant-coureurs des répressions staliniennes', *Études finno-ougriennes*, 38: 7-56.

Toulouze 2016: Toulouze, Eva. 2016. 'A Long Great Ethnic Terror in the Volga Region: A War before the War', in *Minorities in the Stalin Terror*, ed. by Andrej Kotljarchuk and Olle Sundstrom (Huddinge: Södertörn University Press), 153–72.

Toulouze 2020: Toulouze, Eva. 2020. 'Udmurt kunlykly — 100 ar: yöskalyk muzyeylen kyldemez', in *Mezhdunarodnyi nauchno-prakticheskii forum: '100-letie gosudarstvennosti Udmurtii: istoricheskie vekhi i perspektivy razvitiia'. Sbornik materialov foruma. Tom 1*, ed. by Galina Merzliakova, Aleksandr Makarov and Aleksandr Orlov (Izhevsk: Udmurtskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet), 72-78.

Vasil'eva 1998: Vasil'eva, Ol'ga. 1998. 'Problemy natsional'nyh kadrov v Udmurtii v gody predvoennykh piatiletok', in *Politika i ekonomika sovetskogo perioda*, ed. by Sergei Bekhterev, Ol'ga Vasil'eva and Nelli Ligenko (Izhevsk: Udmurtskii Institut Istorii, Iazyka i Literatury Ural'skogo Otdeleniia Akademii Nauk RAN), 120-35.

Verner 1998: Verner, Liudmila. 1998. 'Nad pripast'iu vo lzhi', in *Kak molniia v nochi... Kuzebai Gerd. Zhizn'. Tvorchestvo. Epokha*, ed. by Zoia Bogomolova (Izhevsk: Izdatel'stvo Udmurtskogo universiteta), 225-28.

Vikharev 1962: Vikharev, Boris. (ed). 1962. *Ocherki istorii Udmurtskoi ASSR*, t. 2 (Izhevsk: Udmurtskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo).

Zueva 1997: Zueva, Anna. 1997. *Udmurtskaia literatura v kontekste iazycheskikh i khristianskikh traditsii* (Izhevsk: Izdatel'stvo Udmurtskogo universiteta).

Papers

Annalisa Di Santo

Ricordi sul caso Vera Zasulič di A. F. Koni. Autoritratto di un giudice

A. F. Koni's *Recollections of the Vera Zasulich Case*. The Self-Portrait of a Judge

A. F. Koni's *Recollections of the Vera Zasulich Case* offers a cross-section of social history useful for reconstructing the macrohistory of the Russian judicial Counter-Reformation together with the microhistory of the many characters who crowded Russia's dungeons and courtrooms in the 1870s. In these pages, Judge Koni retraces the milestones of the procedural history of revolutionary Vera Zasulich and writes about himself as a judge, his own idea of justice, and the factors that led him away from criminal law. Koni is self-deprecating throughout this account of those days of great upheaval, above all in his dialogues with Minister of Justice K. I. Palen. Koni, blamed for neither convicting Zasulich nor resigning, defends his actions and the institution of the popular jury. This article reevaluates Koni's self-portrait on the basis of his dialogues with Palen and his chosen evaluative lexicon.

Questo lavoro si propone di analizzare l'autoritratto che il giudice Anatolij Fedorovič Koni (1844–1927) restituisce di sé nei *Ricordi* sul caso giudiziario della terrorista Vera Zasulič, scritti tra il 1904 e il 1906 a Sestrorec[1], ventisei anni dopo la sentenza di assoluzione da lui pronunciata, e dati alle stampe a distanza di quarantacinque anni dal fatto storico.

Vospominanija o dele Very Zasulič (Ricordi sul caso Vera Zasulič) non rappresentano un resoconto ufficiale di terzi, ma una narrazione in prima persona, in cui Koni seleziona e modella consapevolmente le immagini di sé, degli eventi e dei protagonisti del processo[2]. Fin dall'incipit,

[1] Per la nostra analisi si userà l'edizione dei *Vospominanija o dele Very Zasulič* pubblicati in A.F. Koni, *Izbrannoe*, Moskva, Sovetskaja Rossija 1989. L'edizione pubblicata, invece, Lib.ru/ Klassika, recante unicamente la data del 1904, presenta alcune integrazioni, tra cui le appendici al caso, i discorsi della difesa e dell'accusa e la traduzione in russo di termini o espressioni straniere. Scompare inoltre l'introduzione alla prima sezione, mentre la seconda sezione inizia con i fatti del 13 luglio (l'edizione del 1989 inizia dall'ottobre del 1877). Cfr.: <http://az.lib.ru/k/ koni_a_f/text_0660.shtml>.

[2] In questo scritto autobiografico, Koni tenta di ricostruire le azioni di tutte le persone che hanno preso parte al caso giudiziario. In particolar modo egli ini-

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-009
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

egli dichiara di voler raccontare le proprie sofferenze in qualità di giudice del caso. Il dato storico diventa per Koni l'occasione per offrire un ritratto di sé come giudice onesto, leale alla Legge, integerrimo e solo, al centro di un intricato sistema di potere dominato da voci, nomi, progetti, timori e riforme, trasformando, di fatto, il racconto del caso giudiziario in una apologia di sé stesso.

I *Ricordi* si inseriscono, dunque, nel filone memorialistico che in Russia si afferma a partire dagli anni Trenta del XIX secolo, quando le biografie venivano usate per riflettere su questioni di carattere generale e lo scrittore si preoccupava di farsi riconoscere dal lettore come meritevole di fiducia (Lotman 1985: 194). Anche Koni, pur non essendo uno scrittore di mestiere, conferisce autorevolezza alla propria persona e alle proprie idee in un contesto storico-sociale turbolento, nebuloso e polifonico. Così, sulla scia delle memorie e dei ricordi[3] degli scrittori degli anni Trenta e Sessanta, anche quelli di Koni offrono l'occasione di riflettere sia sulla realtà russa, sia su questioni ideologiche, artistiche e di diritto.

Il testo memorialistico in questione si presta ad essere analizzato secondo diversi approcci metodologici, tra cui quello microstorico, archivistico o, ancora, secondo l'analisi lessicale, quest'ultima utile per ricostruire le specificità espressive del giudice o di altri personaggi; tuttavia, in questa sede ci si intende concentrare esclusivamente sull'impianto retorico-argomentativo.

zia la sua narrazione dagli antefatti processuali, le azioni di Fedor Fedorovič Trepov, le proprie attività e, soprattutto, l'agire e il parlare suo, di e con il ministro della giustizia Konstantin Ivanovič Palen. Al contrario, la figura di Vera Zasulič, che pure dà il titolo al testo, appare sporadicamente, non parla mai, è un'ombra, il motore invisibile di tutta la storia.

[3] È consuetudine nella tradizione italiana rendere *zapiski* con "memorie". Si pensi a *Zapiski iz podpol'ja* (Memorie dal sottosuolo) e *Zapiski iz Mertvogo doma* (Memorie da una casa di morti) di Dostoevskij o *Zapiski ochotnika* (Memorie di un cacciatore) di Turgenev. Per disambiguare i termini *zapiski* e *vospominanija* useremo, perciò, rispettivamente 'memorie' e 'ricordi'. Si sottolinea che le memorie di A.F. Koni sono state raccolte nella sezione *Iz zapisok i vospominanij sudebnogo dejatelja*) (Delle memorie e dei ricordi di un funzionario giudiziario) nell'edizione *Izbrannoe* del 1989, sebbene Koni non abbia mai intitolato nessuno dei suoi scritti *Zapiski*, ma parlasse solamente di *vospominanija*. Sotto il titolo generale di *zapiski* sono, invece, raccolte le note sui casi giudiziari, come *Delo Ovsjannikova* (Il caso Ovsjannikov), *Temnoe delo* (Il caso oscuro), *Propavšaja ser'ga* (L'orecchino perduto), ecc.

Sulla base di queste considerazioni, nel primo paragrafo di questo lavoro intendiamo fornire un breve ritratto di Koni come uomo di diritto e di lettere e presentare il caso giudiziario fornendo qualche dato sull'imputata Zasulič; al secondo paragrafo è affidata l'analisi dei *Ricordi*, condotta attraverso l'esame delle principali strategie linguistico-retoriche che Koni usa per parlare di sé e autodescriversi. L'analisi si basa principalmente sui dialoghi tra il giudice Koni, il ministro della giustizia Palen, il suo successore nome Dmitrij Nikolaevič Nabokov e altre figure di rilievo. Infatti, proprio nelle interazioni dialogiche (che spesso sfociano in monologhi) il giudice – come in un'aula di tribunale – argomenta con veemenza e determinazione, con trasporto e dignità le proprie posizioni, espone l'idea che ha di sè come giudice, esalta il valore della legge di cui si dichiara fervido servitore, e, soprattutto, sostiene l'importanza della giuria popolare, tanto osteggiata. La strategia linguistico-retorica più usata risulta, dunque, quella del dialogismo in senso lato, che consente a Koni di riportare stralci di dialoghi e monologhi per raccontare gli avvenimenti e mettere in risalto la propria *vis oratoria* e la propria onestà, figurandosi un autentico *vir bonus dicendi peritus*. La statura morale che Koni presenta di sé, la "dedizione assoluta alla vocazione di giudice" (Koni 1989: 408) sono rese anche attraverso l'uso di citazioni, fraseologismi, detti, massime sapienziali o riferimenti giuridici (anche in latino o in francese) che rivelano la profonda conoscenza della giurisprudenza e della storia (del diritto e non) russa e straniera, unite alla dimestichezza con le Sacre Scritture.

Data la lunghezza del testo di partenza ci limiteremo, in questa sede, a un'analisi retorico-argomentativa basata sui dialoghi portati ad esempio; all'interno di essi tenteremo poi di individuare ulteriori figure retoriche usate dal narratore per enfatizzare il discorso. L'analisi dell'impianto retorico del testo si accompagnerà all'analisi del lessico valutativo[4] mediante cui Koni dipinge sé stesso, gli altri attori processuali o le circostanze, giacché anche questa strategia valutativa rientra a pieno titolo nella strategia retorica della descrizione e indirizza il consenso del lettore.

[4] Per lessico valutativo ci si riferisce alla definizione datane da Elena M. Vol'f nei suoi studi sulla semantica funzionale, cfr., in particolare, *Funkcional'naja semantika ocenki* del 2002.

1.1 A.F. Koni, il volto nuovo del sistema giudiziario russo

Anatolij Vasil'evič Lunačarskij, in *Tri vstreči. Iz vospominanij ob ušedšich* (Tre incontri. Dai ricordi di chi non c'è più), descrive Koni, personalità di spicco della scena giudiziaria nella Russia imperiale e nel periodo bolscevico, ricordandone gli occhi penetranti e attenti, lo sguardo diffidente e indagatore, la sua maniera di scrutare nell'intimo il proprio interlocutore. Dapprima procuratore (*prokuror*)[5], poi giudice[6], Koni seppe leggere le avvisaglie del tempo, intravedere il futuro delle riforme democratiche, indirizzare altri giuristi[7], scrivere testi di teoria del dirit-

[5] L'organo della *prokuratura* nasce il 12 gennaio 1722 con l'*ukaz* del 12 gennaio 1722 firmato da Pietro I. Il compito del *prokuror* era quello di combattere i disordini, l'ingiustizia processuale e l'illegalità. I compiti del *prokuror* e la sua figura nel sistema giudiziario russo cambia con la Grande Riforma Giudiziaria del 1864, quando la *prokuratura* smette di essere un organo unicamente deputato al controllo generale per occuparsi principalmente del controllo e della gestione delle indagini e dell'accusa in tribunale. "Nell'introdurre in Russia l'istituto della pubblica accusa, mutuato dall'Occidente, i redattori degli Statuti Giudiziari hanno affrontato un compito arduo. Bisognava creare un funzionario con compiti nuovi e insoliti e che agisse non nel silenzio della 'presenza', ma nella situazione di uno scontro pubblico e di uno scambio di opinioni radicate e che agisse per altro con un'arma fino ad allora sconosciuta: la parola viva." (Koni 1924:7) [Qui e ove non diversamente indicato la traduzione è dell'autrice dell'articolo]. Koni fu nominato *tovarišč prokurora* (aiuto procuratore) del distretto giudiziario di Char'kov alla fine del 1867. Nel maggio del 1871 Koni fu nominato *prokuror* del tribunale distrettuale di San Pietroburgo. In questi anni Koni si fa conoscere per i suoi discorsi accusatori, successivamente lavora per un breve periodo al Ministero di Giustizia per poi essere investito della carica di giudice del tribunale distrettuale di San Pietroburgo.

[6] Koni fu giudice fino al 1884 quando il ministro di giustizia Nabokov (1878–1885) intercedette a suo favore presso lo zar per la nomina di *ober-prokuror* (capo procuratore) del Dipartimento della Cassazione penale del Senato, cosa che avvenne di fatto il 6 febbraio 1885. Nel 1891 Koni chiese la destituzione dal ruolo di capo procuratore del Dipartimento di Cassazione Penale del Senato e fu nominato senatore, dedicandosi unicamente alla civilistica.

[7] Per ragioni di spazio non è possibile trattare qui questo aspetto della vita e dell'opera di Koni; tuttavia, numerosi sono i riferimenti al giudice da parte di altri giuristi dell'epoca. Si menzionano a titolo esemplificativo il caso dell'allora *prokuror* Sergej Arkad'evič Andreevskij che Koni salvò dalla disgrazia proprio dopo il caso Zasulič indicandogli la via dell'avvocatura e l'introduzione da lui scritta per un'opera di retorica forense tuttora imprescindibile negli studi di diritto in Russia, *Iskusstvo reči na sude* (L'arte del discorso in tribunale) di Petr Sergeevič Porochovščikov, pubblicato con lo pseudonimo P. Sergeič nel 1910 a San Pietroburgo.

to[8] e di critica letteraria[9], pronunciare discorsi giudiziari rimasti nella storia dell'oratoria russa[10] e intrattenere rapporti con nomi autorevoli del panorama culturale russo[11].
Il giudice ha lasciato anche diversi *vospominanija*[12] sulla Russia a lui contemporanea[13], tra cui casi giudiziari e appunti processuali[14] che ancora oggi sono preziosi per gli studiosi di storia del diritto, di storia del pensiero e di retorica giudiziaria[15].

[8] Tra queste ricordiamo *Nravstvennye načala v ugolovnom processe* (I principi morali nel processo penale, 1878), *Vlast' suda v primenenii nakazanija*, (Il potere della Corte nell'applicazione della pena 1895), *Sudebnaja reforma i sud prisjažnych* (La riforma giudiziaria e la giuria popolare, 1898), *Istorija razvitija ugolovno-processual'nogo zakonodatel'stva v Rossii* (Storia ed evoluzione della legislazione di procedura penale in Russia, 1914), *Priemy i zadači prokuratury* (Tattiche e compiti della procuratura, 1924).

[9] Tra le opere di critica letteraria menzioniamo *Nravstvennyj oblik Puškina* (Il ritratto morale di Puškin, 1899), *Motivy i priemy tvorčestva Nekrasova* (Motivi ed espedienti della produzione di Nekrasov, 1922).

[10] Nell'introduzione all'*Arte del discorso in tribunale* di Sergeič Koni afferma che nella sua lunga attività giudiziaria non ha mai scritto i suoi discorsi per intero, ma ha sempre studiato attentamente i materiali del caso, memorizzandoli e ragionandoli, per poi lasciare che la persuasione e la parola fluissero liberamente durante il processo.

[11] Noti sono le sue corrispondenze con gli scrittori Tolstoj, Dostoevskij, Čechov, Korolenko, Turgenev e i frequenti incontri con lo zar Aleksandr II.

[12] Oltre a *Vospominanija o dele Very Zasulič* (Ricordi sul caso Vera Zasulič, 1904), si ricordano *Iz Kazanskich vospominanij* (Dai ricordi di Kazan', 1907), *Vospominanija o Čechove* (Ricordi su Čechov, 1925).

[13] A titolo esemplificativo *Otkrytie I Gosudarstvennoj dumy* (Inaugurazione della prima Duma di Stato, 1906), *K istorii našej bor'by s p'janstvom* (Storia della nostra lotta all'alcolismo, 1915), *Peterburg. Vospominanija staroždla* (Pietroburgo. Ricordi di un vecchio abitante, 1921).

[14] Tra cui *Po delu ob utoplenii krest'janki Emel'janovoj ee mužem* (Sul caso di affogamento della contadina Emel'janova ad opera del marito, 1872), *Delo o redaktore-izdatele gazety* Graždanin *knjaze V.P. Meščerskom, obvinjaemom v opozorenii v pečati voennych vračej* (Il caso del redattore del giornale *Graždanin* principe V.P. Meščerskij, accusato di vitupero dei medici militari nella stampa, 1892).

[15] In particolare, per lo studio dei testi memorialistici di Koni e degli atti processuali si ritengono produttivi e maggiormente in uso oggi l'approccio anglosassone della *Law and Literature* e l'approccio microstorico. La *Law and Literature* è applicata all'ambito russo da relativamente pochi anni e si può esemplificare attraverso i lavori *Western Law, Russian Justice: Dostoevsky, the Jury Trial, and the Law* di Gary Rosenshield (2005), *The Letters and the Law. Legal and Literary Culture in Late Imperial Russia* di Anna Schur (2022) e, in italiano, da *Diritto e Letteratura. La giustizia narrata* di V. Vitale (2012), in particolare il paragrafo *I fratelli Karamazov, di Fedor Dostoevskij, ovvero: presunti innocenti?*. Si tratta principalmen-

Cruciale nella vita e nella carriera di Koni si rivelò il caso giudiziario della rivoluzionaria e terrorista Vera Ivanovna Zasulič (ca. 1850–1919), di cui fu nominato giudice in presenza della giuria popolare. Ma il verdetto di assoluzione non piacque allo zar e al Ministero della Giustizia che fecero pressioni sul giudice affinché questi si dimettesse, ammettendo di non aver assolto al suo ruolo di tutore della legge. Koni, divenuto ormai *opalyj sud'ja* (giudice in disgrazia), fu così costretto a lasciare la sua posizione e a reinventarsi nel settore del diritto civile, pur continuando a rivestire il ruolo di senatore e ad occuparsi, soprattutto a livello teorico, di diritto. Nei suoi scritti si legge che, a seguito del comportamento liberale e non servile del giudice, questi fu soprannominato *krasnyj sud'ja* (giudice rosso, ovvero rivoluzionario)[16]. Da molti acclamato come un uomo libero, forte e onesto, Koni ebbe un ruolo di rilievo anche nel periodo bolscevico della storia della Russia, per poi spegnersi il 17 settembre 1927 a Leningrado.

1.2. Vera Zasulič, la rivoluzionaria che terrorizzò lo zar, e il caso storico-giudiziario

Vera Ivanovna Zasulič nasce il 27 luglio 1849 a Michajlovka nel governatorato di Smolensk da Ivan Petrovič Zasulič, un nobile polacco caduto in disgrazia e viene educata da una governante ferventemente credente. Nel 1867, all'età di 18 anni, arrivata a San Pietroburgo, Vera entra a far parte del gruppo di Nečaev[17]. L'anno successivo viene arrestata e nel 1871 allontanata dalla

te di studi su scrittori ottocenteschi, sul ruolo e la rappresentazione dei processi nella loro prosa. Alla base dell'approccio microstorico invece vi è uno studio delle fonti archivistiche che mira a ricostruire il fatto storico attraverso le personalità coinvolte e a mettere in relazione la storia del singolo con la storia del Paese.

[16] Nella quinta sezione dei *Ricordi*, Koni afferma di essere stato chiamato in modo dispregiativo "*krasnyj*" poiché considerato inadatto a insegnare Teoria e pratica del processo penale presso la Scuola di diritto a causa delle sue posizioni liberali (Koni 1989: 406).

[17] Sergej Gennadievič Nečaev è stato un nichilista e rivoluzionario russo. Uno dei primi esponenti dell'attivismo rivoluzionario russo, fu a capo della *Narodnaja Rasprava* e autore del manifesto radicale *Il catechismo del rivoluzionario*. Condannato per l'omicidio dello studente Ivanov, morì in carcere il 3 dicembre 1882. Fu proprio a causa di Nečaev che Vera fu arrestata la prima volta nel 1869. Questi, infatti, aveva usato l'indirizzo postale di Vera per la sua corrispondenza illegale e propagandistica benché, all'epoca, Vera si fosse distaccata da Nečaev le cui idee le sembravano troppo fantasiose.

capitale. Durante la sua assenza da San Pietroburgo, Vera si muove tra i governatorati di Novgorod e Kostroma, fino ad arrivare a Char'kov, dove entra nell'organizzazione rivoluzionaria di ispirazione bakuniniana *Južnye buntari*, impara a sparare e prende parte attivamente al tentativo fallito di insurrezione dell'*uezd* di Čigirin. All'indomani del fallimento, e per nascondersi dalla polizia, Vera si trasferisce nuovamente a San Pietroburgo dove conosce i membri del gruppo terroristico *Zemlja i volja*.

Il 13 luglio 1877 il giovane rivoluzionario Aleksej Bogoljubov, pseudonimo di Archip Petrovič Emel'janov – arrestato all'età di 24 anni durante la manifestazione del 6 dicembre 1876 presso la cattedrale della Madonna di Kazan' da *Zemlja i volja*, poi condannato a 15 anni di lavori forzati (Venturi 1972:126) e detenuto nella Casa di detenzione preventiva[18] – viene punito per aver mancato di rispetto (non si era tolto il cappello) al governatore di San Pietroburgo, il generale Fedor Fedorovič Trepov. Quest'ultimo, offeso dall'insolenza del detenuto, si reca per un parere dal vicedirettore del Dipartimento di giustizia Koni ma, non avendolo trovato in ufficio, si rivolge al ministro della giustizia Konstantin Ivanovič Palen, che lo autorizza[19] a usare una punizione corporale[20].

La notizia delle percosse oltrepassa le mura della Casa di de-

[18] La Casa di Detenzione Preventiva (*Dom predvaritel'nogo zaključenija – DPZ*), o Prigione Špalernaja, è stato il primo carcere investigativo speciale della Russia con sede a San Pietroburgo. La casa di detenzione preventiva iniziò la sua attività il 1 agosto 1875 come prima prigione investigativa della Russia, con 317 celle di isolamento e oltre 68 celle generali e di punizione per un totale di 700 detenuti. Fino alla Rivoluzione d'Ottobre in questo carcere venivano detenuti tutti i rivoluzionari. La casa di detenzione preventiva si trova tuttora al numero 25 di via Špalernaja ed è il centro di custodia cautelare n. 3 del Servizio penitenziario federale.

[19] Nella sezione prima dei *Ricordi* Koni riporta il suo primo dialogo con il ministro Palen sull'accaduto: "Sui fatti avvenuti nella casa di detenzione preventiva". [...] Palen s'infiammò e mi disse con foga: "Lo so e trovo che abbia agito bene; era stato da me per un consiglio ed io gli avevo dato il permesso di fustigare Bogoljubov... Si deve fare così con queste canaglie!". (*O proissèstvii v dome predvaritel'nogo zaključenija"*. [...] *Palen vspychnul i zapal'čivo skazal mne: "Znaju i nachožu, čto on postupil očen' chorošo; on byl u menja, sovetovalsja, i ja emu razrešil vyseč' Bogoljubova... Nado ètich mošennikov tak)!* (Koni 1989: 300).

[20] Le punizioni corporali come misure di punizione penale erano state abolite il 17 aprile 1863, tuttavia proprio a metà degli anni '70 il Ministero della giustizia era intento a riflettere la possibilità di reinserire la frusta come misura di punizione per i rivoluzionari detenuti.

tenzione e del Dipartimento di Giustizia, provocando reazioni a catena nella cerchia dei rivoluzionari. Costoro tramano una sorta di riscatto per l'episodio di violenza ai danni di Bogoljubov e affidano il compito di vendicarlo a Vera Zasulič[21].

L'attentato a Trepov avviene il 24 gennaio 1878 all'indomani del processo dei 193[22]. Per Koni il 24 gennaio è la prima giornata nella carica di presidente del Tribunale distrettuale di San Pietroburgo: deve sbrigare innumerevoli pratiche legate all'insediamento ma, terminati gli affari urgenti in tribunale, viene a sapere dell'attentato e si reca a casa di Trepov di fronte all'Ammiragliato. Nella sala, seduta a un lungo tavolo di fronte all'investigatore Kabat e al capo della polizia investigativa Ivan Dmitrievič Putilin, scorge una ragazza di media statura, dal viso lungo, pallido e malaticcio e con i capelli ben pettinati. La ragazza, vestita con un mantello grigio e decorato lungo i fianchi, scrollava nervosamente le spalle e alzava gli occhi grigio-chiaro al soffitto. Koni intercetta negli occhi della fanciulla uno sguardo di dolore e un atteggiamento determinato, fiero ed entusiastico: era Vera Zasulič (Koni 1989: 313–314).

Vera viene arrestata. Gli inquirenti, nonostante la natura politica del caso, lo qualificano come privato: Zasulič dichiara di aver agito autonomamente sotto

[21] Il progetto di un'azione punitiva nei confronti di Trepov era di M. Frolenko, I. Vološenko, G. Popko e V. Osinskij (rivoluzionari ucraini membri di *Zemlja i volja*), ma Vera Zasulič li precedette. Così Vera si occupò di Trepov, mentre Marija Aleksandrovna Kolenkina, sua compagna di stanza sull'*Anglijskij prospekt*, lo stesso giorno si diresse, con lo pseudonimo di Zagorskaja, dal senatore Vladislav Antonovič Želechovskij, autore dell'atto d'accusa nel Processo dei Centonovantatrè. Kolenkina, però, non riuscì a farsi ricevere da Želechovskij e il suo attentato fallì.

[22] Il Processo dei Centonovantatrè, noto anche come "Il grande processo" o "Il caso sulla propaganda nell'Impero" (*Delo o propagande v Imperii*), fu intentato contro i rivoluzionari-*narodniki* (populisti). Esso si tenne a San Pietroburgo presso il Tribunale Speciale del Senato (*Osoboe Prisutstvie Pravitel'stvujuščego Senata*) dal 18 (30) ottobre 1877 al 23 gennaio (4 febbraio) 1878 e vi furono coinvolti 193 partecipanti dell'"andata al popolo", arrestati per l'attività di propaganda rivoluzionaria svolta tra il 1873 e il 1877. In quello stesso periodo ebbe luogo anche il processo contro i 21 manifestanti sulla piazza della cattedrale di Kazan', dei quali 18 furono condannati e mandati al confino. Lo stesso Tribunale Speciale, dal 21 febbraio al 14 marzo, si occupò del Processo dei Cinquanta contro 50 attivisti rivoluzionari dell'organizzazione *Vserossijskaja social'no-revoljucionnaja organizacija*, rei di aver fatto a Mosca propaganda di opposizione tra la popolazione operaia. Per un quadro dettagliato dei fatti si consigliano Venturi 1972 e Karpilenko 1994.

la falsa identità della maestra Kozlova. Pertanto, il caso di vendetta personale viene affidato alla giuria popolare presieduta dal giudice Koni. Dietro questa decisione stava lo stesso ministro Palen che affidava così alla giuria popolare gli esiti di un processo lampo che si sarebbe concluso con un sicuro verdetto di colpevolezza (Vilenskij 1969: 259–260).

Le indagini si chiudono a fine febbraio e il processo viene fissato per la fine di marzo. Koni ne chiede a Palen il rinvio all'estate successiva, quando il caos prodotto dall'accaduto si fosse calmato, ma Palen, appellandosi alla richiesta dello zar, gli oppone un rifiuto. A metà marzo Koni riceve una lettera in cui lo zar lo invita a un incontro durante il quale gli raccomanda di fare bene il proprio lavoro.

Il processo a Vera Zasulič ha inizio il 31 marzo 1878, alle ore 11, presso il Tribunale distrettuale di San Pietroburgo in via Špalernaja. Davanti al tribunale si raduna una folla immensa di tutti coloro che non avevano avuto il permesso di entrare in aula[23]. Il collegio giudicante è formato dal presidente Koni, dai membri della corte O.G. Den e V.A. Serbinovič[24], e dai giudici popolari; l'accusa è affidata a Konstantin Ivanovič Kessel', la difesa a Petr Akimovič Aleksandrov, tra i corrispondenti è presente anche Dostoesvkij.

L'accusa informa la giuria popolare che quella ragazza vestita di nero, giovane, calma e fiera è accusata ai sensi degli articoli 9 e 1454 dell'*Uloženie o nakazaniach* (Codice delle pene) del 1866, legge le dichiarazioni di Trepov e dei testimoni e interroga la Zasulič. Che non nega la propria colpevolezza ma dichiara che, pur ritenendo spaventoso e ingiusto fare del male ad altri, non era riuscita a reagire diversamente alla notizia dei fatti avve-

[23] "Nel frattempo, il giorno del processo si avvicinava.... L'interesse pubblico per il caso cresceva, si diffondevano le voci più ridicole e io venivo sommerso da lettere che chiedevano biglietti d'ingresso. Particolarmente interessate a partecipare all'udienza erano le signore, anche il cassetto sinistro della mia scrivania, dove gettavo le lettere, era impregnato dell'odore di profumo dei biglietti colorati con intricati monogrammi e stemmi. Non si poteva neppure pensare di far entrare il pubblico senza biglietto. Avrebbe causato ogni sorta di disordini, scandali e forse anche feriti. Visto il numero di richieste, dovetti adottare un sistema di distribuzione dei biglietti [d'ingresso] per quegli orribili scranni nella soffocante e buia aula del Primo Dipartimento del Tribunale di San Pietroburgo". (Koni 1989: 336).

[24] Purtroppo dalle fonti consultate non è stato possibile risalire ai nomi completi dei due giudici.

nuti nella casa di detenzione preventiva.

Le arringhe iniziano con il discorso accusatorio di Kessel'[25] che, senza soffermarsi sul singolo caso, banalmente sostiene che tutte le azioni devono essere legali, che l'unico organo competente per la gestione delle ingiustizie è il tribunale di stato e non il "tribunale Zasulič"[26].

Di tutt'altro peso è il discorso difensivo di Aleksandrov: basti ricordare che ad un certo punto dell'arringa Koni è costretto a chiedere al pubblico di smettere di applaudire (Karpilenko 1994: 34). Nel suo discorso Aleksandrov sottolinea il rapporto di causa-effetto tra "il caso Bogoljubov" e l'atto criminoso dell'imputata, un atto che vuole essere la voce della giustizia che tace quando la violenza viene esercitata su un suddito. Vera – nelle parole del suo difensore – è l'emblema di quella gioventù che, pur agognando a un futuro migliore per la Russia, si ritrova a essere testimone di nefandezze e falle nel sistema amministrativo e del giudiziario vessatorio ai danni dell'uomo comune, spogliato del proprio onore e della propria dignità[27]. Vera è, per Aleksandrov, il simbolo di una generazione di speranze infrante da funzionari che si comportano in maniera arbitraria e perpetrano soprusi, Vera esercita la capacità di immedesimarsi nel prigioniero politico con cui condivide la reclusione, l'isolamento, l'agitazione nervosa, l'ansia costante, l'incertezza perenne e le martellanti domande sul futuro e il destino del suo popolo (Smoljarčuk 1984: 45–46).

Una volta concluse le arringhe, il giudice presenta alla giuria popolare le domande a cui è chiamata a rispondere: è stata Vera Zasulič a sparare al generale Trepov il 24 gennaio? Era sua intenzione ucciderlo? Se sì, ha fatto tutto il possibile per realizzare il suo piano?

Successivamente Koni pronuncia il riassunto del presidente[28],

[25] Interessante che il discorso pronunciato da Vera Zasulič non sia riportato in nessuna delle edizioni dei *Ricordi*.

[26] Il discorso dell'aiuto procuratore Kessel' è reperibile al sito: <http://az.lib.ru/k/koni_a_f/text_0660.shtml>.

[27] Dal discorso di Aleksandrov (Smoljarčuk 1984: 43).

[28] Il discorso di A.F. Koni venne riportato dalla stampa e contestato dai conservatori. Il testo è inserito da Koni stesso nel suo *Ricordi sul caso Vera Zasulič* e occupa la sezione terza, da pag. 337 a 347 nell'edizione da noi consultata.

Oggi il riepilogo del presidente con cui la corte riassume i fatti e invita i giurati a ritirarsi nella camera di consiglio per l'emissione del verdetto è chiamato *naputsvtennoe slovo predsedatel'stvujuščego v sude prisjažnych* (lett. discorso di congedo del presidente nel processo con giuria popolare).

congedando la giuria. Quando i giurati rientrano il loro capogruppo, A.I. Lochov, consegna a Koni con mano tremante il foglio contenente il verdetto. La frase "No, non è colpevole!" tuona nel silenzio di tomba dell'aula. Seguono grida, applausi, abbracci, segni di croce. Koni, che dispone di liberare l'imputata, è costretto a ordinare di condurla all'uscita attraverso una porta secondaria del tribunale per garantire l'ordine pubblico. La gioia della folla è incontenibile. Giustizia è stata fatta, secondo l'opinione pubblica. Di parere diverso sono il ministro Palen, il redattore capo del *Moskovskie vedomosti* Michail Nikifirovič Katkov e, ovviamente, lo zar Aleksandr II. Vera è libera fino a sera, quando viene emesso un nuovo mandato di arresto contro di lei. Koni, dal canto suo, pagherà le conseguenze per la mancata "manipolazione" del verdetto.

2. *Ricordi sul caso Vera Zasulič*: il racconto apologetico del giudice A.F. Koni

Il testo, nell'edizione del 1989 da noi consultata, occupa le pagine 277–420, per una lunghezza di 143 pagine, ed è composto da una introduzione, cinque sezioni e il riepilogo pronunciato da Koni in qualità di presidente del collegio giudicante a conclusione della fase dibattimentale (sezione III). A livello tematico l'introduzione funge da premessa in cui si anticipa il tema, mentre i primi due capitoli, o sezioni, sono dedicati all'antefatto del caso: in particolare la prima sezione tratta dei moti rivoluzionari presenti sul territorio e del caso Bogoljubov, mentre la seconda sezione si concentra sul fatto criminoso. La terza sezione contiene il riepilogo di Koni il cui compito consiste, appunto, nel riassumere l'evoluzione del processo: le posizioni delle parti, i discorsi. Le ultime due sezioni sono dedicate al periodo successivo al processo con l'esposizione delle conseguenze sul piano storico, giudiziario e privato per Koni dopo l'assoluzione a Vera.

Pertanto, l'analisi retorico-linguistica dei *Ricordi* seguirà l'impianto narrativo del testo.

Se, come crediamo, questo testo autobiografico di Koni ha valore apologetico e rappresenta un discorso difensivo sulla propria condotta e sulla propria verità giudiziaria, allora la premessa vale come esordio, ovvero la prima parte del discorso nell'oratoria forense, che non ha solo la funzione di introdurre l'argomento e di suscitare l'attenzione dei lettori, conciliandone la be-

nevolenza, ma assolve piuttosto a una funzione assai più pregnante: quella di rompere il silenzio su un dato evento e, in un certo senso, di "esorcizzare l'arbitrarietà di ogni inizio" (Traversi 2024: 127). Nell'incipit dei *Ricordi*, Koni sente l'esigenza di porsi come un testimone credibile degli eventi, avendo ormai raggiunto quella distanza emotiva e psicologica dai fatti che si ottiene solo con lo scorrere del tempo, come una persona che può, perciò, vantare il diritto e l'autorevolezza di svelare ciò che al tempo era nascosto da ombre:

> *Глубокий возраст*[29], принося свои тягости, вместе с тем дает то *преимущество*, которое достигается во время путешествий восхождением на большую горную высоту, а теперь, вероятно, дается поднятием на аэроплане; там горизонт перед взором расширяется настолько, что вдруг вместо уголка известной местности она становится видной вся, и то, что оставалось в тени и представлялось навсегда лишенным солнца, оказывается закрытым от его лучей лишь временным туманом.[30] (Koni 1989: 277)

Koni ribadisce, inoltre, la necessità di leggere le sue pagine immergendosi nel contesto storico e sociale "di quel tempo" per non falsare la percezione di personalità ed eventi.

> Важно, чтобы читающий записку мог установить в себе угол зрения *того времени*, понять взгляды *той эпохи*. […] Вот почему, смотря с этой точки зрения на мемуары и записи прошлого, я печатаю то, что написано мною 45 лет назад, не изменяя ни одного слова. Читая записку о деле Засулич, надо стать на точку зрения людей *того времени*. Это – под-

[29] Tutti i corsivi usati per enfatizzare i termini utili alla trattazione sono dell'autrice del saggio, fatta eccezione per le espressioni in lingue diverse dal russo.

[30] L'età avanzata, pur portando i suoi fardelli, allo stesso tempo offre un vantaggio simile a quando si scalano vette montuose e che oggi probabilmente si ottiene salendo in aereo; da lì l'orizzonte davanti al proprio sguardo si allarga a tal punto che all'improvviso, invece di un angolo di una località conosciuta, diventa visibile la località intera e ciò che era rimasto in ombra e sembrava essere per sempre privato del sole risulta essere chiuso ai suoi raggi solo da una foschia temporanea.

линные переживания тогдашнего председателя окружного суда (семидесятых годов), которому было в то время около 35 лет, который был во всеоружии всех своих душевных сил и макал перо не в чернила, а в сок своих нервов и кровь своего впоследствии больного сердца, чтобы запечатлеть на бумаге то, что казалось ему, вписывается как начало новой страницы ее истории в жизнь России. […] Итак, вот что записано бывшим председателем по делу Засулич 45 лет тому назад[31]. (Koni 1989: 278)

Attraverso il dato biografico (35 anni) il narratore ci restituisce l'immagine di un uomo che ha raggiunto l'età della saggezza, frutto di studi ed esperienza, all'apice della propria carriera e, tuttavia, segnato da una sofferenza tale da aver scritto questi ricordi con il sangue e il sudore.
Per quanto riguarda, invece, la portata storica del caso, che poi costituisce il *leitmotiv* dei *Ricordi*, Koni scrive:

Выстрел Засулич обратил внимание общества на совершившийся в его среде акт *грубого насилия* в то время, когда все его внимание было обращено на театр войны. И настроение общества в Петербурге в это время вовсе не было столь благодушным, чтобы думать, что оно отказалось от суровой критики правительственных действий … Наоборот, именно в начале весны 1878 года в петербургском обществе проявлялась *раздражительная нервность и крайняя*

[31] È importante che il lettore di questo scritto possa predisporsi secondo il punto di vista *di quel tempo*, comprendere le opinioni di quell'epoca. […] Ecco perché, guardando le memorie e i documenti del passato da questo punto di vista, consegno alle stampe ciò che ho scritto 45 anni fa senza cambiare una sola parola. Nel leggere la nota sul caso Zasulič, bisogna assumere il punto di vista della gente di *quel tempo*. Queste sono le angosce autentiche vissute dall'allora presidente del Tribunale distrettuale (degli anni Settanta) che all'epoca aveva circa 35 anni, era nel pieno possesso di ogni forza d'animo e intinse la sua penna non nell'inchiostro, ma nel liquido dei suoi nervi e nel sangue del suo cuore successivamente malato, per mettere su carta ciò che gli sembrava essere l'inizio di una nuova pagina di storia nella vita della Russia. […] Ebbene ecco cosa è stato scritto dall'ex presidente per il caso Zasulič 45 anni fa.

впечатлительность[32].
(Koni 1989: 322-323)

Con questa breve riflessione, Koni vuole dimostrare di essere un uomo capace di leggere i segni della storia, che conosce la società e comprende le radici dei moti rivoluzionari. L'aggettivazione e, in generale, le scelte lessicali chiaramente valutative del giudice rivelano un liberale che chiama le cose con il proprio nome: l'azione governativa è di una violenza brutale, incivile, la società è resa nervosa e impressionabile a causa della guerra all'esterno e del terrorismo all'interno del paese.

La prima sezione dei *Ricordi* è dedicata alla manifestazione del 6 dicembre 1876, giornata che l'autore definisce fatale per molti. Da questo momento, Koni inizia a presentare sé stesso come una personalità di spicco del diritto russo, pienamente inserito nella società e largamente stimato. Lo scopo è perseguito e raggiunto principalmente attraverso tecniche retoriche di coinvolgimento come, appunto, il dialogismo. L'esposizione dei fatti o dei caratteri attraverso sceneggiature drammatiche coinvolge profondamente il lettore, grazie al cosiddetto "effetto presenza"[33]. Egli ricorda che, nel febbraio 1877, quando era professore presso la Scuola di diritto, durante una festa organizzata dal principe Petr Georgievič Ol'denburgskij, il senatore e vicedirettore Boris Nikolaevič Chvostov lo prese da parte per conoscere la sua opinione sul processo dei 50[34], in particolare

[32] Lo sparo di Zasulič richiamò l'attenzione della società su un atto di grave violenza commesso al suo interno in un momento in cui tutta l'attenzione era rivolta al teatro della guerra. Persino l'umore dell'opinione pubblica pietroburghese in quel periodo non era così favorevole da far pensare che essa avrebbe rinunciato a criticare severamente l'azione governativa.... Al contrario, fu proprio all'inizio della primavera del 1878 che la società pietroburghese mostrò un *nervosismo irritabile* e *un'impressionabilità estrema.*

[33] I dialoghi presenti nel testo sono in tutto 58, se si contano solo i dialoghi diretti. Compaiono anche numerosi dialoghi indiretti, ovvero non riportati fedelmente, ma riassunti.

[34] Il Processo dei Cinquanta o ufficialmente "Caso sui diversi individui accusati di crimini di stato per l'organizzazione di un'associazione illegale e per la diffusione di testi criminosi" (*Delo o raznych licach, obvinjaemych v gosudarstvennom prestuplenii po sostavleniju protivozakonnogo soobščestva i rasprostraneniju prestupnych sočinenij*) fu un processo ai rivoluzionari-populisti affidato al Tribunale dei senatori a San Pietroburgo. Il processo si svolse dal 21 febbraio al 14 marzo 1877. Il presidente del collegio giudicante era Karl Karlovič Peters, l'accusa l'*oberprokuror* del Dipartimento di Cassazione penale Konstantin Nikolaevič Žukov, mentre tra i quindici difensori degli im-

per chiedergli come si sarebbe comportato lui se non ci fossero state prove contro molti degli imputati. La risposta di Koni, che avrebbe assolto gli imputati in assenza di prove di colpevolezza, turba il senatore, il quale esclama: "Non conviene assolvere!". Koni replica:

> Ваше превосходительство, – сказал я, *взбешенный*, наконец, всем этим, – вы – сенатор, судья, как можете вы спрашивать, что вам делать, если нет улик против обвиняемого, то есть если он невиновен? Разве вы не знаете, что единственный ответ на этот вопрос может состоять лишь в одном слове – оправдать? И какое неудобство может это представлять для вас? Ведь вы – не административный чиновник, вы – судья, вы – сенатор![35] (Koni 1989: 286)

Koni costruisce l'immagine di sé come prototipo di giudice nel contesto giudiziario russo e, forse, principalmente, nella storia della Russia soprattutto utilizzando la tecnica del dialogismo[36]. Koni, dunque, espone la narrazione del caso Zasulič lasciando emergere, attraverso i continui dialoghi con diverse personalità coinvolte a vario titolo nelle azioni processuali, la propria personalità, le proprie motivazioni e la propria osservanza della Legge.
Quando, infatti, durante una conversazione, il principe Dmitrij Aleksandrovič Obolenskij vuole convincere Koni della necessità di frustare i criminali politici, questi tuona:

> "Вы или шутите, – отвечал я, – или совершенно не понимаете нашей молодежи, попавшей на революционную дорогу, если думаете испугать и остановить ее розгами. Опозорив правительство, возмутив против него массу порядочных людей, вы все-таки не достигнете цели. Поли-

putati c'erano Vladimir Danilovič Spasovič e Konstantin Fedorovič Chartulari.

[35] Eccellenza – dissi, alla fine, *furioso* – Lei è un senatore, un giudice, come può chiedere cosa fare in caso di assenza di prove contro l'imputato, ovvero se questi è innocente? Non sa forse che l'unica risposta a questa domanda può consistere in una sola parola: assolvere! Dopo tutto, lei non è un funzionario amministrativo, è un giudice, è un senatore!

[36] Il dialogismo o finzione di dialogo è una tecnica retorica per cui viene riportato un dialogo realmente avvenuto o supposto al fine di rendere più avvincente il racconto.

тические преступники будут свивать себе мученические венцы из розог, будут указывать на свои истязания как на лучшее оправдание своей ненависти к правительству и не только не станут скрывать своего сечения, но найдутся и такие, которые будут *a titre d'estime* вымышлять даже, что их секли. Вы вызовете яростное ожесточение в молодежи и глубокое негодование в людях, чуждых революционным тенденциям. Какой отец простит вам сечение своей взрослой дочери? Какой "сеченый" сочтет возможным стать впоследствии другом порядка, каким он легко и без позорного забвения своего унижения может стать даже после годов каторги? Наказывайте подданного, когда он нарушает положительный закон, но не убивайте чувства собственного достоинства в человеке! И можно ли советовать такую меру государю, отменившему телесное наказание?! Нет, князь, вы выбрали плохое средство снять с себя неудовольствие государя..." Оболенский очень сконфузился, стал защищаться, доказывать, что это лишь проект, что ничего определенного он сам не решил, что *мое мнение ему очень важно* и т.д[37]. (Koni 1989: 295–296)

[37] "O state scherzando – risposi – o non capite affatto i nostri giovani che hanno imboccato la strada della rivoluzione, se pensate di spaventarli e fermarli a colpi di frusta. Non è disonorando il governo e aizzandogli contro la massa delle persone perbene, che raggiungerete il vostro scopo. I criminali politici si intrecceranno corone da martire con le verghe, identificheranno nelle loro torture la giustificazione migliore del loro odio verso il governo e non solo non nasconderanno le loro frustate, ma vi saranno alcuni che, *a titre d'estime*, persino s'inventeranno di essere stati frustati. Susciterete un'amarezza feroce nei giovani e una indignazione profonda nelle persone estranee alle tendenze rivoluzionarie. Quale padre vi perdonerebbe le frustate alla figlia adulta? Quale uomo "frustato" penserà di poter diventare in seguito amico dell'ordine? Che amico può diventare con leggerezza e vergognosamente dimentico dell'umiliazione anche dopo gli anni di lavori forzati? Punite pure il suddito, se viola una legge positiva, ma non uccidete il senso di dignità nell'uomo! E poi, si può davvero suggerire una misura simile ad un sovrano che ha abolito le punizioni corporali?! No, Principe, avete scelto un mezzo sbagliato per sottrarvi al malcontento del sovrano ...". Obolenskij si sentì molto imbarazzato, cominciò a difendersi, cercando di dimostrare che si trattava solo di una bozza, che lui stesso non aveva deciso nulla di preciso, che la

Il dialogo si trasforma in un monologo, una tirata retorica vera e propria, in cui Koni utilizza l'interrogazione o domanda retorica per costringere l'interlocutore ad acconsentire al suo punto di vista. L'interrogazione, infatti, condotta con un climax ascendente tripartito (quale padre […]? Quale uomo "frustato" […]?, si può davvero suggerire […]?) si conclude con una risposta unica pronunciata esplicitamente da Koni: "No!".

Non è raro, ancora, che Koni, riportando dialoghi di rilevanza sociale e giuridica come quelli sulle punizioni corporali, riferisca di aver perso il controllo, restituendo il ritratto di una persona che non riesce a restare indifferente dinanzi a questioni di giustizia sociale, ma si agita profondamente, lasciandosi trasportare dalle emozioni. Il tono perentorio e fermo di Koni, però, nel corso dei suoi dialoghi/monologhi non si trasforma mai in arroganza o superbia. Il giudice, attraverso le sue tirate – a volte prolisse e dal tono omiletico – tenta di porsi verso il suo interlocutore sempre con saggezza e profonda sensibilità. Nella risposta a Obolenskij, per esempio, non risuona lo sprezzo, bensì la frustrazione di chi cerca di far aprire gli occhi all'altro, sforzandosi di mostrare che i sudditi sono un organismo vivente con dei diritti garantiti dalla Legge. Koni sottolinea continuamente la necessità – per le autorità – di scorgere i fatti in prospettiva. Secondo il giudice un inasprimento ingiustificato delle misure cautelari porterebbe a svergognare lo Stato e ad agitare la massa: le generazioni più anziane perderebbero fiducia e amore nei confronti del governo, mentre le nuove generazioni se ne allontanerebbero definitivamente. Egli è, nel suo racconto, sempre più solo e incompreso, pur se ancora molto stimato nel suo ambiente. Non è un caso che proprio a lui volesse rivolgersi Trepov quel famoso 13 luglio 1877. Anche in questa occasione Koni dipinge sé stesso come un uomo sensibile, saggio e pieno di *humanitas*:

> Все эти известия произвели на меня *подавляющее впечатление*. Я *живо* представлял себе этот *отвратительный* дом предварительного заключения, с его душными, лишенными света, камерами, в которых уже четыре года томились до двухсот человек полити-

mia opinione era molto importante per lui, ecc."

ческих арестантов, преимущественно по жихаревскому делу. [...] Я пережил в этот *печальный* день *тяжкие* минуты, перечувствовал те ощущения *отчаяния* и *бессильного негодования*, которые должны были овладеть невольными свидетелями истязания Боголюбова при виде грубого надругательства силы и власти над беззащитным человеком, [...] Я ясно сознавал, что все это вызовет *бесконечное ожесточение* в молодежи, что сечение Боголюбова будет использовано агитаторами в их целях с необыкновенными успехом и что в политических процессах с 13 июля начинает выступать на сцену новый ингредиент: между судом и политическими преступниками резко вторгается *грубая рука* административного *произвола. Глубоко огорченный* всем этим, я пошел к Палену, которого застал в беседе с одним *хитроумным* Улиссом правоведческого мира – Голубевым. "Какая тяжелая новость!" – сказал я ему. "Да! и кто мог этого ожидать так скоро, – отвечал Пален, – как жаль, что все это случилось! Я очень, очень огорчен». – "Я не только *огорчен*, я просто *возмущен*, граф, и уверяю вас, что эта *отвратительная расправа* будет иметь самые *тягостные последствия*". – "Какая расправа? О чем вы говорите?" – изумленно спросил меня Пален. "О происшествии в доме предварительного заключения". – "Ах, помилуйте, я совсем о другом! Наш достойнейший Владимир Степанович Адамов умер! Вот телеграмма его жены; какое несчастье!" – "Ну, это несчастье еще не большое и легко поправимое, но то, что произвошло в доме предварительного заключения, действительно несчатье! – сказал я. – Разве вы не знаете, граф, что там наделал Трепов?" [...] "Это не конец, а начало, – сказал я ему, *теряя самообладание*, – вы не знаете этих людей, вы их вовсе не понимаете, – и вы разрешили вещь совершенно *противозаконную*, которая будет иметь *ужасные* последствия;

этот день не забудется арестантами дома предварительного заключения; *c'est plus qu'un crime, c'est une faute*, это не только ничем не оправдываемое насилие, это – политическая ошибка… ” […] Я передал ему некоторые спешные бумаги и вышел, *взволнованный* и *возмущенный тупым озлоблением* этого человека, который *мнил* себя руководителем правосудия и ухмылялся с видимым удовольствием, когда узнал, что по-польски он титулуется «minister sprawiedliwoscy». […] Целый день провел *я в чрезвычайном удручении*, и мысль выйти в отставку соблазняла меня не раз[38]. (Koni 1989: 299-301)

[38] “Tutte queste notizie mi fecero un’impressione tale da *sopraffarmi*. Immaginai vividamente quella *disgustosa* casa di detenzione preventiva, con le sue celle *soffocanti* e senza luce, in cui da quattro anni *languivano* fino a duecento prigionieri politici, per lo più del caso Žicharev. […] In quel *triste* giorno ho vissuto momenti *pesanti*, ho avvertito quei sentimenti di *disperazione* e di *impotente indignazione* che dovevano aver travolto i testimoni involontari della tortura di Bogoljubov alla vista del *brutale sopruso* di un uomo indifeso da parte del potere dell’autorità, […]. Ero chiaramente consapevole che tutto questo avrebbe causato un’esasperazione senza fine nella gioventù, che le percosse a Bogoljubov sarebbero state sfruttate da diversi agitatori per i loro scopi con straordinario successo e che nei processi politici a partire dal 13 luglio iniziava a comparire sulla scena un nuovo ingrediente: tra il tribunale e i criminali politici irrompeva bruscamente la *mano brutale* del *sopruso amministrativo*. Profondamente *angosciato* da tutto ciò, mi recai da Palen, che trovai a colloquio con l’astuto Ulisse del mondo giurisprudenziale, Golubev. […]. “Che notizia grave!” – gli dissi io “Sì! E chi poteva aspettarselo così presto, – rispose Palen, – che peccato che sia successo tutto ciò! Sono molto, molto angosciato”. – “Non sono solo *angosciato*, sono semplicemente *indignato*, conte, e le assicuro che questo *disgustoso massacro* avrà le più gravi conseguenze”. – “Quale massacro? Di cosa sta parlando?” - Mi chiese Palen stupito. “Dell’incidente nella casa di custodia”. – “Ah, abbia pietà, io parlo di tutt’altro! È morto il nostro rispettabilissimo Vladimir Stepanovič Adamov! Ecco il telegramma da parte della moglie; che disgrazia!” – “Beh, questa è una disgrazia non troppo grave e facilmente superabile, ma quello che è avvenuto nella casa di detenzione preventiva è davvero una disgrazia! – dissi io. – Non sa forse, conte, cosa ha combinato lì Trepov?” […] “Questa non è la fine, ma l’inizio” – gli dissi, *perdendo il controllo* – “voi non conoscete queste persone, non le capite affatto e avete autorizzato una cosa assolutamente contraria alla legge, che avrà conseguenze terribili; questo giorno i detenuti della casa di custodia non lo dimenticheranno; *c’est plus qu’un crime, c’est une faute*, non è solo una violenza ingiustificabile, è un errore politico…” […]. Me ne andai, *agitato* e *indignato* per l’*ottusa ostinazione* di quest’uomo che si credeva il capo della

La descrizione che Koni dà di sé in questo frammento passa attraverso un lessico chiaramente valutativo nella cornice di un dialogo fatto di esclamazioni, domande e risposte incalzanti.
Lo stato d'animo del narratore appare scosso e fortemente impressionato dagli eventi; si immedesima nei detenuti e testimoni di cui prova le stesse emozioni di disperazione e impotente indignazione di fronte alle torture inflitte nella invivibile casa di custodia a Bogoljubov. Koni è indignato, perde il controllo fino a cadere in uno sconforto tale da pensare alle dimissioni. La casa di detenzione diventa nella mente dell'autore un posto disgustoso, buio e sovraffollato, sovrastato dalla mano del potere che esercita una violenza brutale e ingiustificabile. Anatolij Fedorovič è turbato dall'ottusità del ministro della giustizia che diventa, nella sua narrazione, un anti-ministro della giustizia. Palen appare come un servo del potere, un uomo cieco e incapace di studiare in profondità le questioni più delicate; Koni, al contrario, rifiuta di assolvere al ruolo passivo di testimone di misure inique, illegali e disumane. Significativo appare l'uso del termine *rasprava* (linciaggio, azione punitiva) che ha una connotazione negativa, ulteriormente rafforzata dall'aggettivo chiaramente valutativo *otvratitenl'naja* (disgustoso), ma che è anche un termine ricorrente nel linguaggio rivoluzionario coevo[39], usato in contrapposizione all'istituzionale *pravosudie*/*justicija* (giustizia).
Il 14 luglio Koni riceve una visita da parte di Trepov. Il giudice si dice indignato e amareggiato dalle sue azioni e gli spiega animatamente quanto la sua condotta nei confronti dei detenuti sia per lui illecita e crudele. Trepov si difende, definendosi un "soldato, che ignora le sottigliezze giuridiche". La sezione procede con un'altra trovata retorica assimilabile alla prosopopea in quanto Koni inserisce, a conferma della sua posizione sul caso Bogoljubov e della sua portata sociale, una lettera scritta con lacrime e sangue (Koni 1989: 304) dall'anziana Ekaterina Volchonskaja, madre di un detenuto politico. La donna, addolorata e preoccupata per il figlio, anch'egli maltrattato e ancora non giudicato, si rivolge a Koni pur non conoscendolo di perso-

giustizia. [...]. Passai tutta la giornata in uno *sconforto terribile* e l'idea di dimettermi mi tentò più di una volta".

[39] Basti a titolo esemplificativo il nome dell'organizzazione rivoluzionaria *Narodnaja rasprava*.

na, per aver sentito di lui come di una persona sempre pronta ad aiutare il prossimo. Questo stratagemma retorico-narrativo offre l'occasione a Koni sia di avvalorare la propria tesi su quanto il popolo si sentisse oppresso, incompreso, ingiustamente disumanizzato dalle autorità, sia di mostrarsi come unico personaggio controcorrente, empatico e saggio.

La seconda sezione inizia con qualche parola sul processo dei 193 (iniziato a ottobre 1877 e terminato il 23 gennaio 1878), descritto attraverso numerosi elementi deittici – date, nomi di personaggi coinvolti, stralci dai numeri di giornali dell'epoca – che contribuiscono a creare l'effetto presenza mediante l'ipotiposi.

Si cambia poi tema attraverso un laconico "Così iniziò l'anno 1878…". Koni, appena insediatosi come giudice in tribunale, il 24 gennaio, si reca dal ferito Trepov e vi trova anche Palen e il procuratore Lopuchin che lo salutano affidandogli immediatamente l'incarico di giudice per un caso – dicono – già chiarissimo e di sicuro movente personale, non politico. Koni non è d'accordo, chiede delle indagini, profetizza ripercussioni da parti dei terroristi, denunciando ancora una volta l'ottusità di Palen . Il neogiudice è certo che così facendo si prepara in modo incauto e frettoloso un processo che si rivelerà fatale per l'intero istituto giudiziario: come afferma lo storico Vilenskij, proprio con il processo Zasulič ha inizio la controriforma giudiziaria nell'Impero Russo (Vilenskij 1969: 265).

La narrazione procede ancora attraverso conversazioni, per cui dopo aver rifiutato la richiesta di Koni di rimandare il processo, Palen gli chiede apertamente se può garantire un verdetto di colpevolezza. Koni risponde di no e al "ne è sicuro?" di Palen, ribatte con una vera e propria lezione di teoria del diritto sulla giuria popolare e sui concetti di giustizia e trasparenza che il giudice pone come pilastri della propria statura morale:

> "Если бы я был сам судьею по существу, то и тогда, не выслушав следствия, не зная всех обстоятельств дела, я не решился бы вперед высказать свое мнение, которое притом в коллегии не одно решает вопрос. Здесь же судят присяжные, приговор которых основывается на многих неуловимых заранее соображениях. Как же я могу ручаться за их приговор? […] Я предполагаю, однако, что здравый

смысл присяжных подскажет им решение справедливое и чуждое увлечений [...] Но ручаться за признание виновности я не могу!" [...] Я даже просил бы вас об этом, граф, так как мне самому крайне нежелательно, чтобы государь возлагал на меня надежды и обязательства, к осуществлению которых у меня как у судьи нет никаких средств. [...] "Граф, – сказал я, прерывая его речь, обратившуюся уже в поток бессмысленных междометий, – я люблю суд присяжных и дорожу им; всякое выражение недоверия к нему мне действительно очень больно; но если от них требуется непременно обвинительный приговор и одна возможность оправдания заставляет вас – министра юстиции – уже выходить из себя, то я предпочел бы, чтобы дело было у них взято; оно, очевидно, представляет для этого суда больше опасности, чем чести. Да и вообще, раз по этому делу не будет допущен свободный выбор судейской совести, то к чему и суд! Лучше изъять все дела от присяжных и передать их полиции. [...] Все, за что я могу ручаться, это – за соблюдение по этому делу полного беспристрастия и всех гарантий правильного правосудия..." "Да! правосудие, беспристрастие! – иронически говорил Пален, беспристрастие... но ведь по этому проклятому делу правительство вправе ждать от суда и от вас особых услуг..." – "Граф, – сказал я, – позвольте вам напомнить слова d'Aguesseau[40] королю: "*Sire, la cour des arrets et pas des services*"[41]. (Koni 1989: 320–322)

[40] In latino nel testo. Henri François d'Aguesseau (1668– 1751) è stato un giurista e politico francese, da avvocato generale a procuratore generale e cancelliere di Francia. Nella sua vita si occupò di razionalizzare il diritto sulla scia delle idee del secolo precedente. D'Aguesseau propose innovazioni nel diritto privato, pubblico e fedecommessi. In realtà l'espressione sarebbe stata usata da Antoine Séguire (1768–1848), primo presidente del tribunale di Parigi dal 1811 al 1848, nel 1826 durante un processo politico per respingere la pressione ricevuta dal re.

[41] "Se anche fossi stato io il giudice di fatto, neanche allora, senza aver ascoltato l'istruttoria e senza conoscere tutte le circostanze del caso, non mi sarei az-

zardato ad esprimere in anticipo la mia opinione, che peraltro da sola nel collegio non risolve la questione. Nel nostro caso c'è una giuria, il cui verdetto si basa su molte e imponderabili considerazioni. Come posso garantire per il loro verdetto? [...]. Suppongo, tuttavia, che il buon senso della giuria la guiderà verso un giudizio equo ed imparziale. [...] Ma garantire per una sentenza di colpevolezza non è in mio potere!". [...] "Io ve lo chiederei [di riferirlo], Conte, perché io stesso sono estremamente riluttante a che il sovrano riponga delle speranze in me e degli obblighi che in qualità di giudice non ho la possibilità di soddisfare. [...] "Conte - dissi, interrompendo il suo discorso che era già diventato un torrente di interiezioni senza senso – io amo e ho a cuore la giuria popolare; qualsiasi espressione di sfiducia nei suoi confronti, soprattutto se proviene dal sovrano è davvero molto dolorosa per me; ma se sono tenuti a darmi una condanna e una sola possibilità di verdetto assoluzione a Lei, il Ministro della Giustizia, fa uscire di testa, preferirei che il caso venisse loro tolto; per questo tipo di tribunale questo caso è, a quanto pare, più un pericolo che un onore. E, infatti, se in questo caso la libera scelta della coscienza giudiziale non è consentita, a cosa serve un processo! Meglio togliere alla giuria tutti i casi e affidarli alla polizia. [...] Tutto quello che posso garantire io è che questo caso venga gestito con assoluta imparzialità e con tutte le garanzie del giusto processo. "Sì! Giustizia, imparzialità! - disse ironicamente Palen. – Imparzialità... ma in questo caso maledetto il governo ha il diritto di aspettarsi favori speciali dalla Corte e da voi...". – "Conte - dissi - permettetemi di ricordarvi le parole di d'Aguesseau al Re: "*Sire, la cour rend des arrêts et pas services*"".

Koni appare come un giudice che dichiara di "amare" l'istituto della giuria popolare, pur consapevole delle inevitabili "interferenze" non-giuridiche che influenzano i verdetti di giudici non togati. Si mostra preoccupato per le sorti della giuria popolare e solo per questo chiede a Palen di avvertire lo zar che non può garantire nulla, se non di supervisionare l'ordine e il giusto iter processuale. Usando una citazione erroneamente attribuita al giurista francese d'Aguesseau, il presidente fa leva su due noti condivisi: il concetto dell'imparzialità della Corte e il ruolo del diritto francese nell'evoluzione del sistema giudiziario russo[42]. Grazie a questo stratagemma retorico dell'*auctoritas*, Koni conclude la sua arringa e "mette a tacere" l'avversario.

I giorni scorrono veloci e il ministro della giustizia è in difficoltà: i migliori procuratori della capitale si rifiutano di sostenere l'accusa contro Vera Zasulič. La scelta ricade, perciò, su Kessel', che confida a Koni il suo disagio nell'aver accettato un ruolo rifiutato dai colleghi. Koni conosce Kessel' sin dai tempi in cui lavoravano entrambi a Kazan' e lo

[42] A questo proposito si veda per esempio il testo teorico di A.F. Koni *Priemy e zadači prokuratury*.

tratteggia negativamente attraverso una prolessi con lessico valutativo che ha il compito di presentare al lettore le scarse capacità oratorie di Kessel': "Mi sono figurato vividamente quale discorso accusatorio (*bescevtnaja*) scialbo, (*slabosil'naja*) debole e (*vodjanistaja*) annacquato avrebbe sentito Pietroburgo" (Koni 1989: 331).

Quattro giorni prima del processo, il 27 marzo, si tiene un altro dialogo tra Palen e Koni in cui quest'ultimo riassume al ministro il ruolo del presidente collegiale in un processo con giuria e, più nello specifico, il corretto e giusto comportamento da tenere nel processo alla Zasulič.

Nel dialogo si contrappongono sin dall'inizio due posizioni e idee di giudice: Palen afferma che tutto dipende dalla bravura e dall'eloquio di Koni, mentre questi ribatte che l'unica cosa che il Codice richiede al presidente è di osservare in maniera imparziale la legge, tanto da risultare assolutamente prevedibile in ogni azione e parola. Alle insistenze di Palen ("Le ripeto che da Lei, proprio da Lei, il governo si aspetta servizio e sostegno all'accusa"), Koni esplicita pacatamente la sua visione del ruolo sacro di presidente, sfruttando le figure retoriche della definizione, della metafora e, ancora, della parafrasi interpretativa: "*Председатель – судья, а не сторона,* и, ведя уголовный процесс, он держит в руках *чашу со святыми дарами.* Он не смеет наклонять ее ни в ту, ни в другую сторону – иначе *дары будут пролиты*…[43]" (Koni 1989: 333). In questa risposta a Palen, Koni fornisce la definizione di *predsedatel'* (presidente) innanzitutto attraverso l'iponimo *sud'ja* (giudice) e poi attraverso il termine *storona* (parte) che in questo specifico contesto opera in qualità di antonimo autoriale ad indicare il ruolo imparziale del giudice. Il narratore, di fatto, definisce dapprima giuridicamente il ruolo e la funzione del giudice *super partes*; per chiarire ed enfatizzare ulteriormente il concetto, usa la metafora religiosa della pissi-de-processo che contiene il Santissimo Sacramento-Giustizia e, infine, sempre in maniera figurata, spiega perché tutto vada maneggiato con cura. La parafrasi interpretativa, infatti, in questo caso, serve per spiegare il motivo per cui il giudice non può favorire una parte a discapito

[43] Il presidente è un giudice, non una delle parti e nel presiedere il processo penale tiene tra le sue mani la pisside con il Santissimo Sacramento. Non osa inclinarlo da un lato o dall'altro – altrimenti il Santissimo si riverserebbe a terra …

dell'altra: la giustizia rischierebbe di crollare.
La pressione è altissima e Koni passa la notte tra il 30 e il 31 marzo quasi insonne.
Arriva il processo che il narratore riassume in un lungo monologo ai giurati (sezione III): trascritto in 10 pagine, vi si ricapitolano i fatti, le posizioni delle parti e si chiede ai giurati di affidarsi al "*duch pravdy*" (spirito di verità) che deve permeare tutte le azioni degli uomini che ricoprono il sacro ufficio di giudice (Koni 1989: 347)[44].
Koni è molto stanco, ma sollevato. Pur non potendo prevedere il verdetto, è consapevole che né i giurati, né la società possono tacciare la Corte di aver "giocato alla giustizia" (Koni 1989: 347).
Mentre il giudice attende la decisione dei giurati, abbandonandosi a pensieri e auspici sulla giusta applicazione della procedura giudiziaria, ritiene importante per sé conoscere cosa pensasse del processo il Dipartimento di Cassazione. L'opinione di Michail Evgrafovič Kovalevskij è positiva: "Siete riuscito a combinare un ordine rigoroso con la concessione alle parti dei più ampi diritti, e anche se volessi criticarvi, per amicizia, non ho nulla a cui appellarmi" (Koni 1989: 349).
La campanella del verdetto genera grande agitazione nel pubblico presente del tribunale. Il capogruppo dei giurati non riesce neppure a concludere la sentenza: non è colpevole. La richiesta di silenzio di Koni resta inascoltata. Vera è libera, l'aula si svuota.
Koni torna nel suo ufficio, agitato e confuso. I procuratori non ci sono. In strada c'è il caos. Quando esce dall'edificio, un giovane con alti stivali e un vecchio berretto da medico gli chiede, non riconoscendolo, se fosse stato al processo e se sapesse qualcosa. Koni riferisce dell'assoluzione di Zasulič: braccia forti lo abbracciano con foga, labbra umide e baffi rigidi scivolano sulla sua guancia, poi il berretto prosegue la sua strada (il giovane, per sineddoche, si è trasformato nei suoi attributi). Koni è stremato e l'incendio che divampa vicino al tribunale sembra allegoricamente incarnare il furore della popolazione, e al tempo stesso è presagio dell'inferno professionale che attende Koni e la Russia:

> Когда я возвращался домой, *истомленный тревогами и впечатлениями* этого дня, по улицам с

[44] Per ragioni di spazio e di genere scrittorio non tratteremo in questa sede il discorso di congedo, ma riprenderemo l'analisi dalla sezione IV, quando la giuria si ritira nella sala di consiglio e riprende la narrazione dei fatti.

> грохотом мчались пожарные и *в стороне окружного суда вставало яркое зарево близкого пожара*. За Невою, на Выборгской, горела огромная фабрика, и темно-багровые облака, медленно клубясь, нависали над местностью, где разыгралось дело, возбудившее страсти глубоко и надолго.[45] (Koni1989: 354).

A distanza di quasi una settimana, tra finti complimenti e articoli di giornale calunniosi, Koni si ritrova a colloquio con Palen. Di nuovo. Palen fa presente a Koni che la sua posizione è molto delicata, non è benvisto e lo zar potrebbe richiedere le sue dimissioni.
Koni dapprima risponde freddamente che il giudice non è tenuto a giustificarsi se non in istanze specifiche, per giunta per accuse infondate. Poi, quando gli vengono proposte le dimissioni, tenta di mantenere la calma. Palen non ha alcuna intenzione di discutere con lo zar, di rischiare, di prendersi la responsabilità per le azioni sbagliate altrui. Koni capisce di essere totalmente solo e che anche chi in privato gli aveva assicurato di sostenerlo, in realtà gli ha voltato le spalle. Egli difende le sue parole di congedo ai giurati, difende l'assenza di intromissione nel discorso di Aleksandrov (che non infrangeva alcuna legge), che avrebbero solamente insospettito la giuria. Il giudice fa, perciò, una commovente tirata sulla sua idea di tribunale e di giustizia:

> Общество должно верить в свой суд, должно уважать его деятелей, и оно будет с доверием относиться к его ежедневной, рядовой деятельности, к его приговорам о безвестных Иванах, Егорах, когда по привлекающим общее внимание делам, по делам, волнующим и выходящим из ряда, оно будет видеть, что суд спокоен и действует безмятежно, не утаивая ничего, ничего не изменяя, не прибегая к исключительным способам и приемам. Вера в

[45] Mentre tornavo a casa, *esausto per le ansie e le impressioni* della giornata, i pompieri si precipitavano per le strade con boati e dalla parte del tribunale circondariale si levava il bagliore luminoso di un incendio vicino. Al di là della Neva, su via Vyborgskaja, stava bruciando un'enorme fabbrica e scure nubi scarlatte, che si gonfiavano lentamente, incombevano sull'area in cui si era svolto il processo che aveva suscitato passioni profonde e durature...

> правосудие поддерживается не тысячами ежедневных справедливых приговоров, а редкими случаями, когда можно было опасаться, что суд станет *угодливым, потворствующим, прислуживающимся* – в данном случае он таким не оказался.[46](Koni 1989: 374–375).

Questo estratto dal monologo di Koni che si dipana per sei pagine è reso enfatico dalla combinazione di diverse figure retoriche. Innanzitutto, si notano delle ripetizioni di parole che rientrano nelle tecniche di amplificazione. L'espressione di dovere *dolžno* (deve) è raddoppiata in epanalessi, mentre i termini *po delam* (nei casi) e *ničego* (niente) vengono ripetuti in anadiplosi. I nomi propri Ivan e Egor, usati per antonomasia al fine di indicare ogni possibile uomo russo, fungono anche da elementi deittici che costruiscono l'effetto presenza: dare un nome a un qualsiasi uomo russo concretizza l'individuo. Infine, il numerale *tysjača* (mille) al plurale è chiaramente un'iperbole. A livello contenutistico, invece, il tema della necessità di affrancare la magistratura dalle catene del servilismo – esplicato da Koni con tre sinonimi in gradazione peggiorativa ascendente – nei confronti del potere è ricorrente nel suo discorso: si tratta di una questione che lo turba profondamente e che, nel colloquio con Palen, raggiunge il culmine quando il focus viene spostato nuovamente dal giudice ideale al suo operato specifico. Koni sostiene che il rimprovero di aver infranto la legge è improprio perché lui è un giudice e non un agente del potere che agisce *ad arbitrium*. In ogni processo, lui ricerca la verità e cerca di portarla alla luce, non di insabbiarla. Il giudice si dichiara incorruttibile, affermando di non accettare nessun compromesso; aggiunge che possono licenziarlo, se vogliono, ma lui, da parte sua, non abbandonerà il proprio posto, gesto che paragona ad un suicidio: "Potete uccidermi in

[46] La società deve credere nel proprio tribunale, deve rispettare i suoi figuranti e così si fiderà della sua attività quotidiana e ordinaria, delle sue sentenze sugli sconosciuti Ivan, Sidor e Egor, quando, nei casi che attirano l'attenzione generale, nei casi che agitano e travalicano l'ordinario, vedrà che il tribunale è tranquillo e agisce serenamente, senza nascondere nulla, senza cambiare nulla, senza ricorrere a metodi e tecniche eccezionali. La fiducia nella giustizia non si tiene sulle migliaia di sentenze giuste quotidiane, ma sulle rare occasioni in cui si poteva temere che la corte diventasse *ossequiosa, ruffiana, servile* - in questo caso non è stato così.

senso ufficiale con il più alto comando – lo interruppi – ma è del tutto vano suggerire che io mi suicidi in questo senso" (Koni 1989: 380). Attraverso questo lungo dialogo con Palen e la scelta accurata delle sue parole, Koni si vuole mostrare come un uomo fedele ai propri ideali, alla propria idea di legge, di giustizia, di magistratura. Palen gli chiede provocatoriamente cosa lo trattenga al suo posto e Koni risponde che, oltre all'idea di poter essere utile nel ruolo di giudice, a trattenerlo è il principio giuridico dell'inamovibilità del giudice:

> Но меня удерживает, помимо соображения, что я могу быть полезен на моем месте, еще одно – и удерживает более всего. *На мне должен разрешиться, судя по всему, практически вопрос о несменяемости.* Несменяемость – лучшая гарантия, лучшее украшение судейского звания. Благодаря ей легко переносится и скудное вознаграждение, и тяжкая работа судей. Она поддерживает, она ободряет многих деятелей внутри России; она дает им доверие к своим силам в столкновениях со всякой неправдой… И вы хотите, чтобы эти далекие деятели, живущие только службой, узнали, что председателя первого суда в России, человека, имеющего судебное имя, занимающего кафедру, которого ждет несомненный и быстрый успех в адвокатуре и для которого служба – далеко не исключительное и неизбежное средство существования, – достаточно было попугать несправедливым неудовольствием высших сфер, чтобы он тотчас, добровольно, с готовностью и угодливою поспешностью отказался от лучшего своего права, приобретенного годами труда и забот, – отказался от несменяемости… [47] (Koni 1989: 380).

[47] "Ma mi trattiene, oltre che la considerazione che potrei essere utile al mio posto, ancora un'altra cosa – ed è ciò che mi trattiene di più. A quanto pare, praticamente è sul mio corpo che si deve sciogliere la questione dell'inamovibilità. L'inamovibilità è la migliore garanzia, il miglior ornamento del titolo di giudice. Rende facile sopportare sia il magro compenso che il duro lavoro dei giudici. Sostiene, favorisce molte figure all'interno della Russia; dà loro fiducia nelle proprie forze di fronte a qualsiasi falsità. E voi volete che queste figure lontane, che vivono solo del proprio

In ultimo, Koni si dice disposto a cedere e a rinunciare al suo ruolo, ma solo ad una condizione: "Mi potete garantire che con questo verrà acquistata l'assoluta inviolabilità del processo con giuria? Che questo rimarrà intatto indiscutibilmente?" (Koni 1989: 381). La risposta di Palen, tuttavia, è negativa: il destino della giuria popolare è segnata dalla Controriforma giudiziaria. In seguito a questo dibattito, Koni scrive una lettera a Palen, temendo di essere stato poco incisivo sul suo disaccordo di dare le dimissioni. La lettera viene riportata per intero nel testo e con lei si conclude la sezione IV.

Nella quinta sezione, Koni si allontana da San Pietroburgo. Il giudice caduto in disgrazia racconta dell'astio e delle difficoltà incontrate dopo il caso Zasulič: gli fu persino negato un alloggio e la sua attività di docente di diritto smise di essere benaccetta. Nel gennaio 1879 Kovalevskij riferisce a Koni che il nuovo ministro della giustizia, Nabokov, lo invita a licenziarsi. Koni risponde di aver sopportato una serie di offese e guai, ma che questo invito è ancora più amaro e che sarà lui a decidere quando ritirarsi. Aggiunge inoltre che, se non ci fosse stato il caso Zasulič, probabilmente avrebbe occupato qualche alta carica ministeriale, senza però aver riconosciuto i veri amici né la bassezza umana: egli ha preferito rimanere un servo fedele dei principi al cui servizio era entrato sin dagli anni di università (Koni 1989: 420).

Conclusioni

I *Ricordi* di Koni sono solo in parte la ricostruzione dell'evento storico, tanto che la descrizione del processo giudiziario è, di fatto, assente. Il testo è in realtà il racconto di ciò che il processo a Vera Zasulič ha rappresentato per il giudice più noto dell'Impero Russo e per il sistema giudiziario russo nella sua evoluzione storico-giuridica: un terremoto tanto improvviso quanto prevedibile, che ha lasciato dietro di sé le rovine di un sistema giudiziario ancora troppo giovane e instabile. Il processo a Vera Zasulič diventa così il punto di intersezione tra macro-

servizio, vengano a sapere che il presidente del primo tribunale della Russia, un uomo che ha un nome giudiziario, che occupa una cattedra, da cui ci si aspetta un sicuro e rapido successo come avvocato e per il quale il servizio non è affatto un mezzo di sostentamento esclusivo e inevitabile, è bastato spaventarlo con un ingiusto malcontento delle sfere più alte affinché egli rinunciasse immediatamente, volontariamente, con prontezza e ossequiosa fretta al suo diritto più grande, acquisito con anni di lavoro e di premura, - perché rinunciasse all'inamovibilità".

e microstoria, in cui Koni – nella narrazione che offre – emerge come un uomo integerrimo, pronto a sacrificarsi per i suoi ideali, nel nome di quella giustizia in cui ha sempre creduto e che ha sempre servito con devozione. Il dato interessante dal punto di vista dell'impianto retorico è il continuo intrecciarsi di voci, in dialoghi, monologhi, stralci di lettere, frasi riportate, citazioni. La storia della Russia e del sistema giudiziario russo sembra evolvere nelle conversazioni, nelle discussioni, nelle parole intercorse tra personalità diverse: è come se la storia del paese scaturisse dai colloqui tra i singoli uomini, più o meno influenti. A leggere Koni, sembra che tutta la storia russa, in particolare quella legata al suo processo a Vera Zasulič, sia frutto di continui scontri verbali nei quali lui difende strenuamente il compito sacro e inalienabile del giudice e la giustizia di cui lui si sente devoto servitore ed esecutore. Koni, uno contro tutti, difende sé stesso, il ruolo del giudice, l'istituto della giuria popolare, l'idea di giustizia e, così, la Russia in ognuno dei suoi cittadini.

Concludendo, sottolineiamo anche come la terza sezione dello scritto qui presentato costituisca un materiale di particolare rilevanza per l'approccio della *Law and Literature*, in quanto coniuga i tratti tipici del riassunto giudiziale – inteso come forma di retorica forense – con elementi narrativi riconducibili all'ambito letterario e meriti di essere trattata, perciò, in lavori successivi.

Bibliografia

Lavezzi 2017: Lavezzi, Gianfranca. 2017. *Breve dizionario di retorica e stilistica.* Nuova edizione (Roma: Carocci editore).

Mašinkij 1960: Mašinskij, Semen. 1960. 'O memuarno-avtobiografičeskom žanre', *Voprosy literatury*, VI:129–145.

Mortara Garavelli 2010: Mortara Garavelli, Bice. 2010. *Il parlar figurato. Manualetto di figure retoriche*. (Bari-Roma: Editori Laterza).

Karpilenko 1994: Karpilenko, Jurij. 1994. Delo *Very Zasulič. Rossijskoe obščestvo, samoderžavie i sud prisjažnych v 1878* (Brjansk: Izdatel'stvo Brjanskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogičeskogo instituta).

Koni 1924: Koni, Anatolij. 1924. 'Priemy i zadači prokuratury: (iz vospominanij sudebnogo dejatelja)', https://rusneb.ru/catalog/000199_000009_004824400/ [ultima consultazione 26 novembre 2024], 7.

Koni 1989: Koni, Anatolij. 1989. *Vospominanija o dele Very Zasulič*. Izbrannoe (Moskva: Sovetskaja Rossija), 277–420.

Lotman 1985: Lotman, Jurij. 1985. *Il diritto alla biografia. Il rapporto tipologico fra il testo e la personalità dell'autore*, in Id., *La semiosfera* (Venezia: Marsilio).

Lunačarskij 1927: Lunačarskij, Anatolij. 1927. 'Tri vstreči. Iz vospominanij ob ušedšich', http://lunacharsky.newgod.su/lib/vospominaniya-i-vpechatleniya/tri-vstreci/ [ultima consultazione 26 novembre 2024].

Traversi 2024: Traversi, Alessandro. 2024. *Tecniche argomentative e oratorie*. (Milano: Giuffré).

Smoljarčuk 1984: Smoljarčuk, Vasilij. 1984. *Giganty i čarodei slova. Russkie sudebnye oratory vtoroj poloviny XIX – načala XX veka* (Moskva: Juridičeskaja literatura).

Venturi 1972: Venturi, Franco. 1972. *Dall'andata nel popolo al terrorismo* (Torino: Einaudi).

Vilenskij 1969: Vilenskij, Boris. 1969. *Sudebnaja reforma i Kontrreforma v Rossii* (Saratov: Privolžskoe knižnoe izdatel'stvo).

Vol'f 2002: Vol'f, Elena. 2002. *Funkcional'naja semantika ocenki* (Moskva; Editorial URSS).

Andrijana Kos-Lajtman

Representations of Growing up in Wartime In the Contemporary Croatian Novel

The paper explores the issues of growing up in specific circumstances in Croatia in the first half of the 1990s – significantly those determined by the collapse of Yugoslavia, the war in newly formed Croatia and the neighbouring state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the large number of refugees and exiles from war-torn areas – as the thematic axis of a relevant number of contemporary Croatian novels. The study focuses on five novels: *Underground Barbie* [Sloboština Barbie, 2008] by Maša Kolanović; *The Hotel Tito* [Hotel Zagorje, 2010] by Ivana Simić Bodrožić; *In Late Summer* [U kasno ljeto, 2022] by Magdalena Blažević, *Cabbage Leafing* [Listanje kupusa, 2023] by Igor Beleš; and *The Croat Factory* [Tvornica Hrvata, 2023] by Nebojša Lujanović. These novels were not initially conceived as children's or young adult novels but function as a kind of mediation space between children's literature and adult literature (so-called crossover literature) due to certain characteristics – child protagonists, issues related to growing up, the context of the peer group, the relation between the world of youth and the world of adults, the questioning of associated socio-psychological phenomena (wartime trauma, hatred, violence, exclusion, political and economic transition, gender and class deprivation, etc.). The latter is confirmed by the inclusion of some of them in primary or secondary school lists of required reading (*The Hotel Tito* by Ivana Bodrožić). Through analytical examination of the motifs, themates, and concepts, and worldviews present in the selected novels, we observe the representation of growing up in a collision with the semantic, narrative, linguistic and stylistic aspects of their structure and establish the typology of several different models of growing up in the modern Croatian novel. Special attention is paid to the dimension of autobiographism generated through the relationship of instances of author, narrator, and character, whereby the autobiographical or pseudo-autobiographical nature of all novels is observed as their common structural feature. Also, in all the novels analysed here, war becomes a kind of platform for accelerated maturation and, at the same time, a site of implicit social criticism.

1. The theme of childhood and growing up in the contemporary Croatian novel

It is well known that, of all life periods, childhood is of crucial importance for the entire life of an individual, mainly because of the direct influence of our early experiences on the development of personality in future life periods, on the processes of self-

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-010
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

realisation, and on future accomplishments in intellectual, emotional, and social spheres. This is undoubtedly one of the key reasons why the topic of childhood and growing up is common in literature and other arts, not only in works intended for children but also in works intended for adult recipients. However, it turns out that, in some socio-historical contexts, there is greater than usual interest in dealing with childhood, and this usually applies to precisely those socio-political environments in which childhood is threatened or in some way tested. In the book *A Shock Worker! Rebel? Consumer…* [Udarnik! Buntovnik? Potrošač…, Kolanović 2011], which deals with the relationship between the Croatian novel and popular culture, Maša Kolanović notes that confronting traumatic experiences in childhood is a frequent literary theme in the contemporary novel of post-Socialism, if we situate post-Socialism in the last decade of the twentieth century and the initial decade of the twenty-first century (Kolanović 2011: 27). Similar insights are presented by the literary historian Krešimir Nemec, who concludes that the 1990s in Croatia, marked as they were by war and processes of state independence from the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, had a great influence on Croatian writers, so they often resort to the topic of war and endangered existence, evoking their childhood or youth in literary worlds (Nemec 2003: 412). In other words, autobiographical literature of various types is quite common in contemporary Croatian prose and is produced, naturally, in connection with numerous themes of contemporary life, most often in the form of ominous portents, such as the themes of death, violence, addiction, social inequality, gender identities, transgenerational heritage, and others. Regardless of the specific genre or form in which it is present, it is evident that it serves as a fundamental driving force for much contemporary prose literature, both in Croatia and in other countries in the region.

One of the most important topics in the framework of the problem niche of contemporary reality is undoubtedly the topic of childhood and everything that it implies. Childhood is a common topic in children's and adult literature. We often find it – especially when it comes to questioning different aspects of growing up and maturing – in so-called young adult or teen literature. What seems even more intriguing – which was, at the same time, the key impetus for

this work – is the fact of an evident rise in the topic of childhood precisely in the contemporary Croatian novel not directly intended for children but primarily for adult readers. If we look deeper into the habitus of contemporary Croatian literature created in the new millennium, i.e., in the last 25 years that primarily addresses the adult recipient with its textual and para-textual segments and that is oriented to the topic of growing up, we come to at least 15 high-quality and notable novels, written mostly by renowned authors and published by well-known publishing companies. We list them here in chronological order: *Underground Barbie* [Sloboština Barbie, Kolanović 2001] by Maša Kolanović; *The Hotel Tito* [Hotel Zagorje, Bodrožić 2010] by Ivana Simić Bodrožić; *Farewell, Cowboy* [Adio, kauboju, Savičević Ivančević 2010] by Olja Savičević Ivančević; *Dark Mother Earth* [Črna mati zemla, Novak 2013] by Kristian Novak; *The Memory of the Forest* [Sjećanje šume, Karakaš 2016] by Damir Karakaš; *Anatomy of a Rat* [Anatomija štakora, Vidaić 2019] by Martina Vidaić; *Within Reach* [Nadohvat, Haler 2019] by Ena Katarina Haler; *The Swimmer* [Plivač, Prtenjača 2019] by Ivica Prtenjača; *A Big Deal* [Velika stvar, Gašpar 2020] by Mihaela Gašpar; *My Dowry* [Moja dota, Verde 2021] by Nora Verde; *Sons, Daughters* [Sinovi, kćeri, Bodrožić 2021] by Ivana Bodrožić; *Land Without a Sunset* [Zemlja bez sutona, Andrijašević 2021] by Marija Andrijašević; *In Late Summer* [U kasno ljeto, Blažević 2022] by Magdalena Blažević; *Cabbage Leafing* [Listanje kupusa, Beleš 2023] by Igor Beleš; *The Croat Factory* [Tvornica Hrvata, Lujanović 2023] by Nebojša Lujanović; and *The Innocent* [Nevini, Haler 2024] by Ena Katerina Haler. In most of the novels listed here, the problem of growing up is presented against the background of difficult, often traumatic experiences, such as those determined by war, other forms of the death and suffering of loved ones, or by different types of exclusion (social, emotional, gender) and results in various types of social criticism. Given that the focus of this paper is a more detailed examination of the presentation of wartime childhoods, their models of presentation, and the way they function in the context of the novel, we have focused our research exclusively on novels that explore growing up in the context of war, more precisely, on analysing five contemporary Croatian novels – *Underground Barbie* by Maša Kolanović; *The*

Hotel Tito by Ivana Bodrožić; *In Late Summer* by Magdalena Blažević; *Cabbage Leafing* by Igor Beleš; and *The Croat Factory* by Nebojša Lujanović.

2. Growing up and wartime

If we agree that war is an extremely unfavourable, often dramatic event that negatively affects both society as a whole and its micro-structures (families and individuals), it is clear why war has such a significant impact on a child's mental health and mental life (cf. Ullmann 1997; Kocijan-Hercigonja 1997). In the research article 'Croatian children's literature on war' ['Hrvatska dječja književnosti o ratu', Zima 2001], Dubravka Zima argues that it is possible to distinguish between two dominant narrative patterns in war prose in Croatian children's literature: the first depicts war as a period of maturation and concentrates on the children's experience of war, which is mainly the experience of horror and insecurity that war generates in children's lives, while the second presents war as an adventure relying on the image of war that adults tell children – simplified, schematised, and stylised events (Zima 2001: 84-85). These two approaches, as Zima points out, can be intertwined and even merged (Zima 2001: 84), and the entirety of Croatian children's war prose could be divided into two main thematic circles: prose about World War II and prose about the Croatian War of Independence in the early 1990s, the so-called Homeland War (Zima 2001: 83). Works that are not directly intended for children – although some of them eventually find recipients among such readers – are more complex and diverse due to the greater narrative-semantic complexity of such prose than those for children, and such titles tend to be underresearched. Therefore, this paper intends to examine the semantic and narrative-stylistic features – the so-called semantic and syntactic substructures (cf. Paleš 1999) – of these novels the events of which take place in the context of the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s and the literary discourses of which are not intended for children, but which have a child character at the centre of their novelistic world, with the intention of looking at deeper connections and possible presentation patterns that are established between the notions of war and growing up in a specific wartime context.

3. Representations of war in Croatian novels (for adults) with a child as the main character

3.1. *Underground Barbie* (2008) by Maša Kolanović

The novel *Underground Barbie*, through first-person singular narration from the perspective of an unnamed 12-year-old girl, depicts a childhood in the Zagreb neighbourhood of Sloboština in the early 1990s, at the time of the military aggression against Croatia by the Greater Serbian forces and the support provided to them by the Yugoslav People's Army. Although the socio-historical context presented inevitably points to the wartime situation in 1991, the focus of the narrative world is a group of children of prepubescent age (11–12), at a time when the central part of their children's world consists of playing every day with their Barbie dolls. What is most interesting in this novel and what constitutes its key difference from most other novels about wartime childhoods is that the war, along with the sociopolitical phenomena that accompany it, remains in the background of the novel. At the same time, in the foreground, children and their everyday world are marked by play and typical children's problems. It is also interesting that the game – otherwise a key narrative figure in children's literature from its beginnings – is presented in atypical form: not as a traditional children's game (for example, groups of children playing outdoors), but as a game with Mattel' Barbie dolls, to date the most famous dolls in the world, whose sales flourished in the 1990s (Piche 2009; Rand 1995).[1] The dolls and their relationships created through everyday games of Sloboština children – which, due to air raids, sometimes take place in bomb shelters – also represent the transposed gender and class relations of the actual (Western) world, that is, they function as a kind of simulacrum (Baudrillard 1981) of reality, a kind of media and popcultural representation of the modern consumer world. Barbies and Kens – more precisely, their appearances, clothes, the relationships they make, the jobs they perform and the lifestyles they lead in children's games – function in the novel as a kind of *reality within reality*, as a kind of fictional obstacle course for creating entertain-

[1] In the book *Barbie's Queer Accessories*, Erica Rand says that in 1992, one Barbie doll was sold around the globe every two minutes (Rand 1995: 26-27).

ment and an emotional escape from serious wartime events for the young protagonists, but if we look at the novel's overall narrative-conceptual structure, then it can also be seen as a platform for ironising certain patterns of the capitalist world, i.e., a platform for social criticism. Of course, the latter will be fully visible to the adult reader, which is certainly one of the elements that legitimise Kolanović's novel as a novel for adults, i.e., a work for readers of appropriate social maturity to recognise specific socio-critical impulses, whether realised through humorous or ironic modes. Thus, the irony of the capitalist world's consumerist patterns and the overall focus on material goods and physical pleasures will be visible through the dolls' behaviour during various episodes in children's play with them. For example, when the most beautiful of the Barbies is to decide between two male suitors, she chooses the more attractive and affluent one, while the older and more unsightly suitor – presented in the form of an old, already ruined doll that the children call Dr. Kajfeš – is ridiculed and mocked:

> No wonder Dea's Barbie was disgusted by Kajfeš. After all, could you imagine the life she would lead with a man like that? She would inhabit a dismal valley of tears and suffering, subsisting on an assortment of disability and welfare benefits, whereas with Ana's Ken she could attain the life she had always coveted: heaps of plastic pearls and small items Made in Taiwan, China, Malaysia, or the Philippines, possessions that were an undeniable necessity for a modern women like Barbie. Plus, after the wedding, Ana's Ken had promised Dea's Barbie they would spend their honeymoon in the Bahamas. (Kolanović 2025: 54)

Humour and ease of storytelling, as well as a handful of pop-culture references (starting from music, movies, television series, popular computer games that at the time were beginning their expansion in the lives of children and teenagers all the way to popular fashion brands), jargon language varieties and English lexemes serve as important defining features of this novel, and make it disctinct from other novels that evoke the war period. An important feature of *Underground Barbie* is the fact that not only do adults remain en-

tirely in the background of events, functioning as secondary elements in the children's world (and the world of dolls created in it by children), but also that the complex reality of war generally penetrates the children's world only partially – for example, through the media (their parents listen to television and radio shows, fragments of which reach the children), the situation of the arrival of new pupils, war refugees, in their classes, or the occasional sounds of air-raid sirens. In most cases, these irruptions of the reality of war are also presented from a casual, infantile perspective as the children of Zagreb did not have a real idea of war since the destruction was happening in other Croatian regions. That said, the social changes caused by the change of the ideological-political paradigm (transferring from Socialist Yugoslavia to the democratic, independent Republic of Croatia) are evident at every step and are also noticed by children (cf. Kolanović 2025: 10-11), 12-year-olds in Zagreb can still do what all children of that age do in peacetime – the daily life of socialising, playing, and school. So, for example, the children organise the so-called 'Barbie Refugee Ball' where, along with a number of popular tunes on the repertoire, there are war songs of serious, mostly patriotic, and even combative tones that constantly aired in those days on radio and television stations (Kolanović 2025: 98–108). The city in which the child protagonists live, however, although often subject to air-raid alerts, largely remains beyond the reach of direct military destruction – the war for children in *Underground Barbie,* therefore, remains a relatively remote phenomenon that does not significantly interfere with their daily enjoyment of communal neighbourhood games, especially their favourite, the reality of which is more potent for children than any other, including the war – playing with Barbies. The simulacrum, therefore, has primacy over reality, and the play and enthusiasm it generates prevail over the sad and ugly signs of imminent war.

Although the name of the narrator, who is also the main character, is not explicitly stated – as such, the text does not directly establish the so-called autobiographical contract with the reader proposed by Philippe Lejeune in *Le pacte autobiographique* (Lejeune 1975) – if the details in the story are connected (for example, a last name starting with the letter K, growing up in the neighbourhood of Sloboština, age, etc.) with extra-

textual elements that the reader may (but does not have to) know about the author, we realise that this is (or might be) an autobiographical text. Namely, in the case where the name of the character in the text remains unexplicated, which is the most complex and challenging case when it comes to interpreting the autobiographical basis of the novel (cf. Lejeune, cited in: Milanja 1999: 215), it remains up to the reader's discretion and the information possessed to conclude either a so-called autobiographical contract, or a novelistic agreement, or to leave the interpretation unclear as to its autobiographical basis. In this case, the text will undoubtedly conclude a so-called referential agreement with the reader, which is the second iteration of Lejeune's conception, indicating that an autobiography (like a biography) is definitely a referential text, i.e., speaks of a reality, and as such allows the possibility of a kind of verification, even when its aim is not credibility, but similarity to the truth – it is, therefore, not an 'impression of the real' but 'an image of the real' (Lejeune, cited in: Milanja 1999: 226). Given the interrelationship of the three instances of the subject in the narrative text – the author, the narrator, and the character – which is also the most important criterion for the verification of literary autobiographism, in *Underground Barbie*, there is, therefore, a balance between the so-called pure autobiographies and pseudo-autobiographies (cf. Kos Lajtman 2011: 86–93), precisely because the identity of the author and the narrator is not explicit. Thanks to the extratextual elements (data from the biography of the author of the novel) and also the details mentioned within the text itself, it is more likely, however, that the reader will prefer to view the text as an autobiographical rather than a pseudo-autobiographical novel.

3.2. *The Hotel Tito* (2010) by Ivana Bodrožić[2]

Just like *Underground Barbie,* the novel *The Hotel Tito* is written in the first-person singular, from the perspective of a girl, a witness of the war in Croatia in the early 1990s. Unlike the somewhat older protagonist in *Underground Barbie*, the protag-

[2] At the time of publication of the original in Croatian, the author signed herself as Simić Bodrožić, but later she changed her surname (back) to Bodrožić. This surname is also listed on the English edition of the novel, so we will list it here in an updated form as well.

onist of this novel is still very young; more precisely, she is only nine years old when the war (and the novel) begins and does not understand exactly what is happening – for example, when she and her older brother, together with other children, are sent to the seaside to escape their native city of Vukovar, which is becoming a scene of conflict, the girl is not clear why the adults are crying and why they are upset (cf. Bodrožić 2010: 6).

The events are presented from an infantile, child-like perspective so the reader learns what a child of that age can know and understand.[3] Through the plot development that follows the time spent as a refugee by the protagonist, her brother, and her mother over several years, the girl grows and matures, which also leads to changes in perspective – her insights become more serious, more aware, and critical, i.e., the girl, later a teenager, gradually realises the complexity of the wartime reality, as well as the unenviable position that a refugee's life entails. While her father remained to defend the city, she, along with her mother and brother, changes places of residence, moving from one refugee shelter to another, constantly awaiting action regarding their right to housing, as well as the news of their father, who seems to have been captured and taken to a camp. In such suspense and social uncertainty, years pass: the protagonist finishes elementary school in Kumrovec (staying in Hotel Zagorje, which had been adapted to house refugees), and then secondary school in the Croatian capital Zagreb. At the end of the novel, she is almost a young woman; less than a decade has passed since the beginning of the war, but the traumatic family situation remains open since any relevant information about her missing father is still absent.

In addition to the most important problems that the protagonist faces growing up and which disrupt her existence – the search for her father and the wait for the housing to which her truncated family is entitled –

[3] In the master's thesis *The Child in the Narrative Text: Child Subjectivity in the Context of Narratology and Stylistics* [*Dijete u pripovjednom tekstu: dječja subjektivnost u kontekstu naratologije i stilistike*, Košćak 2004] Nikola Košćak posits that the term *infantile narrator* can also be understood as a hyperonym, which, in addition to the child narrator, can include other narrative situations whose subject can in some aspect be recognised as infantile, including the so-called infantilised narrator in the case of narration where the narrator imitates the behaviour, communication, and speech of a child (Košćak 2004: 6).

during the novel, we follow several other problematic situations common to one's teenage years, such as falling in love, academic achievements, dating, and similar juvenile challenges. It is interesting that the limited child's perspective, clearly visible at the beginning of the novel, later changes not only in terms of the maturation of the protagonist – which is logical and expected – but also, in some places, by producing a real clash when the perspective of the child or teenager intertwines with that of the adult narrator – something which has already been noted in critical literature (Milanko 2010: 9; Brkljačić 2019: 12). Furthermore, as the girl matures and understands more, elements of social criticism become more pronounced – starting from the inefficiency of state institutions, especially those from which the family expects help in the search for their father and in solving their housing issue, through the criticism of the residents of Zagreb and Zagorje who generally have no understanding for the exiled citizens, to the later more subtle criticism of the school system, media, and politicians when the protagonist reaches secondary school age. It is clear, therefore, that war affects her personal life and her resentment of the system (cf. Postnikov 2010). For example, when her older brother sends successive letters to the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia, asking them to help solve the housing issue facing them as war refugees who have also lost their father, the narrator comments with disappointment: 'I wonder whether he's writing this for himself, or Mama, or if he really thinks they're still reading our letters' (Bodrožić 2017: 139).

Although the dominant narration in *The Hotel Tito* is linear, the narrator's voice occasionally returns to the past and sometimes rushes to the future, offering the reader information about future events that the young narrator did not yet have, nor could have, in that moment. For example, information is given about the future death of some acquaintances: 'After a few years, old lady Pundjara came down with cancer and died, so she never lived long enough to go back to Vukovar. They buried her in Zagorje, on the little hill, and she had no family of her own to take back her bones' (Bodrožić 2017: 41).

As in *Underground Barbie*, in this novel, the protagonist and narrator remain unnamed, although based on knowledge of the author's life (her birth and life in Vukovar until the beginning of the war, going into exile

with her mother and brother, searching for her father, etc.), the reader can quickly establish links between the autobiographical reality of the author's life and the novelistic reality. Also, some quite concrete motifs from the world of the novel are consistent with the documentary data from the author's life, including the initials of the main character's name, which is undoubtedly the key element by which the text legitimises its autobiographical nature: 'He had a brother, I., and married wife A. who bore him two sons, J. 1975 and I. 1982. […] That was all that was known about my father, and there I was, the second "son": I. 1982' (Bodrožić 2017: 63).

3.3. *In Late Summer* by Magdalena Blažević

The narrator of *In Late Summer*, Ivana, is a girl from Central Bosnia who faces growing up in wartime and is eventually killed in August 1993 in the massacre of civilian rural population by an enemy military unit. Although there are no precise locations in the novel, nor is the war presented through documentary details, the sentence that stands in the dedication of the novel – 'To the residents of Kiseljak, in memory of 16 August 1993' (Blažević 2025: 5) – allows us to place the plot in central Bosnia, where in August 1993 Bosnian-Muslim military forces committed a massacre against the Croat population in the town of Kiseljak near Žepče. In the first chapter, Ivana's voice leads the reader into a room where a seven-year-old girl (herself) and her doll lie, and explains her feelings for the doll, her family members, her daily habits, and presents a situation in which the girl begins to choke on hard candy. The narrator's voice, however, reveals to the reader the most important information of the novel: 'This isn't the end. It can't be. I've got another seven years of life ahead of me' (Blažević 2025: 12). At the beginning, therefore, the reader receives the information that the girl has only seven years left to live and that the whole introductory chapter can be understood as the voice of the dead Ivana – her spirit, in a way – who recalls her early childhood. The last sentence of the opening chapter reads: 'My name is Ivana. I lived for fourteen summers, and this is the story of my last' (Blažević 2025: 16).
Therefore, the bulk of the novel deals precisely with the last months of 14-year-old Ivana in a rural Bosnian environment. The girl and her cousin Dunja, de-

spite the war that rages around, spend seemingly ordinary youthful days in a modest, scarce rural environment. They carry water from a nearby spring, pick apples in the garden, and ride bikes in the deserted village. The girls live their early teenage days in the shelter of nature, with domestic and wild animals and plants in the garden and in the fields and woods nearby.[4] The narrator pays special attention to the presentation of the state of nature, the slightest changes in the plant world, and an atmosphere of special tenderness that emerges from the overall organic and inorganic world that contextualises the human world with which it seems to be in counterpoint. This 'breathing of nature' is captured in a distinctly lyrical way, with a richness of detail and sensory imagery that brings the novel closer to lyrical prose.

> If you look around you, you'll see that the village was deserted a long time ago. Gates padlocked on both sides of the road. Ivy and tiny rose vines have made their way around the iron railings. The hissing of vipers and adders, and green lizards among the lush weeds in the gardens, sunbaking on the concrete along the houses as if on a hot pebbly beach. Disintegrating ribbons for tying up plants hang from stakes in the gardens. On patios, tables with nailed-down plastic tablecloths are covered in smooth black ink, and buried under leaves and twigs.
>
> Drip, drip, drip, drip…
>
> The roofs of the abandoned houses drip, caved in by rain and snow. The drops drum, tap until the roof tiles move apart; bird nests in the cracks. (Blažević 2025: 23)

However, a change occurs in the life of Ivana and her family – namely, her mother, father, older brother, and grandparents – when, for safety, they are forced to leave their house and move across the Bosna River to another village where their great-aunt lives. Other villagers, along with cattle and domestic animals, leave in a caravan headed by tractors loaded with older women and children. The life that follows is marked by scarcity,

[4] For example, they catch pond terrapins and later release them back into nature.

cramped space, and daily danger. However, despite poor material conditions and uncertainty, the children manage to find joy in small, ordinary things – in pets, the occasional hard caramel, or jumping over a bonfire in the meadow. We can say that the depiction of children and childhood here is more or less in line with the so-called Apollonian image of the child, where the child is presented as an almost entirely innocent and good being, almost angelic (cf. Jenks 2005). Such an essentially archetypal depiction of childhood is suddenly interrupted by an unfortunate event – the incursion of enemy troops into the village and Ivana's murder before her mother and brother's eyes. This murder is depicted stylistically – without concretisation; the war is generally not portrayed in a documentary manner in this novel, but symbolically, in counterpoint to the modesty of the village and the innocence of children. Its key symbol is the anonymous soldier who kills Ivana. The narrator calls him by the symbolic name of Death and points out his youth, the fact that he was almost still a child, establishing a connection with her own brother, who was 16 years old at the moment of the intrusion of the military unit and the cruel murder of civilian residents, including herself, and who is extremely shaken by the tragic end of his sister's life, which he had to witness:

> Spilt blood never cools. My brother was kneeling in a puddle of blood next to me, but not touching me. His hands are shaking as if they've just been lashed by a switch. He tries to lower them to my face. Can stuck eyes be closed? They still shine like marbles turned towards the sun. (Blažević 2025: 113)

Everything in the novel *In Late Summer* is presented in a very refined, poetic style, including the very moment of the death of a 14-year-old girl after an enemy soldier has shot her in the chest:

> I was hit by one spark. Directly in the heart. Mother hears me calling her.
> Mummy! Mummy!
> Softly, like the tenderest of songs. She doesn't know that I'm shouting.
> You'll go deaf from my screams!
> They flood the forest and the fields.
> Can you hear them?

> They're in the flapping of bird wings, in the wind howling through open windows, in the creaking of wood underfoot, in the clanging of metal. (Blažević 2025: 105)

It is as if the gentleness and subtlety of events in nature constantly counteract the callousness and aggressiveness of the human world. We can say that this is a kind of poetic realism through which the concrete space-time of central Bosnia in 1993 transforms into a kind of archetypal temporal space of war in the face of whose cruelty the most fragile and innocent suffer: children and animals. The narrator will thus show in a very moving scene how the soldier who shot Ivana, only a few minutes earlier, in an aggressive raid on their house and yard, throws a box with newly hatched chickens into the air and then tramples each chick individually with his boot:

> The black boot sends the box with the chicks flying into the air, high up, all the way to the roof. Like Dunja and I leaping over the bonfires. Yellow flakes in the air. He stomps on them, one by one. He transforms them into yellow-red star-shaped flowers. (Blažević 2025: 102)

What is, however, the most interesting in this novel and what makes its key difference from other Croatian novels about growing up in wartime is the narrator herself and her narrative position. Namely, Ivana not only narrates until the moment of her death but continues to narrate even after the cruel murder as a kind of omniscient spirit storyteller whose eye sees and knows everything. In other words, when Ivana narrates after death, it is not through the so-called internal focalisation that is derived from the character's vision but rather the so-called 'zero focalisation' (cf. Genette 1980), where the narrator knows more than the character knows or can know. Thus, for example, the dead Ivana will not only know what some of her fellow people are doing but also what they think and see at a particular moment. For example, she knows what her grieving mother saw immediately after her daughter's murder: 'One moment, Mother sees a bit of sky, my brother's sweaty face and closed eyes, and the next everything goes black before her eyes and her body completely gives way' (Blažević 2025: 113).

Unlike the previous novels, here, because of the name that is different from the author's, we do not need to directly relate the main character to the author herself and interpret the novel as autobiographical. However, if we are privy to certain specific information from the author's life, primarily that she grew up in Bosnia in the 1990s in the same part of the country (she was born in Žepče in 1982), the conclusion is that the circumstances and experience of wartime childhood that she acquired then (regardless of the fact that Ivana's fate is not her fate, nor is she Ivana herself) had an immeasurable influence on this novel.

3.4. *Cabbage Leafing* by Igor Beleš

Cabbage Leafing, a novel by Igor Beleš published in 2023, develops the story of five 11-year-olds in Borovo Naselje in 1991. Borovo Naselje is a suburban settlement of Vukovar, a town in eastern Croatia that suffered the most tremendous casualties during the war in Croatia in the early 1990s. During the three-month battle for Vukovar in the autumn of 1991, the most difficult battle in the Homeland War, Vukovar was utterly destroyed, and during the Serbian occupation and after the fall of the city, its population was exiled, killed, or taken to camps. Vukovar is the largest Croatian port on the Danube, and Borovo Naselje is known for the Borovo footwear factory, the largest rubber and footwear company in the former Yugoslavia (cf. Šojat 2019).

The narrator and focaliser of the story is the 11-year-old boy Zoran, who recounts the events that began in the spring of 1991 and ended in autumn of the same year. Zoran lives quite an ordinary childhood like most boys of his age – he socialises with a few of his best friends within their group of children (called the An Gang), loves comics and music, falls in love with a girl named Nikolina, who is also a member of the group, experiences his first kiss, and balances between daily life with his mum, older sister, and his strict stepfather and occasional visits to his father. The plot begins to develop very quickly when the members of the An Gang start to investigate the mystery of the disappearance of children from their classes, as well as their entire families – the children disappear overnight; they simply do not show up at school one day, so Zoran and his team are interested in the cause of this. The novel, therefore, starts as an adventure novel, more precisely, as

a crime novel, with the investigation as the central narrative figure and children in the role of the investigator. In parallel, however, the children notice that increasingly serious changes are taking place in the society around them – adults are increasingly nervous and increasingly begin to emphasise their national origin. Thus, the children suddenly discover that they are Serbs or Croats, or possibly some other third thing, although they did not know anything about it until then, and the concept of nationality is not clear or meaningful to them. When one day a boy who is a member of their group goes missing, they are genuinely concerned and realise that something serious is happening. More precisely, the mysterious disappearances are beginning to be associated with the growing militarisation they see all around them. It does not take long for the war to actually start, which adds to the confusion and chaos in their lives. The children's everyday life, otherwise marked by fun and adventure, increasingly becomes a struggle for bare existence. Some children are sent to exile, those of Serbian origin are sent to Serbia by adults, some fathers go to the battlefield, and Zoran, together with his best friend Bojan, takes a motorboat down the Danube to the Serbian town of Futog in the province of Vojvodina, because that is where Dragan and Goran, two of their Serbian friends from the company, are being sheltered by their parents. The situation, however, is further complicated; the war is brewing, and it is impossible for the boys to return. From there, Beleš's novel definitely ceases to be an adventure novel and grows into a sombre war novel full of elements of thriller and tragedy. In Futog, the boys first stay with Goran's grandmother and then hide in the house of Dragan's grandmother, thanks to the kindness and empathy of the two older women, although many people around them (especially Dragan's father) do not tolerate Croats and are themselves engaged in the fighting for the capture of Vukovar and other Croatian places in Slavonia. Zoran and Bojan live in cramped conditions, are worried about their families in Croatia, and avoid going to public places. Their friend Dragan goes to school, while Goran's parents take him to Germany to protect him from the war. The boys help Dragan's grandmother, Savka, pick cabbage since she was left without the help of the men who went to war. As the war rages more and more, the life of the boys from

Croatia in a small Serbian village becomes more unsafe, and they almost no longer come out of the basement. After the fall of Vukovar and the fierce beatings they received from Dragan's father, Zoran and Bojan flee back to Vukovar in the same boat by which they came. There they find a completely demolished town, almost without civilians, while writing on the houses testify that the occupiers had appropriated them. Of all the family, they find only Zoran's angry and drunk stepfather, who had joined the Serbian army. Only to get rid of them, he helps them escape to their people, across the Vuka River, to the Croatian side, but during the crossing, the boy Bojan is killed by the shots of Croatian soldiers who did not immediately realise that it is "their" children who are coming. At the end of the novel, there is an epilogue with a summary view of the later life of all the members of the An Gang, which, just like their friendship, was never the same again – the war left irreparable consequences on their future, as well as the future of their families.

The novel *Cabbage Leafing* is a gripping novel with a profound humanist and anti-war subtext. On the one hand, the author manages to maintain all the qualities of the child's view – curiosity, naivety, tendency to adventure and interconnection through affinities of values, not social markers such as nationality – while on the other hand, the narrative is very detailed, the reality of war is presented without embellishment, as are the characters and their relationships, both the children's and those of the adults constantly present in the background (Zoran's father, mother, stepfather, Bojan's parents, Nikolina's parents, Goran's parents and grandmother, Dragan's parents and grandmother). Although the main character is called Zoran, not Igor (which is the author's first name), a note about the author on the inside cover of the book confirms that the novel has an autobiographical basis: 'Igor Beleš spent his childhood in Borovo Naselje, in a time which he tried to partially transfer from memory into this book' (Beleš 2023). It becomes clear to the reader even before the reading itself that this is an autobiographical experience that is more or less fictionalised during the construction of the novelistic world.

The titular motif of the cabbage, at the same time the leitmotif of the novel, is a strong symbol and metaphorically represents the fate of a whole generation of children and young adults – those who did not even reach

maturity, and who, just like the cabbage, had their heads cut off, either in the literal or in the conveyed sense of the removal of the right to grow up in normal peacetime circumstances. The narrator reveals the symbolism of cabbage as early as the novel's first sentences.

> Spring is the best time for planting cabbage, and autumn for harvesting and pickling. The end credits of my childhood began to roll in the spring and ended in the fall with the leafing of cabbage. The cabbage is harvested so that its head is cut off from the base of the leaves. We had better luck. (Beleš 2023: 7)

Furthermore, the third part of the novel – the most shocking and tragic one – is entitled 'How green cabbage is made into red cabbage'. In addition to the fact that the boys actually pick cabbage in it, helping Dragan's grandmother and at one point (in order to distract themselves from the shots heard from the outside) pretend that the cabbage leaves are the pages of new issues of their favourite comics, the cabbage motif increasingly appears in a negative context – it is related to the aggression of Dragan's father Radovan who is full of contempt for Croats, including Zoran and Bojan. In situations of anger exacerbated by alcoholism, he shoots cabbage heads, and on the day when Vukovar falls, he beats the boys in a cellar full of cabbage. That is to say, since the boys needed to hide, they were ordered to sleep in the cellar with a mountain of fresh cabbage, along with their improvised beds and a barrel with pickled cabbage. Therefore, the red cabbage from the title alludes to aggression, blood, tribulation, and suffering as key semantic fixtures of the novel's third part. The culmination of suffering, and at the same time the entire complex structure, is the final part of the novel in which two best friends try to return to their native Borovo, but one of them does not succeed. In the scene of Bojan's murder, the reader experiences a profound anti-cathartic effect generated from a strong sense of absurdity as an essential ingredient of (every) war and further strengthened by the fact that members of the An Gang remained uninfected by the madness of war. Moreover, they represent a kind of antipode to a number of frenzied adults.

It is important to note that the novel is not subject to the black-and-white depiction of children and adults – children are thus

not idealised or portrayed in the form of the so-called Apollonian child, a being full of natural goodness and clarity of vision (cf. Jenks 2005). On the contrary, children are initially confused by what is happening; they do not cope with the new circumstances and are oriented to their leisure, while, on the other hand, not all adults succumb to the fantasies of wartime circumstances, which manifest themselves in the form of nationalist ideologies. Among the adults, there are some who manage to preserve common sense in wartime circumstances on both sides of the war (Dragan's grandmother and mother, Goran's parents, Zoran's mother, etc.), just as among there children, there are those who, in the context of war, take on the adults' hatred of other ethnicities (children from Dragan's class). The world of children and the world of adults, therefore, are only partially different – by means of a detailed depiction of children's everyday life in peacetime and in times of war, as well as a convincing outline of psychemic narrative figures (cf. Peleš 1999), the novel points to the general differences between children and adults that are based on children's lack of work, love of adventure, and the need to maintain close friendships (while these characteristics are lacking among adults). However, it also does not idealise children, i.e., it shows that transformative takeovers of ethically problematic attitudes and behaviours coming from adults are indeed possible. The depiction of children in Beleš's novel thus departs from the dichotomous Jenks' model, i.e., it does not result in either the Apollonian or Dionysian image of the child but rather establishes a model which Karen Smith calls 'the Athenian child' which rests on the child's abilities and power of action and is realised through responsibility and reflexivity (Smith 2012: 24).

3.5. *The Croat Factory* by Nebojša Lujanović

In Lujanović's novel *The Croat Factory* (Lujanović 2023), the narrative is also derived from the vision of the child character, the protagonist of the events. He is an unnamed 12-year-old boy who, in the first half of the 1990s, together with his mother, grandfather, and younger sister, took refuge from the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in neighbouring Croatia. They found accommodation in their uncle's modest and unsightly apartment in Zagreb, where their uncle often came for unannounced visits, supervision,

and control. The boy's family lives in poor material conditions, and worry and nervousness mainly affect the mother, who feels responsible for the other members, while the father remains in Bosnia, neglecting the family relationships. Therefore, the head of the family is the mother, and the greatest burden of the new situation falls on her shoulders. Not wanting to suffer such scarcity any longer, she decides to take matters into her own hands – starting *The Croat Factory* (the titular motif of the novel), which is, of course, an ironic-parodic naming introduced by the narrator who, through the prism of humour, but also unequivocal social criticism, is directed at the burgeoning fascination with the issues of national identity in the former Yugoslavia during the war and post-war years. Namely, the boy's mother, with the help of secret connections, begins to supply illegal identity documents to the refugees who had been arriving en masse from Bosnia for years, without which they would not be able to secure registration, housing, and other benefits in Croatia. Such documents can be costly, so the boy's family no longer suffers material deprivation.

Although the narrator also touches on those everyday situations in children's lives that happen more or less to all children in the world, such as friendships, first love, and school problems, the boy's family context is still in the foreground in unusual circumstances. This novel differs from the novels discussed above in that it gives a prominent role to the characters of adults, primarily the boy's mother and grandfather. Also, the novel skilfully combines different tonal and stylistic procedures – serious and humorous tones, elements of tragedy and comedy, dramatic effects and the grotesque, confirming that it primarily counts on a mature, experienced reader who will be able to recognise and understand them, as well as the impulses of social criticism that emerge from such a heterogeneous generic and stylistic assemblage by pointing lucidly to various social anomalies (from the attitude of society towards refugees to nationalist worldviews). When the boy presents his family situation, he does it casually and with humour but without embellishment. For example, the grandfather who does not get out of bed for days is described as follows:

> He lies in bed, he winks only when we feed him, when mother changes

> him, it's probably his way of saying "thanks", and then he turns off what little he has. It's like turning off the TV. She didn't leave us with him anymore. When we leave him alone, I think he jumps on his feet, plays folk songs, and dances around the house. Alone, as if doing a circle dance. And I think he does it every time. And in between, he constantly complains about us not taking him to Bosnia and about the country that doesn't end the war (Lujanović 2023: 148).

Although at first, it seems that the boy is not capable of coping with the new circumstances in which he finds himself, he meticulously absorbs everything that is happening around him, primarily the behaviour of his family members but also numerous other people he encounters (from the unknown people who come to their apartment for documents and temporary accommodation to the neighbours) and actually grows up quickly. He is a bright boy with a developed social intelligence who, like an antenna, catches almost all the signals that the new reality sends – he notices the fear and loneliness of his younger sister, his mother's nervousness and inner breakdown, his grandfather's gradual abandonment of life, his uncle's egocentricity, the manipulative gestures with which some adults address his mother, pressed by personal distress. The boy is more intelligent and knowledgeable than his surroundings think; he is a voice of reason in a distorted reality. His inner voice is received by the reader with approval, even a kind of admiration.

> I think to myself. Fuck you, uncle. You and everyone else. I will write on my forehead that I am twelve years old. What's wrong with them all? I am only required to know when the school assignment is due and how many stickers I still need for my Cro Army or Animal Kingdom albums. And that's it. (Lujanović 2023: 154)

Lujanović's child-narrator is, therefore, much closer to the idea of an active, capable child who acts as best as he knows in the context of demanding circumstances (the Athenian child), rather than the idea of an ideal, absolutely innocent and passive child (the Apollonian child).

However, the peculiarity of Lujanović's text is primarily in the greater proportion of humorous-grotesque and satirical tones in a book dealing with war topics compared to any of the previously mentioned novels. Moreover, the reader gets the impression that it is precisely thanks to a hefty dose of humour and irony that the boy grows up quickly into a conscious and mature young person and preserves emotional stability in a disturbed family and social context. Furthermore, thanks to the comic-grotesque register in some situations (e.g., naming his mother's activities 'the Croat factory'), the social milieu of the 1990s in former Yugoslavia, obsessed as it is with issues of national affiliation and divisions into *ours* and *theirs*, is parodically denounced.

Although himself a child with refugee experience in Croatia during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lujanović does not name his main character, so the issue of the autobiographical contract remains open to the reader. In order to answer the question of whether this is an autobiographical novel or not, we should, therefore, know the actual context of the author's life, but this fact, of course, is not crucial for experiencing and interpreting this somewhat atypical war novel.

4. Conclusion: modalities of growing up in wartime in the contemporary Croatian novel and their position of mediation in the literary field

It is evident that the problem of wartime childhood and growing up, otherwise a frequent topic in children's literature, is increasingly echoed in literature intended for adult recipients. In contemporary Croatian novel production framework, several such novels have been published in the last two decades, where there has been a noticeable increase in the war problem – more precisely, its reflection on a child's life – in the last few years.[5] Analysing five contemporary novels published by renowned publishers in Croatia from 2008 to 2023, one can observe two key modalities in the depiction of wartime childhoods. The first refers to the

[5] In addition to the novels analysed here, the reference to war is also present in Kristian Novak's novel *Dark Mother Earth* (Novak 2013) and Ena Katarina Haler's novel *The Innocent* (Haler 2024). Given, however, that in the former novel the war is still conceived as something yet to come, while the latter deals with the post-war situation, these novels were not included in this analysis.

novels that depict wartime childhood incorporated into the context of violence and pain, while the second modality implies the depiction of war only as a background, i.e., a secondary factor in growing up.

Furthermore, while the second modality is confirmed by only one novel – *Underground Barbie* by Kolanović, the first is much more common. Most authors, therefore, are inclined to such a depiction of war that deeply penetrates all pores of the young protagonist's life without hesitating to shed light on even the most challenging and tragic events, experiences, and traumas. Some of them portray the young protagonist as a direct physical victim of the circumstances of war – such as the novels *In Late Summer* by Magdalena Blažević or *Cabbage Leafing* by Igor Beleš (we could call them the first type within the first modality) – while others portray the young protagonist as an indirect victim of war, focusing not so much on the direct physical consequences as on the psychological and social changes that the war brought to their lives and the lives of their families. We could call these the second type within the first modality, exemplified by the novels *The Hotel Tito* by Ivana Bodrožić and *The Croat Factory* by Nebojša Lujanović.

The most important common feature of all the novels analysed here is the first-person singular narration, the voice of the narrator who himself/herself participated in the action or, more precisely, was a participant in the space-time of war. Therefore, the point of view in all the novels analysed belongs to the main character, the girl or the boy, with only occasional minimal deviation from such a focal position. Interestingly, in all the novels analysed, the main protagonists are children between 11 and 14 years old, either prepubertal or early pubertal. Although to the adults who share the daily wartime life with the child, and perhaps at first to the readers as well, the child-narrator seems to be an unreliable witness, with the development of the novel, the reader realises that the child sees and understands more than the adults around them think. It is also important to note that it is precisely during their childhood that the authors of all the novels presented have experienced war. It is clear, then, that the autobiographical experience was the main driver for shaping the fictional novelistic discourse, regardless of the extent to which that experience was ultimately

upgraded or modified. All the novels, therefore, can be seen as autobiographical, i.e., pseudo-autobiographical novels – the latter, especially, in cases where the name of the character differs from the name of the author (two novels are such, while in the remaining three novels the character is not explicitly named).

If we look at the genre and narrative-stylistic structure of these discourses, it is noticeable that they often exhibit a hybrid nature and that it is mostly impossible to put them under a unique genre or poetic procedure. *In Late Summer* thus has the characteristics of poetic prose; *The Hotel Tito* uses simple, unpretentious language to represent the daily life of exiles; *Cabbage Leafing* is at first adventure-oriented, then turns into a dark and tragic thriller, almost a horror; *Underground Barbie* lucidly plays with elements of pop culture by using children's play as a simulacrum of reality, while *The Croat Factory* is a satirical-grotesque depiction of the social climate of the 1990s. If we ask ourselves about the key difference between the usual war novels aimed at children and these novels about growing up in times of war, i.e., whether the boundary between a novel for children and a novel for adults can be precisely defined, it seems that the answer lies precisely in the sphere of poetics, more precisely, in the sphere of narrative-stylistic design. In fact, it is precisely those novels that are more complex in their narrative-stylistic profile – such as, for example, *The Croat Factory* or *In Late Summer* – that can hardly be said entirely within reach of a child reader in terms of experience and cognition and thus interpretation. Socio-critical tones are most intensively generated from such complex genre-stylistic procedures, especially those that penetrate the ironic-satirical-grotesque expression modalities, and they are certainly not fully accessible to the (too) young reader.

On the other hand, novels based on the simplicity of utterance, children's everyday life, play, or adventure, such as *The Hotel Tito* and *Underground Barbie*, and, partially, *Cabbage Leafing*, can undoubtedly find readers among children, i.e., the teenage audience. The latter is undoubtedly confirmed by the inclusion of the novels *Tho Hotel Tito* and *Underground Barbie* to the extended (recommended) list of required reading under the national Croatian Language Curriculum [Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Hrvatski jezik za osnovne škole i gimnazije, 2019].

These novels (and it is possible to assume that the same can be applied to other works with the topic of growing up and the child as a narrator which do not necessarily deal with the war context) function as mediators of sorts between children's literature, literature for young adults, and literature for adults, i.e., as spaces of intergenerational reception interference. In other words, they serve as examples of the type of literature that erases age limits, which modern literary theory often calls 'crossover literature' (cf. Beckett 2008, Falconer 2008).

Bibliography

Baudrillard 1981: Baudrillard, Jean. 1981. *Simulacres et Simulation* (Paris: Galilée).

Beckett 2008: Beckett, Sandra L. 2008. *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge).

Beleš 2023: Beleš, Igor. 2023. *Listanje kupusa* (Zagreb: Hena Com).

Blažević 2022: Blažević, Magdalena. 2022. *U kasno ljeto* (Zagreb: Fraktura).

Blažević 2025:——. 2025. *In Late Summer*, trans. Anđelka Raguž (London: Linden Editions).

Bodrožić 2010: Bodrožić, Ivana. 2010. *Hotel Zagorje* (Zagreb: Profil).

Bodrožić 2017:——. 2017. *The Hotel Tito*, trans. Ellen Elias-Bursać (London: Seven Stories Press Limited).

Brkljačić 2019: Brljačić, Andreja. 2019. *Infantilno pripovijedanje i dječja trauma u romanima Hotel Zagorje, Sloboština Barbie i Črna mati zemla.* Master's thesis. (Zagreb: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences).

Croatian Language Curriculum. 2019: Croatian Language Curriculum. [Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Hrvatski jezik za osnovne škole i gimnazije] <https://www.zakon.hr/c/podzakonski-propis/38707/nn-10-2019-%2829.1.2019.%29%2C-odluka-o-donosenju-kurikuluma-za-nastavni-predmet-hrvatski-jezik-za-osnovne-skole-i-gimnazije-u> [accessed 11 March 2025].

Falconer 2008: Falconer, Rachel. 2008. *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership* (New York: Routledge).

Genette 1980: Genette, Gerard. 1988. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press).

Jenks 2005: Jenks, Chris. 2005. *Childhood* (London: Routledge).

Kocijan-Hercigonja 1997: Kocijan-Hercigonja, Dubravka 1997. 'Children in War: Experiences from Croatia' in *Childhood and Truma. Separation, Abuse, War*, trans. by Mary Heaney Margreiter and Kira Henschel (Brookfield, USA: Ashgate Publishing Ltd), 157–72.

Kolanović 2008: Kolanović, Maša. 2008. *Sloboština Barbie* (Zagreb: V. B. Z.).

Kolanović 2011:—— . 2011. *Udarnik! Buntovnik? Potrošač...* (Zagreb: Ljevak).

Kolanović 2025: _____——. 2026. *Underground Barbie*, trans. Ena Selimović (Zagreb: Sandorf Passage).

Kos Lajtman 2011: Kos Lajtman, Andrijana. 2011. *Autobiografski diskurs djetinjstva* (Zagreb: Ljevak).

Košćak 2004: Košćak, Nikola. 2004. *Dijete u pripovjednom tekstu: dječja subjektivnost u kontekstu naratologije i stilistike.* Master's thesis. (Zagreb: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences).

Lejeune 1999: Lejeune, Philippe. 1999. 'Autobiografski sporazum' in *Autor, pripovjedač, lik*, ed. by Cvjetko Milanja (Osijek: Theoria Nova), 201–36.

Lujanović 2023: Lujanović, Nebojša. 2023. *Tvornica Hrvata* (Zagreb: V. B. Z.).

Milanko 2010: Milanko, Andrea. 2010. 'Sretno ispisivanje traume', *Vijenac*, XVIII (432): 9.

Nemec 2003: Nemec, Krešimir. 2003. *Povijest hrvatskog romana: od 1945. do 2000. godine* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga).

Novak 2013: Novak, Kristian. 2013. *Črna mati zemla* (Zagreb: Algoritam).

Peleš 1999: Peleš, Gajo. 1999. *Tumačenje romana* (Zagreb: Ar-Tresor).

Piche 2009: Piche, Briana. 2009. 'The Intentions Behind the Creation of Barbie', *Constructing the Past*, 10 (1), 6–13.

Postnikov 2010: Postnikov, Boris. 2010. 'Generacijsko preispitivanje devedesetih', *Quorum*. 26 (5/6), 398–402.

Rand 1995: Rand, Erica. 1995. *Barbie's Queer Accessories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

Smith 2012: Smith, Karen. 2012. 'Producing governable subjects: Images of childhood old and new', *Childhood*, 19 (1), 24–37.

Šojat 2019: Šojat, Lada. 2019. 'Borovo d. o. o.' *Portal hrvatske tehničke baštine <https://tehnika.lzmk.hr/borovo-d-d/>* [accessed 15 March 2025].

Ullmann 1997: Ulmann, Elisabeth. 1997. 'Childhood Dreams Lost. War-Traumatized Children in Rwanda' in *Childhood and Truma. Separation, Abuse, War*, trans. by Mary Heaney Margreiter and Kira Henschel (Brookfield, USA: Ashgate Publishing Ltd), 176–83.

Zima 2001: Zima, Dubravka. 2001. ‘Hrvatska dječja književnosti o ratu’, *Polemos*, 4, 81–122.

Danijela Lugarić Vukas

Remembering the (Post)War in Svetlana Alexievich and Ludmila Ulitskaya

This article examines two non-fictional texts composed from the privately communicated memories of historical witnesses to present an ethnography of Soviet childhood during the Second World War and the early post-war year: Svetlana Alexievich's *Last Witnesses. An Oral History of Children in World War* (1985) and Ludmila Ulitskaya's *Childhood 45–53. And Tomorrow There Will Be Happiness* (2013). How do these texts 'stage' post-war memories, given that they both draw on the sensation of dislocation generated by temporal chasms in the process of recreating the childhood memories of now-adult survivors? How do these texts establish a connection between the remembered experience and the process of remembering, particularly considering the epistemic split that arises not only between a child and an adult witness, but also between a child and his or her family members as they mediate the traumatic war experience? Finally, how do narrated memories forge a link between the remembered child and the remembering adult?

1. Introduction

In the post-Soviet Russia of the 2010s, a decade characterized by a deep crisis of symbolic order (Kukulin 2018), cultural and ideological disputes have often been transformed into battles over individual memory within the overarching politics of history. In this context, it is noteworthy that, for several consecutive years, novels exploring the Soviet past became a significant literary trend (Mikhail Shishkin, *The Light and the Dark* [Pis'movnik, 2010]); Sergei Lebedev, *Oblivion* [Predel zabveniia, 2011]), some even receiving prestigious literary awards (e.g., Zakhar Prilepin's *Abode* [Obitel'] in 2014, Guzel' Iakhina's *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* [Zuleikha otkryvaet glaza] in 2015, Evgenii Vodolazkin's *The Aviator* [Aviator] in 2016, and Maria Stepanova's *In Memory of Memory* [Pamiati pamiati] in 2017). Novels from the 2010s thematically centred around the Soviet past contain discrepancies in how they reflect on this historical legacy on levels that go beyond the surface content, reaching the temporal structures of narrative. Be it through staging and reflecting the workings of memory through the transformation of letters into an epistolary novel (*The Light and the Dark*), to cre-

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-011
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

ate mythopoetic circular time; or in the form of a diary (*The Aviator*) that creates an illusion of co-presence of past and present times; or through 'magical historicism' (Alexander Etkind), in which the traumatic past is depicted through grotesque 'time out of joint', such as in Lebedev's *Oblivion*—in all these cases, the authors choose to make use, but also sense, of the Soviet past through multi-temporal levels where past, present, and future intermingle in complex and occasionally provocative ways.

At the most basic level, the rich temporal cartography of contemporary Russian and Russophone prose writing verifies the basic narratological convention that every story, in order to be narrated, requires a temporal framework. At the same time, temporal cartography may also be considered an anthropological-cultural category that archives and traces broad political and cultural splits within post-Soviet Russian society—by making time 'speak our language,' i.e., humanizing it by giving it a linguistic form (Kermode 1968: 44–45)—splits that are marked by a disruption, an elimination, or at least by a relocation of the relations between the past and the future, perhaps best exemplified by the perplexing temporal pseudo-projection 'forward to the dark past' (the slogan of the 'monstrations' in Novosibirsk in 2013, organized by Artem Loskutov). The widespread popularity of literary reworkings of the violent Soviet past in Russian and Russophone literature throughout the 2010s echoes both the 'obsession with the past' (Etkind 2013: 5) and what Aleida Assmann has termed 'the future eclipse' (Assmann 2020: 5).[1] This paradigmatic shift of fo-

[1] A deteriorating sense of progress and growth, closely related to the aporias of historical knowledge, transcends the boundaries of post-Soviet Russia: this is a crucial aspect of global Western (or, at least, European) culture. Jean-Luc Nancy discusses the feeling of existing 'beyond history' and of the 'suspension of history', where narrative fiction represents a way of reclaiming history as 'becoming and happening and […] as sense, direction, and Idea' (Nancy 1994: 155). Frank Kermode asserts that, following the Second World War, 'we no longer inhabit a world with a historical tick that will undoubtedly culminate in a definitive tock' (Kermode 1968: 64). In her analysis of time, Aleida Assmann repeatedly argues that 'the future no longer serves as the Eldorado of our hopes and dreams, while at the same time any heady talk about progress has begun to sound more and more hollow' (Assmann 2020: 4). These days, it is hard to disagree with her assertion that 'the future is no longer much of a motivator in the arenas of politics, society, and the environment' (Assmann 2020: 3–4): our expectations for the future have become 'extremely modest' (Ass-

cus from 'the "shrinking" future to the "expanding" past' (Lorenz 2014: 51) not only testifies to changes in the envisioning of possible futures, but also deterritorializes images of the past. In Chris Lorenz's words, '[a]s the future lost its promise of progress, the past lost its fixed place at a safe distance from the present and its character as an object' (Lorenz 2014: 57). In my research (Lugarić Vukas 2023a; Lugarić Vukas 2023b; Lugarić Vukas 2023c; Lugarić Vukas 2025), I explore a number of contemporary prose writings, written in Russian and published during the 2010s, focusing on their temporal foundations while considering them methodologically in terms both of local contingencies and global flows of knowledge production in memory studies.[2] My aim is to reflect on the insights gained from examining the specific commemoration strategies used

mann 2020: 4) because today 'we no longer automatically assume that change means change *for the better*' (Assmann 2020: 4).

[2] In 'Time and Space in the Long Twentieth Century,' Chris Lorenz offers a three-part periodization of memory studies: first, the foundational period, identified with the work of Maurice Halbwachs on collective memory; then the memory-boom period, associated with Pierre Nora's 'sites of memory;' and, finally, the present-day period of transnational, transcultural, and multidirectional memory, identified with the work of Michael Rothberg, Ann Rigney, Astrid Erll, Daniel Levy, Nathaniel Sznaider, and Aleida and Jan Assmann (Lorenz 2020: 31–49). The last, contemporary phase of development is both a temporal and spatial turn in the sense that it is marked by a fundamental break with notions 'of container space and container time' (Lorenz 2020: 31). Contemporary memory scholars often emphasize that memory is a traveling concept in 'relatively open multiscalar spaces and in multidirectional times—and thus cannot unambiguously be located in one space or in one time, nor connected to one fixed identity' (Lorenz 2020: 31–32). While approaching prose texts in this article through the lens of temporality, I am, of course, aware of the inseparability of spatial and temporal features of narrative (Mikhail Bakhtin's *chronotope*), but I purposely focus on time because I am interested in probing the idea of its multidirectionality in the context of the post-Soviet Russian and Russophone novel of the 2010s, i.e., how time is framed within the experience of the collapse of future perspectives. In Lorenz's words, '[m]ultidirectional time implies a pluralization of times because the past, present, and future are no longer conceived of as chronological, that is as sequential and as discrete points on a straight line. Rather, past, present, and future are conceived as a three-dimensional complex of intersecting, non-linear timelines, that according to Bruno Latour can better be visualized as a plate full of spaghetti than as the modern arrow of time' (Lorenz 2020: 44). To that end, I approach narrative fiction in this analysis as a discourse 'in which the objective and subjective dimensions of time can find their most unified treatments' (Currie 2007: 76).

in post-Soviet Russia of the 2010s, often referred to in existing scholarship as 'warped mourning' (Etkind 2013) and 'after memory' (Schwartz et al. 2021: 1–20).

2. Remembering Childhood, or Why Time Matters?

In this article, I will examine two narratives derived from the privately communicated memories of wartime witnesses, which can be viewed as ethnographies of Soviet childhood during the Second World War and the early post-war years: Svetlana Alexievich's *Last Witnesses. An Oral History of Children in World War* [Poslednie svideteli. Solo dlia detskogo golosa], first published in 1985 but significantly altered for later editions and presently part of a five-volume collection titled *Voices of Utopia* [Golosa utopii, 2013][3] and Ludmila Ulitskaya's *Childhood 45–53. And Tomorrow There Will Be Happiness* [Detstvo 45–53. A zavtra budet schast'e, 2013].[4] Alexievich's book is a collection of memories pertaining to the Second World War as told by witnesses who were children at the time of the war. Sergei Oushakine (2008) has noted that Alexievich's book aligns with similar works that explore topics such as children of war, children in war, and children and war. This includes the novels *Son of the Regiment* [Syn Polka, 1944] by Valentin Kataev and *Ivan* (1957) by Vladimir Bogomolov, as well as Soviet films such as *The Fate of Man* [Sud'ba cheloveka, 1959] by Sergei Bondarchuk (based on Mikhail Sholokhov's short story), *Ivan's Childhood* [Ivanovo detstvo, 1962] by Andrei Tarkovskii, and *Come and See* [Idi i smotri, 1985] by Elem Klimov. The polyphonic structure of testimonies in *Last Witnesses* emphasizes—as suggested by the subtitle in Russian, 'A solo for a child's voice'—that discussing collective trauma in the context of the Second World War is problematic because 'everyone searches for words for his own tragedy independently' (Oushakine 2008), thereby rejecting—already at a conceptual level— the possibility of reifying individual memory within an official and collective politics of commemoration. Ulitskaya's book, published in 2013, consists of letters sent at the invitation of the publishing house AST, in which Russian citizens were asked to recount their memories about the period circumscribed by two symbolically loaded

[3] See Oushakine 2008.

[4] All translations from Ulitskaya's *Childhood 45–53* are my own, D.L.V..

chronological boundaries: 9 May 1945 (the date of the Great Victory in the Second World War) and 5 March 1953 (the date of Joseph Stalin's death). Both events were emotional peaks in Soviet Russian society, provoking a range of sentiments from the unmatched joyfulness of 1945 to the complexity of trauma caused by Stalin's death, and manifested in a broad spectrum of emotions: from deep sadness to—in the words of Dmitrii Prigov—'mourning enthusiasm' (cf. in Paperno 2009: 50).[5] The title of Ulitskaya's book, *And Tomorrow There Will Be Happiness,* suggests that the immediate postwar period was characterized by an optimistic belief in the 'bright future' (*svetloe budushchee*) to come. Social and political life was dominated by an all-pervasive enthusiasm for vitally rebuilding the new on the ruins of the old. Given this widespread orientation toward the bright future, it was considered particularly inappropriate at the time to discuss the totalitarian aspects of the Soviet regime. The fact that the AST publishing house selected Ulitskaya as the author and editor of roughly 150 letters divided into 18 thematic units is not surprising: the themes of familial ties, heritage, childhood, and memory often serve as the backbone of her literary works, and this book is also a logical extension of her overarching artistic style, both in its use of documentary material (*Daniel Stein, Interpreter* [Daniel' Shtain, perevodchik, 2006], *The Green Tent* [Zelënii shatër, 2010], *Jacob's Ladder* [Lestnitsa Iakova, 2015]), and in terms of its thematic content.[6]

According to Marina Balina, 'in the 1990s and 2000s, autobiographic life-writing became the territory of intense negotiations between private and historical experiences. Debates about Soviet history supported by the opening of the state archives and resulting in the accessibility of public as well as personal documents, triggered a process of re-conceptualization of private experience into a *historical event*' (Balina 2014: 185; emphasis in original). Within this cultural-historical context, the collections of testimonies (in Alex-

[5] The amount of tears shed after the news of Stalin's death was frequently an indicator of social demarcation between the community of 'our own' and that of 'the others' (Paperno 2009: 27).

[6] The fact that individuals of diverse backgrounds and ages responded to the AST publishing house's invitation unambiguously indicates that the Second World War (or 'Great Patriotic War') belongs to cross-generational collective memory in present-day Russia.

ievich's book) and letters (in Ulitskaya's book) can be read as narratives that historicize the image of a child by fostering broad-minded thinking about childhood in an epistemic transition between reflecting on the past and facing the future, where childhood is not simply a period in one's life but 'a fundamental element in the artistic representation of the construction of the self' (Criveller et al. 2020: 5). Given that both works draw on the sensation of dislocation generated by temporal chasms in the process of recreating childhood memories of now-adult survivors, they are fruitful examples of creative ways, 'quasi-fictive' and 'in-between' (Emerson 2011: 276)[7] to textually stage the memory of (post)war times as it relates to the evolving self.[8]

According to Henry Jenkins, the prevailing myth of childhood innocence in contemporary culture '"empties" the child of its own political agency and demands nothing—except, perhaps, its own innocence' (Jenkins 1998: 1–2). These images of 'normal' childhood, argues Chris Jenks, 'transcend both time and culture' (quoted in Ahlbeck et al. 2018: 1), a conception of childhood innocence which presumes that 'children exist in a space beyond, above, outside the political' (Jenkins 1998: 2). Moreover, '[t]he innocent child is caught somewhere over the rainbow—between nostalgia and utopian optimism, between the past and the future' (Jenkins 1998: 5). For my assessment of the temporal cartography of contemporary prose writing, it is important to note that childhood in the books

[7] Drawing from Lidiia Ginzburg's *On Psychological Prose*, Emerson reminds us that 'human documents,' such as diaries, confessions, memoirs, and working notebooks, are 'quasi-fictive' and 'in-between' forms of textuality because they are 'not autonomous from life' (Emerson 2011: 276). Ginzburg's analysis, which is also applicable to my understanding of the letters in Ulitskaya's book and the testimonies in Alexievich's, similarly argues that these texts require 'self-distancing [*samootstranenie*] that permitted unprecedented access to the self while formalizing, and thus containing, the resultant pain and vulnerability' (276; emphasis in original).

[8] In this research, 'self' is understood as an 'umbrella term under which more specific understandings of who one is can be subsumed', thus leading to 'a number of corresponding concepts, especially "personality", "I", "authenticity", and "autonomy"' (Quante et al. 2019: 390). Correspondences notwithstanding, however, in this article 'self' corresponds to the narrative account, thus highlighting the idea 'that a person's self is constituted by the stories we tell about who a person is' (Quante et al. 2019: 390).

of Alexievich and Ulitskaya is decidedly not outside of time, insofar as the temporal dimension of the narrated histories is already present in the books' titles.[9] At the same time, these two works show that childhood is subject to the same historical shifts and institutional forces that shape adult human experiences of war and of post-war periods, as also suggest that an essentially temporal notion of change or development is a key metaphor that renders accessible and intelligible not only historical times, but also individual childhoods (Jenks 1996: 36).

Therefore, despite frequent claims about lost childhood,[10] both books are packed with numerous examples showing that the notion of a development does not simply represent a 'natural,' innate process. For Alexievich's interlocutors and the authors of the letters in Ulitskaya's book, development is achieved by narrative references to a socially and culturally constructed sense of change over time, which proves, on one hand, that 'the child's "becoming" is dependent upon the reference points or normative structures made conventional within the adults' world' (Jenks 1996: 40), and, on the other hand, that temporal coordinates are deployed to configure and structure these dynamic developments. Cases in point include this testimony from *Last Witness*: 'Before the war I liked it when Papa told us fairy tales. He knew many fairy tales and told them well. After the war I no longer wanted to read fairy tales …' (Alexievich 2019: 126); or: 'During the war we played the game of "war". When we were tired of playing "Whites and Reds" or "Chapaev", we played "Russians and Germans". We fought. Took prisoners. Shot them. Put on soldiers' helmets, our own and German ones.

[9] Moreover, Ulitskaya's opening words, 'We remember together…' [Vspominaem vmeste…], draw attention to the mysterious and cryptic nature of time, bestowing an overarching philosophical tone on the book: 'Neither history nor geography have a moral dimension. Human beings bring it into play. Sometimes we speak of "violent times". But all times are violent in their own way. They are interesting in their own way. Time shapes certain human characteristics, but what defines the character of a particular era? That is an unsolvable question!' (Ulitskaya 2013: 5).

[10] 'I grew up without mama … I've never remembered myself as a child …' (Alexievich 2019: 94); 'I'm a man without a childhood. Instead of a childhood, I have the war' (Alexievich 2019: 67); 'Were we really children? By the age of ten or eleven, we were men and women …' (Alexievich 2019: 496).

Helmets were scattered everywhere—in the woods, in the fields. Nobody wanted to be a German, we even squabbled over it. We played in actual dugouts and trenches. We fought with sticks, or in hand-to-hand combat. Our mothers scolded us … That surprised us, because earlier … before the war … they didn't scold us for this …' (Alexievich 2019: 86–87). In these examples, temporal markers such as 'before,' 'after' and 'during,' as well as the use of past tense, illustrate that the narrated event has a perplexing chronological structure in which one time (that of narration) resides inside another (that of an event recalled). To be more specific, temporal markers, including tenses and indexical allusions to time, express dynamic and ever-varying connections that link the time of the utterance to the time of the event that is being addressed. In this sense, temporal markers do not merely locate remembered events within chronological time. Rather, they produce the narrative continuity through which fragmented recollections become autobiographical memory.

By refusing to conceptualize past events through a stillness of time, the witnesses in Alexievich's and Ulitskaya's works simultaneously reject the presentation of childhood as a perspectiveless period in one's life, despite war and post-war conditions. They also decisively challenge the conventional assumption that childhood memories are necessarily happy, as all of them draw attention to a temporal fissure articulated through the antonymic adverbs 'before' and 'after,' which shape the overall tone of these testimonies. Moreover, the embeddedness, fixedness and rootedness of narrated events in various representations of time – found in almost all other testimonies and letters ('by the age of ten or eleven,' 'before the war … after the war…,' 'earlier,' 'just about,' 'decades have passed,' etc.) clearly signify that images of the past are for the most part constructed rather than simply retrieved from memory. This shows as Mark Currie has claimed by building on Martin Heidegger's notions of time [*Zeit*] and temporality [*Zeitlichkeit*], that 'time is not something which exists in the world and is then reflected in the human mind, but rather something which arises from human being [*Dasein*] and is then projected onto the world' (Currie 2007: 51–52). Although it is possible to claim that the arbitrariness and conventional nature of the tem-

poral structures of narrative reduce the authenticity of stories narrated, it is also possible to resolve this dispute in the following manner: 'the temporal self-distance of retrospect is a lie which reveals the truth, and this renders the truth a matter of temporality rather than simple presence' (Currie 2007: 64). Reclaiming one's past requires playing with or weighing the variability of temporal experience and other sources of temporal judgements such as temporal schemata and landmark events (Rubin 1995: 153) so that the time of an event recalled corresponds to its place, its location in a commonly shared calendar,[11] in socially patterned time periods[12] and idiosyncratic reference points,[13] all of which have specific purposes, some of which I have already addressed, while others will be addressed in the remainder of this analysis.

The importance of these temporal markers extends beyond the mere dating of remembered events because they also provide the narrative framework through which fragmented childhood experiences are integrated into autobiographical memory. According to Robyn Fivush and Katherine Nelson, 'children begin to develop the idea of a continuous self, a self that exists through time' (Fivush et al. 2004: 575) from a specific age (approximately age four, when they begin to develop a temporal sense of self). Statements about time are therefore crucial for understanding both how now-adult survivors reflect on experiences of temporal dislocation, and how they forge a link between the remembered child self and the remembering adult self. To that end, I propose that these temporal frameworks organize early fragmentary and episodic memories into autobiographical ones, while also mak-

[11] For instance, by mentioning the exact day, month, or a year: 'First candies' ('Pervie konfeti'): 'It was in 1946. I mention this date because it makes it easier to understand why I tasted my first piece of candy so late: I was born shortly before the war with the fascists, and during the war, there were no candies…' (Ulitskaya 2013: 84).

[12] 'I remember winter, cold winter. In winter our grandfather was killed' (Alexievich 2019: 254).

[13] 'I'll tell you about the smell … How war smells … Before the war I finished sixth grade. At school the rule was that beginning from the fourth grade there were final exams. And so we passed the last exam. It was June, and the months of May and June in 1941 were cold. Lilacs usually blossom sometime in May, but that year they blossomed in mid-June. The beginning of the war is always associated in my mind with the smell of lilacs. And of bird cherry. For me these trees always smell of war…' (Alexievich 2019: 28–29).

ing possible the phenomenon known in memory studies as telescoping.

This distinction is crucial because very young children possess episodic, rather than autobiographical memory (Nelson 1993: 8). Consequently, many of the earliest memories recorded in both books appear as isolated fragments rather than coherent life narratives. For instance, 'Everything gets stamped in a child's memory like in a photo album. As separate snapshots…' (Alexievich 2019: 235); 'Does a three-year-old child remember anything? I'll tell you … I remember three or four images very clearly' (Alexievich 2019: 399); 'If something has stayed in my memory, it's like a big family photograph' (Alexievich 2019: 457). While Alexievich's interlocutors frequently make statements that express their own epistemic self-doubt (hypothesized in Freud's concept of 'childhood amnesia,' which refers to adults' incapacity to recall events that happened before the ages of three or four, with the first two years of life suggesting 'a developing ability to recall events, but as yet no sense of a self remembering a specific point in the past, or a past memory being related to current conceptions of self in a continuous self-narrative' [Fivush et al. 2004: 574]), numerous testimonials in both books also offer proofs that, to quote Fivush and Nelson, 'there is a "barrier" that needs to be overcome, and that once this barrier is crossed, autobiographical memories are possible' (Fivush et al. 2004: 573). I propose that passing through this barrier is made possible by temporal settings, thus proving that time and mind are not independent entities, but that an account of time-consciousness, in the words of Mark Currie, becomes 'a mode of self-consciousness' (Currie 2007: 13). The testimony titled 'In the cemetery the dead lay above ground… As if they'd been killed again…' is particularly telling in this regard. It begins with the hesitant words of Vania Titov, who was five at the beginning of the war: 'As I remember it… I remember separate glimpses…' (Alexievich 2019: 85), but proceeds with more self-reliance when the narrator supersedes the individual 'I' with the collective 'we.' 'There was a bombardment,' he writes, 'and we hid in the garden behind the old apple trees. All five of us. I had four brothers, the oldest one was ten' (Alexievich 2019: 86); 'When the German soldiers came to our cottage, we hid on the stove. Under some old rags. We lay with our eyes closed. From fear'

(Alexievich 2019: 86), and so on. This example demonstrates that episodic memories become autobiographical not simply because they are recalled, but because they are narratively embedded within temporal and familial frameworks. This is especially true when an episodic recollection of war narrated from the perspective of the singular 'I' ('I remember separate glimpses') intersects with the experiences of other family members, so that the embeddedness of a narrative 'I' within the family story enables the narrative self to be framed by it. At the same time, the act of redirecting attention to tell-tale marks of temporal continuity between personal life stories and those of the community (his/her family) facilitates a belief in the continuity of identity. Thus, episodic memory assists in creating a structured life narrative (Fivush et al. 2004: 574) by reinforcing the idea that the present self can establish direct contact with the childhood self of the past. On the one hand, this continuity is enabled by the social framework of memory – to recall Maurice Halbwachs, although it is an individual who remembers, one always does so within the context of the group to which one belongs, making remembrance itself a culturally and socially variable activity (Halbwachs 1992). On the other hand, it is reinforced by psychological factors, most notably familiarity. As claimed by Douglas Hermann, one remembers things more clearly when the degree of familiarity is high (Hermann 1993). It is thus not surprising that one of Alexievich's interlocutors attests that: 'I wanted to remember the spot, but how could I remember it if everything around me was unfamiliar?' (Alexievich 2019: 200–01). The aforementioned testimony, 'In the cemetery the dead lay above ground … As if they'd been killed again…,' wherein the transformation of 'I' into 'we' enables the chaining of an episodic memory to a coherent narrative, proves that the emergence of autobiographical memory necessitates different ways both of ordering time, including the ordering of the sequence of time within the event recalled, and then of attaching the narrated event to a specific time in the past. The employment of temporal framings not only enables the creation of a personal past, but also authorizes the continuity between the remembered child and the remembering adult, assuring witnesses that the present self genuinely belongs to the narrated past. For many of Alexievich's and Ulitskaya's interlocutors,

this is of utmost importance on the most basic, existential level since, as numerous testimonies confirm, many forgot their own names and surnames during the war, which, for them, then became 'evidence of a failed life, a sign of the absence of some fundamental, original point of reference' (Oushakine 2008).

Within this imperative to construct a continuous self, namely, a self that exists through time, that has a beginning and a direction, it is possible to describe the telescoping phenomenon in which estimates of dates are moved from the actual date of events toward the present so that time seems compressed, as if viewed through a telescope (Rubin 1995: 131). In the works analysed here, the phenomenon of telescoping is often present in memories of childhood and found in sentences packed with ellipses or rhetorical questions, suggesting the inability of witnesses to accurately frame the time and duration of recalled experience, such as: 'This horror is still lodged in my memory…' (Alexievich 2019: 117); 'Sometimes it's very vivid… It all comes back to me…' (Alexievich 2019: 122); or 'Decades have passed, and I'm still wondering: am I alive?!' (Alexievich 2019: 228). A more complex example of telescoping can be found in the letter entitled 'On Marusia' [Pro Marusiu] in Ulitskaya's book, in which the witness regrets her behaviour towards a poor classmate who lost both of her parents in the war and ultimately finishes her letter with a 'telescopic' conclusion narrated in the present tense: 'Marusia, you can't hear me, but my whole life you stand before my eyes with your pigtails, your dress… You have probably experienced a lot of grief, poverty and humiliation in your adult life. Do you remember me and, if you do, have you forgiven me? I'm sorry, Marusia' (Ulitskaya 2013: 259). Although throughout Alexievich's and Ulitskaya's books internal referentiality is performed through various forms to emphasize 'the communicative conditionality of memories' (Jan Assmann in Schaser 2019: 344), in this example it is performed through telescoping to an absent yet paradoxically present 'you' (indicated by an abrupt switch from past to present tense), thus bridging the temporal chasms between the past and the present and creating a space to articulate an ethical relation to the other in the present, while indicating that the mirror constituted by someone else's eyes (whether 'yours' or 'ours') is a prerequisite for constructing and producing a narrative 'I.' In

terms of Bakhtin's philosophical accounts of dialogism, this process can be characterized as 'not me looking out on the world with my own eyes… [but] out of my eyes, someone else's eyes gaze forth' (cf. Emerson 2011: 277), illustrating that autobiographical memory 'depends not only on an awareness of self in the past, but also on an awareness of others with whom one has shared the past' (Fivush et al. 2004: 575). Through these interpersonal and polyphonic acts of commemoration, memory becomes a site of opportunity for mourning, rather than something that atomizes both the individual and the collective in the triumphalist narrative surrounding the Second World War that still prevails in post-Soviet Russia. These varieties of memory work can create empathy and go beyond hegemonic 'history-making' policies by supporting non-canonical and non-hegemonic forms of cultural imagination as well as new forms of knowledge that are ethically and socially engaged.

3. Conclusion

The micro-histories of the Second World War presented both in Alexievich's *Last Witnesses* and Ulitskaya's *Childhood 45–53* are filtered through a child's sensibility, demonstrating that children do not live in a space and time that is beyond, above, or outside the political. Temporal indices confirm that textualization and narrativization are the only ways to access the material reality of the past, even though the presented testimonies and letters initially appear to be largely unmediated recollections of past experience. It is widely acknowledged that nothing seems more essential to (auto)biography than time, but in the analysis of children's memories of the past, time assumes even greater importance because temporal ordering makes autobiographical memory narratively possible. Without such ordering children would likely remain silent witnesses of the past, 'inherently bifurcated and fragmented' (Oushakine 2008). Children become authentic witnesses when the rhythm and direction of their war and post-war experiences are structured, viewed through a temporal lens, and temporally ordered. Following Heather D. DeHaan (DeHaan 2025), these narratives may be seen as examples of chronopolitics, insofar as the authenticity of any given witness is not an inherent built-in quality, but rather produced through a set of cultural (in this case time-related) conventions, while the

temporality of a narrated event becomes 'a kind of spiralling movement in which the fictional representation of time and the lived experience of time constantly modify each other' (Currie 2007: 94).

This paper was written within the framework of the Croatian Science Foundation project The Documentary Turn in Post-1989 European Literatures (DOCTURN, IP-2025-02-7801).

Bibliography

Ahlbeck et al. 2018: Ahlbeck, Jutta, Lappalainen, Päivi, Launis, Kati and Kirsi Tuohela (eds). 2018. *Childhood, Literature and Science. Fragile Subjects* (London, New York: Routledge).

Alexievich 2019: Alexievich, Svetlana. 2019. *Last Witnesses: An Oral History of the Children of World War II* (New York: Penguin Random House).

Assmann 2020: Assmann, Aleida. 2020. *Is Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

Balina 2014: Balina, Marina. 2014. 'Opyt detstva kak preodolenie proshlogo v sovremennoi autobiograficheskoi proze', *AvtobiografiЯ*, 3: 185–213.

Criveller et al. 2020: Criveller, Claudia and Andrea Gullotta. 2020. 'Introduction', *AvtobiografiЯ*, 9: 5–7.

Currie 2007: Currie, Mark. 2007. *About Time. Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).

DeHaan 2025: DeHaan, Heather. 2025. 'Chronopolitics: Restoring "Backward" Spaces to Modern Time in Soviet Baku after WWII', in *Time and Material Culture. Rethinking Soviet Temporalities*, ed. by Deschepper, Julie, Kalashnikov, Antony and Federica Rossi (London, New York: Routledge), 15–35.

Emerson 2011: Emerson, Caryl. 2011. 'Russian Critical Theory', in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, ed. by Dobrenko, Evgeny and Marina Balina (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press), 269–88.

Etkind 2013: Etkind, Alexander. 2013. *Warped Mourning. Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

Fivush et al. 2004: Fivush, Robyn and Katherine Nelson. 2004. 'Culture and Language in the Emergence of Autobiographical Memory', *Psychological Science*, 15(9): 573–77.

Halbwachs 1992: Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. 'The Social Frameworks of Memory', in *On Collective Memory* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), 35–189.

Herrmann 1993: Herrmann, Douglas J. 1993. 'The Validity of Retrospective Reports as a Function of the Directness of Retrieval Processes',

in *Autobiographical Memory and the Validity of Retrospective Report*, ed. by Schwarz, Norbert and Seymour Sudman (New York, Berlin: Springer-Verlag), 21–37.

Jenkins 1998: Jenkins, Henry. 1998. 'Introduction: Childhood Innocence and Other Modern Myths', in *The Children's Culture Reader*, ed. by Henry Jenkins (New York, London: New York University Press), 1–37.

Jenks 1996: Jenks, Chris. 1996. *Childhood* (London, New York: Routledge).

Kermode 1968: Kermode, Frank. 1968. *The Sense of an Ending. Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press).

Kukulin 2018: Kukulin, Ilya. 2018. 'Cultural Shifts in Russia since 2010: Messianic Cynicism and Paradigms of Artistic Resistance', *Russian Literature*, 96–98: 221–54.

Lorenz 2014: Lorenz, Chris. 2014. 'Blurred Lines. History, Memory and the Experience of Time', *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity*, 2(1): 43–63.

Lorenz 2020: Lorenz, Chris. 2020. 'Time and Space in the Long Twentieth Century', in *A Cultural History of Memory in the Long Twentieth Century*, v. 6, ed. by Stefan Berger and Bill Niven (Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Publishing), 31–49.

Lugarić Vukas 2023a: Vukas, Danijela Lugarić. 2023a. 'Op'ianenie sovetskim proshlym v sovremennom russkom romane: ot restavratsii do refleksii, ot total'nosti do ruin', *Zbornik Matice Srpske za slavistiku*, 103: 215–29.

Lugarić Vukas 2023b: Vukas, Danijela Lugarić. 2023b. 'Pamiat' i zabvenie v sovremennoi russkoi proze (Polina Barskova, Evgenii Vodolazkin, Maria Stepanova)', *Russian literature*, 140: 1–31.

Lugarić Vukas 2023c: Vukas, Danijela Lugarić. 2023c. 'Literatura i/ili mistifikatsiia? "Golosa Utopii" Svetlany Aleksievich: politika pamiati/poetika dokumenta', in *Mistifikatsiia v slavianskoi kul'ture: poetika i praktiki*, ed. by Poliakov, Dmitrii and Natalia Zlidneva (Moscow: Institut slavianovedeniia RAN), 101–28.

Lugarić Vukas 2025: Vukas, Danijela Lugarić. 2025. 'Transformatsiia semeinoi istorii: (post)memorial'naia vremennost' v "Pamiati pamiati" Marii Stepanovoi', *Slavistična revija*, 73: 33–46.

Nancy 1994: Nancy, Jean-Luc. 1994. 'Finite History', in *The States of 'Theory'. History, Art, and Critical Discourse*, ed. by David Carroll (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 149–72.

Nelson 1993: Nelson, Katherine. 1993. 'The Psychological and Social Origins of Autobiographical Memory', *Psychological Science,* 1(1): 7–14.

Oushakine 2008: Oushakine, Sergei. 2008. 'Oskolki voennoi pamiati: "Vsë, chto ostalos' ot takogo uzhasa?"', *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 5. https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2008/5/oskolki-voennoj-pamyati-vse-chto-ostalos-ot-takogo-uzhasa.html [accessed 9 January 2025].

Quante et al. 2019: Quante, Michael and Michael Kühler. 2019. 'The "Self"', in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. by Wagner-Egelhaaf, Martina (Boston, Berlin: De Gruyter), 390–97.

Paperno 2009: Paperno, Irina. 2009. *Stories of the Soviet Experience. Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press).

Rubin 1995: Rubin, David C. 1995. 'Introduction', in *Remembering Our Past. Studies in Autobiographical Memory*, ed. by David C. Rubin (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press), 1–15.

Schaser 2019: Schaser, Angelika. 2019. 'Memory', in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. by Wagner-Egelhaaf, Martina (Boston, Berlin: De Gruyter), 342–49.

Schwartz et al. 2021: Schwartz, Matthias, Weller, Nina, and Heike Winkel. 'After Memory: Introduction', in *After Memory. World War II in Contemporary Eastern European Literatures*, ed. by Schwartz, Matthias, Weller Nina, and Heike Winkel (Boston, Berlin: De Gruyter), 1–20.

Ulitskaya 2013: Ulitskaya, Ludmila. 2013. *Detstvo 45-53: a zavtra budet schast'e* (Moscow: AST).

Polina Popova

Biographical Canon in the Soviet Children's Literature of the 1930s: On the History of Formation

The article analyzes the history of the formation and development of the Soviet children's literature's biographical canon. This study traces the roots of Soviet biographical tradition to its origins in revolutionary eulogies, which were respectively rooted in the ancient traditions of life writing and Christian hagiographies of the saints. Many Bolshevik Party Leaders, like Vladimir Lenin and Sergei Kirov, had multiple books written about their childhood times; Stalin, however, stood as a unique exception: despite the flourishing of political biographies for children in the 1930s, Stalin's early life was kept out of public cultural discourse. This paper investigates the reasons for creating a biographical canon within children's literature, arguing that Stalin was the only exception to the rule. The article addresses the pedagogical approach that dominated these life-writing narratives, discusses the style of political biographies written for children, and analyses the creation of a new heroic pantheon for the upcoming Soviet generation.

'... there has never been a biography that would satisfy the most stringent requirements of scholarship.'
Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Kuehn 2001: 17).

Introduction

On February 16, 1938, in a letter to literary critic and editor of the *Detizdat TsKVLKSM* Kirill Andreev, Joseph Stalin wrote: 'I am decidedly against publishing the *Tales about Stalin's Childhood*. The book contains masses of factual untruths, misrepresentations, exaggerations, and undeserved glorifications."[1] In that same letter, Stalin recommended 'burning the book,' even though he admitted that he felt sorry for the author.[2] The actual name of that never-to-be-published book's author was not mentioned by Stalin, but it is widely known that it was Vera Smirnova, a children's writer

[1] The original text is the following: 'Я решительно против издания «Рассказов о детстве Сталина». Книжка изобилует массой фактических неверностей, искажений, преувеличений, незаслуженных восхвалений...' (RGASPI 1938: 57, 58).

[2] The original text is the following: 'Жаль автора, но факт остается фактом. ... Советую сжечь книжку' (RGASPI 1938: 57, 58).

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-012
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

and later the author of a biographical novel about one of the Bolshevik Party leaders, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, *Comrade Sergo* [Tovarishch Sergo, 1939]. No traces of that manuscript can be found in any of the archives.[3]

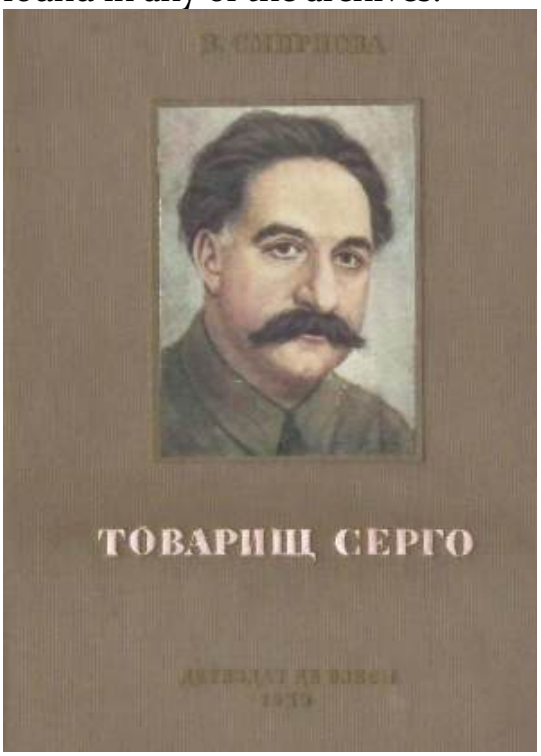


Fig. 1. A Cover of Vera Smirnova's Comrade Sergo.

In a series of interviews that were conducted in Moscow in 2019 for the purpose of gaining better understanding of childhood and school in the Soviet Union of the late-1930s and early-to-mid-1940s, one of the respondents (male, born in 1938) told a story about his childhood games with the neighborhood children in 1943: children were playing a military game of 'Reds vs. Germans,' and one of the older boys proposed to impersonate Stalin. 'At the time, even us, 5-6 years old children, knew that it had to stop. Suddenly, we were all silent, went away, and the game ended there.' The respondent explained it in the following way: 'We read books about Chapaev, Kotovskii, and Kirov, looking at these men as role models, and we often impersonated them when playing military games. But Stalin was off limits: he was a God. Everyone knew that.' [4] So why was Stalin a sacrosanct figure to the extent that he could not be a part of such impersonation games?

Why was there no published biography of Stalin for children or book about his childhood years for children? This question cannot be answered without thoroughly investigating the biographical canon in Soviet children's literature, its development, and maturation

[3] Neither in Smirnova's personal archive at the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, nor in Stalin's personal archive, nor in the *Komsomol* archive.

[4] A book about Kirov's early years, *The Boy from Urzhum* [Mal'chik iz Urzhuma, 1936] was, according to the respondent, his and many of his peers' most beloved children's book. Iurii Tsapenko, an interview conducted by Polina Popova (Moscow, July 1, 2019).

throughout the pivotal years of its formation in the 1920s-1930s. Stalin was an anomaly: all revolutionaries, Party leaders, and 'great people of the past,' except him, had their biographies published, and many of those were written in a didactic manner specifically for children. The article argues that the erasure of Stalin's childhood from Soviet children's literature of the interwar period was a deliberate political strategy controlled by Stalin himself. Thus, everyone had a childhood except Stalin. Lenin, who died in 1924, certainly did. His public image played a significant role in the children's literature of the 1920s. Historian Nina Tumarkin wrote: 'The absence of the living Lenin had encouraged the beginning of his cult' (Tumarkin 1997: 130-31). But it was as much his physical absence as it was the efforts of the Party to maintain the hard-earned political stability in the country and the authority that, many believed, Lenin had provided. By contrast, in the 1930s, with the emergence of socialist realism in literature and in other art forms, Stalin's public image was added to the Soviet political pantheon. Literary scholar Katerina Clark argued that the socialist realist novel in general rested on 'canonical exemplars' which were collected and affirmed after the 1934 First Writer's Union Congress (Clark 2000: xii, 27). Clark wrote: 'Biographies have commonly been a medium of political legitimization. In ancient Rome, emperors often had their biographies rewritten to demonstrate their genealogical links with the gods. In the Soviet context, the corresponding privileged origin was an association with Lenin' (Clark 2000: 122). However, Stalin shaped his own public persona, and hence it was always the exception, never the rule.

Historian Karen Petrone explored the topic of Stalin's unique place in Soviet culture of the 1930s and concluded that he held the position of a caring yet strict father of the Soviet family: because the patriarchal social order was discursively reestablished in the beginning of the 1930s, the father (Stalin) had to always discursively situate himself above the Soviet 'family' (Petrone 2000: 56). This was exactly why Stalin did not fit into the children's biographical framework: he carefully curated his image, not allowing any scrupulous investigation into the nature of his childhood and early years, which were the traditional source of tales about virtuous political and historical

heroes. Some historians claim that Stalin's resistance to his own biographies was due to the fact that he didn't want to encourage his cult of personality (Roberts 2020: 27-28). Others insist that he was careful about curating the story of how his personality was formed (Kotkin 2014: 735). However, both sides agree that Stalin was in control of his life's narrative and extremely keen to prohibit any publications about his childhood, especially those written for children.[5] Such strict control could be partially explained by the flourishing of children's literature in the early 1930s: during these years, it saw unprecedented attention and economic investment, yet it was still not fully controlled from above.[6] In such an atmosphere of relative freedom, a biographical subject was not in control of the facts of their biography anymore – an unthinkable scenario for such an authoritarian leader as Stalin. Writing about his childhood would inevitably make him equal to other heroes of the Revolution, undermining the uniqueness of his position of being nothing but 'a small man placed in extraordinary circumstances' (Suny 2020: 4).

The Soviet Biographical Tradition and its place within Literature for Children

The Soviet biographical tradition in adult literature arose from the literary traditions of obituary.[7] The auto/biographical discourse of the early revolutionary obituaries was rooted in the idea of service for the greater good (of the state). For the first time, this discourse of martyrdom for the sake of the revolu-

[5] Historian Geoffrey Roberts wrote about Stalin that his life was 'one long performance in which he played many different parts,' often using 'an element of performance' in presenting his own persona to the public. But at the same time, as Roberts argued, 'Stalin was too intelligent and self-aware to believe the panegyrics of his own personality cult' (Roberts 2020: 4, 16).

[6] Literary scholars and historians of children's literature are divided in thinking of Soviet children's literature in terms of it being a 'safe space' for writers – an idea first introduced by Marietta Chudakova and later supported by Igor' Kondakov. Nowadays, such an idea is supported by the Canadian literary scholar Megan Swift. While Russian-French historian of children's literature Svetlana Maslinskaia believes the opposite to be true – that Soviet children's literature, even during the years of political purges, in the 1930s, was never a stale shelter for the writers, but rather a space for innovative works and continuation of the pre-revolutionary tradition.

[7] For more on the Soviet obituary traditions see Clark 2000 and Brooks 1991.

tion (and future communist state) was shaped in Lenin's 1910 obituary of Ivan Babushkin, published in the *Rabochaia gazeta*. This obituary was in fact a first short political biography. According to the historian of children's literature Marina Balina, this obituary's literary structure laid the ground for the establishment of the genre in general – it had all the components: the 'hero' entered a revolutionary struggle, which was presented as a second birth, and then he perished fighting (Balina 2002: 245). Historian Marina Mogilner in her book about the mythologized biographical and autobiographical writings of the radical activists argued that those revolutionaries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries transformed history into myths, while literary myth-making became their form of self-reflection: for revolutionary intellectuals, the ideal literary reality, thus, became a normative one (Mogil'ner 1999: 8, 22). Socialist revolutionaries, like, for example, Vera Zasulich, remembered and described the famous Nechaev case in literary terms, not as lived reality (Mogil'ner 1999: 26). This was not the only case: one that is more closely related to this study is that of the young revolutionary Soso Dzhugashvilli who reinvented himself against the backdrop of Georgia's end-of-the-century traditional patriarchal society (Suny 2020: 70-71). Stalin's self-mythologizing is confirmed by another scholar, Mikhail Vaiskopf, who argued that Stalinism inherited the radical leftist mythic-epic tradition from revolutionary Bolshevism (Vaiskopf 2001: 167).

Thus, for Lenin's 1910 obituary of Babushkin, the facts of Babushkin's biography are only important as a matter of potential political agitation and a didactic story, and not for nostalgic or personal reasons. Everything personal is omitted in the biography, while only the facts that are useful for creating the image of a perfect fighter are left. For example, Lenin called Babushkin 'a people's hero' [*narodnii geroi*] and referred to him as a 'shock worker' [*rabochii-peredovik*]. Although this was an honorary title, it was also one that generalized a person's life (Lenin 1910: 4). Yet, for egalitarian purposes, any revolutionary fighter had to have a human personality. This was precisely why small and seemingly non-important details known only to the relatives mattered. The humanizing effect of childhood was used to great effect in the new Soviet children's literature, which presented a distinctly new temporality of

childhood. Childhood recollections by family members who could remember and/or reconstruct the early years of a revolutionary hero were central to creating stories for the new Soviet generation (born after the revolution of 1917). This humanization went alongside the presentation of the protagonist as a hero. As a result, on the one hand, the child protagonist appeared human; on the other hand, he or she could appear as a hero worth emulating. These literary schemes would later be used for the biographies of the famous Bolshevik leaders: this was the case of the book about Iakov Sverdlov's life written by his second wife, Klavdiia Sverdlova. Similarly, Ordzhonikidze's wife, Zinaida Ordzhonikidze, or Kuibyshev's sister, Elena Kuibysheva, wrote children's books about their relatives' heroic paths within this particular framework. As a rule, relatives and people who were previously close to the late famous political actors, became the narrators of their life stories. Closeness to a revolutionary guaranteed that the story was perceived to be truthful. Such an approach created a peculiar dichotomy within the narrative: the documentary element was guaranteed by detailed knowledge of the heroes' childhood; yet as children's literature any such text required an entertaining moment, thus inviting a number of fictional elements into the narrative.

Revolutionary Biographies and Its Place within Russian Literary Tradition

The Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin wrote about ancient autobiographical novels, arguing that they were based on 'a new type of biographical time and a human image constructed to new specifications, that of an individual who passes through the course of a whole life' (Bakhtin 1981: 130). Bakhtin paid special attention to Plutarch's biographies (c. AD 40-120) as the 'energetic' type of biographical writing where 'the full existence, the essence of a man is realized not by his condition, but by his activity' (Bakhtin 1981: 140-41). An ideal of the new realism of both public and private was reflected in Plutarch's biographies of Alexander the Great, Diogenes, and others. Thus, modern European biography is rooted in both individualism and rationality (Valevskii 1993: 28, 45). The first quarter of the nineteenth century was the time when the format of Plutarch's biographical writings was actively adapted into the Russian literary canon

and dominated the historical narrative.[8] 'The Plutarchs' came into the space of children's literature in an unusual way by providing the name for the whole genre. The first historical writings aimed at children appeared in Nikolai Ivanovich Novikov's *Detskoe chtenie dlia serdtsa i razuma* [Children's Reading for Heart and Mind, 1785-1789] (Balina 2020: 184). Nikolai Novikov (1744-1818) and other writers had a long-standing commitment 'to assimilating the classical heritage,' which strongly influenced early Soviet children's literature (Kalb 2008: 13).

The biographies of famous people of the past called *The Plutarchs* [Plutarkhi] were first read to the children of aristocrats educated by French-speaking governors and governess, as the educational system for the children of Russian nobility was based on home schooling and French teachers were prevalent (Hellman 2013: 22). The emergence of the modern concepts of childhood and the child-reader in Russia happened under the influence of French Enlightenment philosophy (Olich 2009: 18). The first edition of *The Plutarchs* was the French edition *Plutarch for young men* [Plutarkh dlia iunoshestva, 1809], which was translated into Russian and published in 1809. Later, that book was adopted by the French writers Catherine-Joseph-Ferdinand Girard de Propiac and Pierre Blanchard and then translated and published in Russia by Fedor Glinka in 1816 as *Plutarch for young women* [Plutarkh dlia molodykh devits, 1816] (Setin 1972: 60-61). Educated young men and women of the first quarter of the nineteenth century modeled themselves and their social behavior on the Roman political predecessors about whom they read in French literature (or French literature translated into Russian) (Balina 2007: 323-53). In the second half of the nineteenth century, historical and

[8] Embracing antiquity (especially that of the Ancient Rome) as a cultural model was not new to Russia: the idea of Rome was adapted to and included into Russian cultural discourse in two forms – metaphorical (through literature) and visual (through architecture). (Balina 2007: 323-53) The latter was adopted by Peter I as early as in the first half of the eighteenth century, whilst the deep interest in the Ancient Roman literary forms and genres peaked during Alexander I reign (1801-1825) in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Precisely because before the nineteenth century, Russia knew no tradition of civil non-Christian biographical description, though Christian 'life writings' (*zhitiia*) of the saints were also didactic and in that way, similar to the secular hagiographies. (Averintsev 1973: 240)

biographical literature for children rooted in *The Plutarkhs* [Plutarkhi], flourished (Setin 1972: 142). The genre became established in Russian territories through the non-religious biographical tradition of classical antiquity. What role did these observations and facts play within children's literature? Nineteenth century writers followed the tradition of *The Plutarkhs* [Plutarkhi], whom they had themselves read as children: they skillfully marged actual historical knowledge with didactic pedagogy, combining them with an adventurous plot that gave rise to an enduringly popular genre of children's literature in Russia (Balina 2018, 120). Historical semi-fictional novels based on the lives of Peter the Great, Alexander Men'shikov, Alexander Suvorov, Grigorii Potemkin, and many others were among those written for children and young adults all throughout the nineteenth century.

Overall, the biographical canon was fully formed in Russian children's literature during the nineteenth century. Some of the major values propagated to children in the biographies were honesty, service, and martyrdom for the greater common goal. Paradoxically, these very virtues were the ones in demand by the new revolutionary culture. They were successfully adapted by twentieth century writers and started to serve the new ideological demands. A new generation of Soviet literati in the 1930s simply added a new political dimension to traditional characteristics of the hero's path. Soviet children's writers did not need to invent them from scratch: an already well-established biographical canon was simply 'repackaged' for the new political reality and historical purposes. The virtues of service and martyrdom were easily adapted to the politically new post-revolutionary environment.

The Soviet Biographical Canon for The New Soviet Children

Soviet biographical children's literature did not come from the literary vacuum but was formed and informed by the fact that its authors had similar (if not the same) educational background. Thus, for children born during or right after the 1917 Revolution, the newly established political heroes had to be legitimized, but the literary framework of how to narrate those heroes' lives remained the same. The new children's periodicals of the mid and late-1930s – (*Baraban* (1923-1926), *Vorobei*, later

renamed into *Novii Robinzon* (1923-1925), *Pioner* (1924-2016), *Murzilka* (1924-now), *EZh* (1928-1935), *Zateinik* (1929-1953), *ChIZh* (1930-1941), *Kostër* (1936-1946, 1956-now) – began to establish the biographical canon of Soviet children's literature. It was in those journals that many biographical articles were published.[9] The institution of children's periodicals was a late-1920s to early-1930s Soviet phenomenon that flourished at the moment of the political 'perfect storm' between the end of NEP and the start of Stalinist Cultural Revolution in 1928. From the mid-1924, private publishing houses in the Soviet Union were gradually reduced, giving way to the centralized state-controlled publishing and, as a result, to the politicized state controlled discourse in children's journals. The last volume of the old-fashioned *Novii Robinzon* was published in November of 1925 and soon the journal, highly criticized by paedologists and the *Komsomol*, was shut down[10] (Kolesova 1993: 34-35, 84-87). A similar fate awaited another popular children's journal, *Baraban,* a bit later. The journals *Ezh* (a playful abbreviation of "*Ezhenedel'nii zhurnal*") and *Chizh* (another playful abbreviation of "*Chrezvychaino interesnyi zhurnal*") came to replace them.[11] *Pioner,* the first explicitly political journal for children launched in 1936, featured fictional works as well as special-interest rubrics, including stories about honorable Soviet men alongside special articles on world history ('Travel through the Centuries' [*Puteshestviia v veka*]), a special rubric that ran from 1936 until 1938) (Balina 2014: 12-13). We can see that many children's journals of the interwar period, especially in the 1930s, started to showcase the biographical articles which served simultaneously as sources

[9] The only work about Stalin's life for children was published in the first volume of the 1934 journal *Kolkhoznye rebiata* – a carefully curated exception made only one time (although the article was made in the encyclopedia style, failing to give any details about Stalin's childhood).

[10] Pavel Blonskii, one of the central figures of Soviet paedology, defined that science as a 'study of childhood' (as opposed to 'the study of children'). Another prominent Soviet paedologist and the editor of the journal *Pedologiia,* Aaron Zalkind, defined paedology in broader terms – as a universal science of human development (Etkind 1997: 261). In the Russian Empire, paedology began as a clinical and psychological study of early childhood. Later, the Soviets continued the late-Imperial paedological practices.

[11] The word 'Ëzh' in Russian means 'Hedgehog,' and the word 'Chizh' in Russian means 'Siskin' – those were the common protagonists of the traditional Russian fairytales.

of new historical facts and a space for introducing the heroes of the revolutionary times.

The new biographical genre of children's literature required either the rewriting of history or the ability to locate more bifurcating revolutionary moments in the past. History was to be presented as a set of climactic points of revolutionary changes, and it was history that adapted reality for the new circumstances. Naturally, the literary model established in *The Plutarchs* [Plutarkhi] could not work anymore because the ancient historical pantheon had to be purged, and new heroes with model behaviors needed to be found (Balina 2007: 324). This was precisely what the new biographical literature for children was concerned with. These searches for a *longue durée* history and the consequent need for the new paradigm of the Antiquity came hand in hand with the search for new knowledge and new heroes (this is how, for example, Spartacus, and not Plutarch or Socrates, became the number one figure of the Ancient Roman past). In that new paradigm, Stalinist writers and historians looked for the roots of revolutionary struggle.[12] That new paradigm also necessitated the creation of a paratext – a multi-layered, multi-contextual textual work with commentaries that helped spread historical knowledge, with many footnotes that taught readers the necessary political and historical vocabulary.[13] Soviet historiography of the 1930s, thus, consisted of historical facts and politically correctly shaped individual stories.[14] Thus, the genre of Plutarchs survived well beyond 1917, carried by those who had attended pre-revolutionary gymnasiums and

[12] Not accidentally, writers were among the most frequently purged, but also among the most privileged cultural workers – even architects who at the time were rebuilding the new Moscow using Ancient Roman motives, were behind writers in the Stalinist hierarchy (Papernyi 2002: 224-22). In 1937, historian Milii Ezerskii published a historical novel, *Aristonik* (for the 'Historical library of Detizdat''s series) about the uprising of Roman slaves in Sicily. Ezerskii and the other soldiers of the front of the cultural revolution gladly 'adopted' Rome as a metaphor for eternal and indestructible social order (Balina 2007: 323-53). In Ezerskii's work, the author is omnipresent as a historical and moral guide to the Ancient Roman world for the young readers. Ezerskii revived the very Ancient Roman type of literature where text is merely a form of representation of the valuable for society knowledge from the 'perfect man' to the 'flawless youngster' (Arzamastseva 2003: 324-26).

[13] For more about the notion of paratext, see Genette 1991.

[14] For more on '*Historie*' vs. '*Geshichte,*' see Balina 2018.

real schools [real'nye uchilishcha], and later (in Soviet times) became children's writers. These people were very familiar with the genre, knew its canon, and preserved and handed over the 'genre's memory' to the new Soviet generation of children born after 1917. Still, the new Soviet Plutarchs had a key component in them, namely the martyrdom element, which was not necessarily novel for Russian literature. According to the Russian cultural historian, Sergei Averintsev, biographies and autobiographies reflect a highly individualized aspect of culture, but at the same time, biography is always responding to the question about how the personal life of its protagonist relates to the general historical process. Averintsev highlighted that biography was created as a result of the crisis of polis life in the IV century B.C. However, the first biographies were mostly investigating unusual biographical facts, while Plutarch revolutionized the genre, reorienting it from gossip and scandals towards historicism and monumentality. This means Plutarch's biographies had a moral aspect in them which permeated the text and ennobled the whole genre (Averintsev 1994: 637-58). However, the martyrdom element in the Soviet Plutarchs fulfilled a didactic function, which they were to play in Soviet literature and pedagogy. The biographical works for children were to describe how a hero was prepared to die for his country ever since he was a child. This was exactly why the facts for such biographical works were carefully chosen and controlled from above by Party officials. Generally speaking, the new children's biographies were built upon a careful blend of real historical facts, adventurous fiction, and some skillful didactic propaganda.

The Boy from Urzhum: Fact and Fiction in One Boy's Life

A classic example of the interwar Soviet biographical canon in children's literature would be a series of biographical works for children about Sergei Kirov – a person turned into a Bolshevik martyr after his (supposed) assassination. American historian Matthew Lenoe, who studied Kirov's murder, noticed how 'memoir accounts of Kirov's youth and early political career… all appeared to be influenced by martyrology;' and moreover, contemporary commentators from the West who came to see Kirov as a moderate opposition to Stalin repeated the Stalinist

hagiography of Kirov as a political martyr (Lenoe 2010: 19). Born in Urzhum (Viatka region) in 1886, towards the early 1920s, Sergei Kostrikov (later – Kirov) became a prominent member of the Bolshevik Party after he served as the first secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan in Baku, backed in that position by Lenin, Ordzhonikidze, and Stalin (Lenoe 2010: 58). In 1925, by the end of his Baku tenure, Kirov became a well-versed politician and a follower of Stalin's party line (for example, under Stalin's instructions, Kirov attacked Lev Trotsky 'factionalism' in January of 1925 during the denunciation of the latter). The real-life Kirov, unlike the Bolshevik hero portrayed in the many post-1934 biographies of him, 'understood that revolutionary politics were a dirty game' (Lenoe 2010: 43). By 1930, Kirov settled down in Leningrad becoming head of the Party organization of that region; while his wife, Mariia Markus, was appointed to 'cure' prostitutes of Leningrad after her volunteer work with homeless children in Baku in the late 1920s. Ironically, eyewitnesses of Markus's work claimed that her idea of therapy was reading the biographies of exemplary Bolsheviks to the former prostitutes (Lebina 1999: 95-96). And while her own husband was known for having many mistresses, he was able to maintain an image 'as an upright, totally dedicated "proletarian" leader' (Lenoe 2010: 124). Kirov's images of a strong, kind, well-meaning man surrounded by children, could often be found in art, illustrations, and children's literature. Kirov's murder on December 1, 1934, sparked the infamous wave of political trials and purges of prominent Bolsheviks, among them Grigorii Zinov'ev, Lev Kamenev, and Nikolai Bukharin. The first Moscow trial of the so-called 'Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist center' began on August 19, 1936, overseen by Nikolai Ezhov, Genrikh Iagoda, and Andrei Vyshinskii, but managed by Stalin. There, Kamenev was explicitly accused of organizing Kirov's assassination (and admitted his guilt for obvious reasons). However, Kirov's image as a perfect Communist fighter-martyr started to form even before the summer of 1936, with children's literature driving the idea of his martyrdom. But the most important and canonical (from the biographical perspective) heroic image of Kirov was built upon different stories about his life, childhood, and his legacy written for children. In them, the history that surrounded Kirov's life was just another

window into contemporary Stalinist 'happy childhood' and the even happier communist future.[15] Kirov's biographies were didactic and created an image of a strictly positive hero who can be emulated. Thus, those biographical works fashioned a specific pattern of the Bolshevik martyr-hero's life – a pattern that could later be applied to any other Party leader or famous Bolshevik. With the exception of Stalin. Since heroes like Kirov came alive on the pages of children's books, while Stalin did not need that literary *aqua vitae,* he was more than alive: he was above them all and seemingly immortal.

Fig.2. Elizaveta Kruglikova, S.M. Kirov with Children [S.M. Kirov s det'mi], engraving, exact year unknown, sometime in the second half of the 1930s.[16]



The first work about Kirov's life for a children's audience was published in a special volume of the *Pioner* periodical published

[15] Here, the dichotomy '*Historie*' vs. '*Geschichte*' – of history (the historical background, true events, facts) and story (something that happens to a child) – is especially obvious (Balina 2018, 118-27).

[16] *Virtual Russian Museum* (https://rusmuseumvrm.ru/data/collections/engraving/s.gr.-8941/index.php, accessed on February 20, 2024).

in February of 1935, dedicated entirely to Kirov due to his supposedly unexpected death. Writers Boris Zhitkov, Ben'iamin Ivanter, Andrei Nekrasov, and Boris Shatilov came together to depict Sergei Kirov's life and political career from birth to his assassination (later, in 1937, that volume would be published as a stand-alone book for children entitled *A Tale of Comrade Kirov* [Povest' o Tovarishche Kirove, 1937]). From the gifted boy Serëzha Kostrikov to 'chief of the Leningrad's Bolsheviks' [*vozhd' Bol'shevikov Leningrada*], the article traces a political odyssey of Kirov as a global Revolutionary hero. In the Dickensesque story of Serëzha's early years, readers see for themselves how unusual and bright (yet somehow lonely) orphaned Serëzha was from the time he was a young child. As a result, readers can easily deduct how young Kirov was destined to become a hero: 'Serëzha Kostrikov had it all different from the others'(Pioner 1935a: 1).[17] Kostrikov's character, according to that biography, was formed by the trauma of witnessing the death of his politically like-minded friend, Iosif Kononov, from the hands of tsarist police.

In many ways, that 1935 collection of biographical articles was based on Kirov's own autobiography, which he had falsified to a significant extent 'to make himself appear a more steadfast revolutionary;' he had exaggerated his prison term and changed the article of the Criminal Code under which he was convicted (Lenoe 2010: 28). But that is not so important, since Zhitkov and his colleagues based their writing on the pre-existing canon of the life of a hero, only adding some defined characteristics and facts from Kirov's life – a hero who had to overcome many obstacles and unfair treatment in order to grow into a confident man, only to be martyred for the sake of yet another revolutionary struggle. The authors then claimed that Kirov was betrayed by Zinov'ev 'and his party,' which was supported by Trotsky (Pioner 1935b: 26-27). That biographical work was full of illustrations: drawings depicting different episodes of Kostrikov's life around the time of the First Russian Revolution of 1905 and afterwards, when Kirov founded an underground printing house, and then his life during the October Revolution and the Civil War. Towards the very end, readers witness Kirov's political activity in the 1920s and early 1930s and read about his

[17] The original text said: 'У Сережи Кострикова все не как у людей.'

path to becoming the Leningrad Party leader. The many simplistic drawings, which accompanied the story about Kirov's life, went in stark contrast to the very last illustration – a photograph of Joseph Stalin with Lazar' Kaganovich, Viacheslav Molotov, Kliment Voroshilov, and Sergo Ordzhonikidze standing by Kirov's casket. The significance of the choice for the final illustration of the story about Kirov's life can hardly be overestimated: first and foremost, the photograph added a realistic dimension to the otherwise fairy-tale like story aimed at middle-school children and young adults; second, it signaled that the death of Kirov is not a children's matter anymore – rather, it is a political all-Soviet affair; and finally, it quite literally shifted the readers' attention from Kirov to Stalin whose figure was strategically located right in the center of the photograph observing Kirov's body with an affectionate paternal gaze.

Fig. 3. Stalin and his political milieu standing around the dead body of Kirov. Illustration on page 33 of a special volume 2 of the Pioner *journal (1935).*



The Martyrdom of Kirov

The martyrdom of Kirov was in many ways perpetuated by Stalin who himself edited the Politburo's announcement of the Leningrad's leader's death, which appeared in *Pravda* on

December 2 of 1934 (Lenoe 2010: 487). A campaign to memorialize Kirov through a series of public meetings and press coverage followed. Later, Kirov's martyr cult reached fantastic heights: up until 1953, his death was commemorated in a fashion almost similar to Lenin's (Lenoe 2010: 518). Kirov's figure truly acquired a cult status: 'The eulogies written by friends, coworkers and acquaintances provided plentiful source material to portray him as a tolerant and humane leader' who was nonetheless (supposedly) innocent enough to be betrayed by a conspiracy of traitors (Lenoe 2010: 524). Children's literature did not stand aside: biographies of Kirov for the younger audience continued to be produced. In the introductory article of the ninth volume of the 1936 *Pioner* journal, the death of Kirov was dramatized much more than in the 1935 *Pioner*.[18] Of course, a year and a half after Kirov's death, his biography was abridged, yet the volume was prefaced with an even harsher and politically more explicit article than the previous year, 'The Snake is Crushed' [*Zmeia razdavlena*], about the Moscow trials and Trotsky's flight ending up in the 'garbage bin of history.'[19] In that same volume, Boris Zhitkov's shortened biography of Kirov including some new episodes was published as 'The Tale about Kirov' [*Povest' o Kirove*]. In it, Zhitkov zoomed in on how Kirov improved the functioning of the Leningrad harbor and how, under Kirov's watch, the maritime shipping in that harbor flourished after the Revolution; another part of Zhitkov's story was about Kirov's talented approach to the improvement of agriculture in the Leningrad region.

The books about Kirov's life were subsequently published and popularized in the late 1930s. One of them, 1936 Antonina Golubeva's *The Boy from Urzhum*, became a vivid example of political biography written for children; and it was an example of a classical socialist realist biographical novel, praised by many, including Anton Makarenko, who wrote a detailed review of it. Makarenko stressed how in Kostrikov's childhood as described by Golubeva, 'the beginnings of a colossal mission of service to people

[18] One of the sentences starts with 'Не успела еще кровь Кирова засохнуть в коридоре Смольного…' (Pioner 1936: 5).

[19] The original text says: 'в мусорной яме истории.' (Pioner 1936: 4).

are already seen.'[20] Golubeva's work was quite personal and the most important thing was that her book was about Serëzha Kostrikov. She wrote it for school children, so it was not about Sergei Mironovich Kirov, but more about how the protagonist lost his parents, how he grew as a revolutionary and gained the respect of his peers, and how he decided to leave his hometown. Golubeva's book had a somewhat happy ending, and her story concluded with Serëzha growing out of age into a successful loyal revolutionary. A young leader among his peers, he leaves the familial Urzhum to study at the Technological Institute in Tomsk.

Finally, Nikolai Byl'ev's 1938 *Stories about Kirov* [Rasskazy o Kirove, 1938] was a set of short stories, episodes from Kirov's revolutionary and military career, and his time in the Red Army. Unlike Golubeva, Byl'ev work was simple, concise, and stressed Kirov's closeness to Stalin, which was bordering on dependence): in the last story 'The Fire' [*Pozhar*], readers witness Kirov in Baku writing a letter to Stalin (Byl'ev 1938: 19). The book ends with the following episode: after three days of putting out the fire and risking his life, Kirov returned to his office and finished his letter to Stalin without a single word about himself and his troubles (Byl'ev 1938: 24).

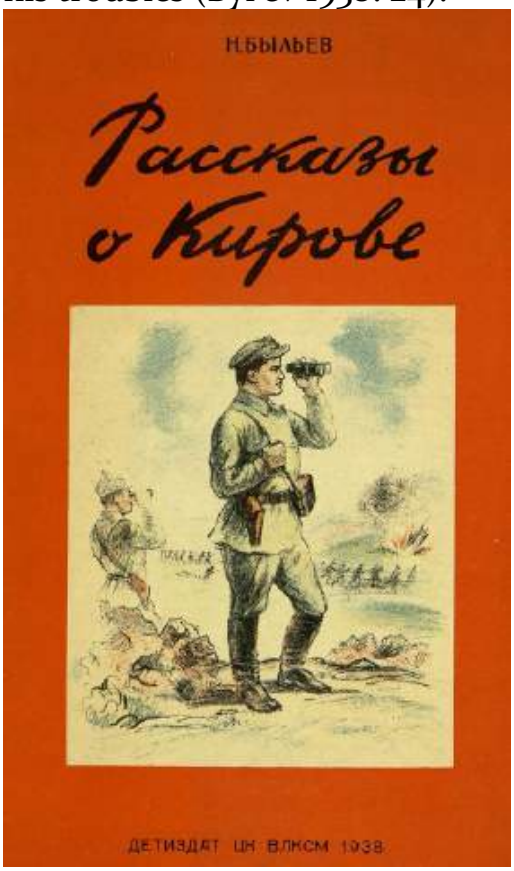


Fig. 4. A Cover of Nikolai Byl'ev's The Stories about Kirov – a set of fairy-tale-like short stories mostly about Kirov's military career. The cover is a vivid example of how even the biographical works and their illustrations were influenced by the general militarization of Soviet culture towards the late 1930s, with Kirov being presented as a military rather than a political hero – a model for future Red Army soldiers.

[20] The original text says: 'Уже видны начала большого служения делу человечества...' (Makarenko 1937: 2)

The Soviet Biographical Canon for Children: Verbal Imperialism in Action

Kirov was not the only superhuman hero figure in the Soviet children's biographical pantheon. The late 1930s witnessed an unprecedented amount of biographies of Party leaders and great people of the past published for children. It was the time of the Great Purges when everyone, whether perpetrator or victim, as historian Igal Halfin put it, 'always left behind a personal life and a verdict pertaining to one unique case' (Halfin 2002: 208). Historian Jochen Hellbeck claimed that 'the Bolsheviks were verbal imperialists,' stressing the importance of the 'script,' so to speak, for the Bolshevik biography and autobiography (Hellbeck 2006: 19).

At the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, Soviet children's poet Samuil Marshak made an emotional statement to the effect that now Soviet literature for young adults of the 1930s 'is tackling the big themes.' 'Big themes' included those discussed by Stalin at his meeting with the German-Swiss writer Emil Ludwig – stories about true 'new popular heroes' [*narodnye geroi*], among them Ivan Bolotnikov, Stepan Razin, and Emel'ian Pugachëv (Marshak 1936: 22). In January 1936, the main children's literature publishing house, *Detizdat,* came under control of the TsK VLKSM, the Party's youth division. As a result, Soviet childhood, as well as pedagogy, were placed under the strict control of the Bolshevik Party. Marshak and other children's writers, along with the Komsomol activists, leaned towards an extreme rhetoric caused by the moment of canonization of the Soviet propaganda (Fitzpatrick 1979: 251). It was a game with no winners: writers either accused their fellow writers of writing in the 'bourgeois' style and not being fit to enter the newly emerging canon; or they were themselves charged and, in the best-case scenario, their books were never to be published.

With the growing demand for historical books for children, the late 1930s also witnessed the publication of many books about historical heroes of the Soviet past. In 1937, Evgenii Gerasimov and Mikhail Erlikh's *Shchors* was published – a detailed biography of the "Ukrainian Chapaev". In 1938, a book about Karl Marx, *The Great Teacher Karl Marx* [Velikii Uchitel' Karl Marks], which opened with Friedrich Engels's

speech at Marx's grave, was published by *Detizdat*. It had a number of biographical articles by Vladimir Lenin, Paul Lafargue, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Eleanor Marx, and Lazar' Kaganovich. In 1939, Stepan Zlobin published his fairy-tale-like book about the life of Stepan Razin – a Don Cossack who led a major peasant uprising in the seventeenth century. That was a very typical socialist realist book for children, where Razin was presented as not only a political rebel, but also a good father and a caring husband. That same year, Tat'iana Bogdanovich's *The Militiaman Serf* [Kholopopolchenets] about the peasant uprising led by Ivan Bolotnikov in 1606-1607, was published, a long book written in a pseudo old-Russian style presenting a more complex picture of the proto-revolutionary leader. In 1940, Lidiia Chukovskaia published *A Story of One Uprising* [Istoriia odnogo vosstaniia], a children's book about the 1750 Haydamak Cossack Uprising in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, led by Semën Nezhivii. The book features a heartbreaking scene of Nezhivii burying his four-year-old son who died from disease and cold weather; later he buries his wife, too. All of the three historical tales about peasant rebellions were published within a year and had similar protagonists: strong, selfless revolutionary heroes, capable of love for their families, yet willing to become martyrs for the sake of fighting against the oppressive imperial regimes.[21] Overall, biographical

[21] Another Soviet author who attempted to write about Stalin's youth but was prevented by Stalin himself was Mikhail Bulgakov. The story of Bulgakov's attempt to bring Stalin's past to the stage at MKhAT in 1939 was once forgotten but later rediscovered by literary scholars and translators (including Ellendea Proffer, Marietta Chudakova, and Colin Wright) in the final quarter of the twentieth century. That episode echoed the earlier account of Vera Smirnova described in this article. Correspondence between Bulgakov and MKhAT employee (and later, theatre historian) Vitalii Vilenkin, along with Bulgakov's letters and those of his contemporaries, confirms that the writer completed his play about Stalin, titled *Batum,* rather quickly. In the first comprehensive biography of Bulgakov, literary scholar Marietta Chudakova drew parallels between the protagonist of Bulgakov's most famous work, *Master i Margarita* – the Master – and the author himself. In the late 1930s, amid the political purges, Bulgakov was torn between fear of the almighty dictator and his [Bulgakov's] natural drive for artistic success. However, the project was doomed from the start: Stalin prevented Bulgakov from traveling to Batum for further research and later reportedly wrote: 'All children and young people are alike. One shouldn't put on a play about the young Stalin' (Chudakova 1988: 632, 638-39; Wright 1995: 46). According to his wife's diaries, Bulgakov's interest in

works for children published in the late 1930s were tools meant to hone the political consciousness of the new, Soviet, generation of readers. They construed a particular moral universe with clear distinctions between good and evil and narrated the past in a way that conformed to the Party's renewed historical agenda. Within that framework, the childhood of the hero became central to the Stalinist regime's self-representation.

Conclusion

The role of children and young people for the Bolshevik Party's self-image can hardly be overestimated. The Stalinist cultural revolution extensively focused on children in order to create a child-centered, rock-solid moral universe with established juxtapositions of right and wrong (Krevsky 2012: 114-15). The First Five-Year Plan and the rise of the Stakhanovite movement introduced a family-like hierarchy to Soviet society, where ordinary people were treated as children of the big, happy family (Clark 2000: 119). As Katerina Clark argued, biographical writings of the 1930s were of the two types, 'fathers' and 'sons,' with Stalin emerging as national leader over all of them (Clark 2000: 123-24). In the interwar period, with extremely high child mortality (as well as the demise of pre-revolutionary charitable traditions) as a result of the Civil War, adolescents became a pressing issue, but also a solution, for the regime of the late 1930s (Gorshkov 2023: 4-6). Children born after the Revolution were forcefully disconnected from pre-revolutionary history, which lived on in the stories about the new revolutionary heroes. This generation was to be taught how to 'speak Bolshevik' through various art forms, including literature (the main one), art, architecture, theatre, and music; these children were to be raised, reforged, and reeducated as Soviet subjects (Dobrenko 2008: 52, 59). In many cases, the children's world of the 1930s was presented as a fairy tale come true, an idealized, picturesque image.

In some sense, the biographical genre of Soviet children's litera-

writing the play began in 1936, and the writer was not necessarily insincere in his fascination with Stalin's biography. However, the play proved unsuccessful: it paled in comparison with his other significant works in terms of depicting an individual in conflict with tyranny, while simultaneously portraying Stalin as merely an ordinary revolutionary rather than someone exceptional and destined for great political success (Wright 1995: 45-46).

ture was built upon a number of such idealized fairy-tale-like stories. Many biographies of the prominent figures of Russian history, with their focus on childhood as a formative period of time, were subsequently published, yet only Stalin was left without a childhood. Famous Soviet political actors like Ordzhonikidze, Sverdlov, and Kirov, depicted in the years of their childhood, served as examples that children could learn from when emulating the heroes' passion for revolutionary activities. Stalin's childhood, however, was never part of the children's biographical literary canon. Stalin was not someone who could be imitated – he was above all of his political predecessors. It is important to stress that this was Stalin's own narrative strategy, which he controlled personally. Metaphorically, without a description of his childhood and early formative years, Stalin was truly immortal, which means that the usual combination of fact and fiction used in biographies was irrelevant in his case. He could not have had a simple, ordinary childhood, like Lenin, Ordzhonikidze, or Kirov, because a story about such a childhood would inevitably show him to be vulnerable in one way or another, and with character weaknesses that all children have, even those who become powerful and famous as adults. Thus, within the Soviet children's biographical framework, he remained in charge of the carefully curated image of himself as the omnipotent Soviet 'father' who was supposed to be feared first and foremost. No childish pranks or weaknesses could be associated with his self–created image, leaving him the only leader within the Soviet children's literature biographical pantheon without a childhood.

Bibliography

Arzamastseva 2003: Arzamastseva, Irina. 2003. *'Vek rebenka' v russkoi literature 1900-1930 godov* (Moskva: Prometei).

Averintsev 1994: Averintsev, Sergei. 1994. 'Dobryi Plutarkh rasskazyvaet o geroiakh, ili schastlivyi brak biographicheskogo zhanra i moral'noi filososii' in *Plutarkh, Sravnitel'nye zhizneopisaniia*, v. 11, ed. by Sergei Averintsev, Mikhail Gasparov and Simon Markish (Moskva: Nauka), 637-58.

Averintsev 1973: Averintsev, Sergei. 1973. *Plutarkh i antichnaia biographiia: k voprosu o meste klassika zhanra v istorii zhanra* (Moskva: Nauka).

Bakhtin 1981: Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Teas Press).

Balina 2002: Balina, Marina. 2002. '"Kakoi-to neproiavlennyi zhanr:" memuary v literature sotsrealizma' in *Sovetskoe bogatstvo: stat'i o kul'ture, literature i kino*, ed. by Marina Balina, Evgenii Dobrenko and Iurii Murashov (Moskva: Akademicheskii proekt), 241-58.

Balina 2007: Balina, Marina. 2007. 'Ancient Rome for Little Comrades: The Legacy of Classical Antiquity in Soviet Children's Literature' in *The Sites of Rome: Times, Space, and Memory*, ed. by David H.J. Larmour and Diana Spencer (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 323-53.

Balina 2014: Balina, Marina. 2014. 'Creativity through Restraint: The Beginnings of Soviet Children's Literature' in *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, ed. by Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova (New York: Routledge), 3-18.

Balina 2018: Balina, Marina. 2018. 'Detskaia istoricheskaia proza,' *Detskie chteniia*, 13 (1): 114-40.

Balina 2020: Balina, Marina. 2020. 'Reimagining the Past for Future Generations: History as a Fiction in Soviet Children's Literature,' in *A Companion to Soviet Children's Literature and Film*, ed. Olga Voronina (Leiden: Brill), 179-211.

Brooks 1991: Brooks, Jeffrey. 1991. 'Revolutionary Lives: Public Identities in "Pravda" during the 1920s' in *New Directions in Soviet History*, ed. Stephen White (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 27-40.

Byl'ev 1938: Byl'ev, Nikolai. 1938. *Rasskazy o Kirove* (Moskva, Leningrad: TsK VLKSM).

Chudakova 1988: Chudakova, Marietta. 1988. *Zhizneopisanie Mikhaila Bulgakova* (Moskva: Kniga).

Clark 2000: Clark, Katerina. 2000. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press).

Dobrenko 2008: Dobrenko, Evgeny. 2008. 'The School Tale in Children's Literature of Socialist Realism' in *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, ed. by Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova (New York: Routledge), 43-66.

Etkind 1997: Etkind, Alexander. 1997. *Eros of the Impossible: The History of Psychoanalysis in Russia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press).

Fitzpatrick 1979: Fitzpatrick, Sheila. 1979. *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press).

Genette 1991: Genette, Gérard. 1991. 'Introduction to Paratext', *New Literary History*, 22(2): 261-72.

Gorshkov 2023: Gorshkov, Boris. 2023. *The Dark Side of Early Soviet Childhood, 1917-1941* (London: Bloomsbury).

Halfin 2002: Halfin, Igal. 2002. 'Intimacy in an Ideological Key: The Communist Case of the 1920s and 1930s' in *Language and Revolution: Making Modern Political Identity*, ed. by Igal Halfin (London, Portland: Routledge), 185-213.

Hellbeck 2006: Hellbeck, Jochen. 2006. *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

Hellman 2013: Hellman, Ben. 2013. *Fairy Tales and True Stories: The History of Russian Literature for Children and Young People* (Leiden: Brill).

Kalb 2008: Kalb, Judith E. 2008. *Russia's Rome: Imperial Visions, Messianic Dreams, 1890-1940* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press).

Kolesova 1993: Kolesova, Larisa. 1993. *Detskie zhurnaly sovetskoi Rossii, 1917-1977* (Petrozavodsk: PGU).

Kotkin 2014: Kotkin, Stephen. 2014. *Stalin: Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928* (New York: Penguin Press).

Krevsky 2012: Krevsky, Elena. 2012. 'Arkadii Gaidar, the New Socialist Morality, and Stalinist Identity', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, LIV(1-2): 113-32.

Kuehn 2001: Kuehn, Manfred. 2001. *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Lebina 1999: Lebina, Natalia. 1999. *Povsednevnaia zhizn' sovetskogo goroda: Normy i anomalii, 1920-1930 gody* (Sankt-Peterburg: Letnii sad).

Lenin 1910: Lenin, Vladimir. 1910. 'Ivan Vasil'evich Babushkin (nekrolog)', *Rabochaia gazeta*, 2, 18 (31) December: 4.

Lenoe 2010: Lenoe, Matthew. 2010. *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).

Makarenko 1937: Makarenko, Anton. 1937. 'Mal'chik iz Urzhuma', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 65, 1 December: 2.

Marshak 1936: Marshak, Samuil. 1936. 'Za bolshuiu detskuiu literaturu', *Detskaia literatura*, 1: 18-23.

Mogil'ner 1999: Mogil'ner, Marina. 1999. *Mifologiia 'podpol'nogo cheloveka:' radikal'nii mikrokosm v Rossii nachala XX veka kak predmet semioticheskogo analiza* (Moskva: NLO).

Olich 2009: Olich, Jacqueline. 2009. *Competing Ideologies and Children's Literature in Russia, 1918-1935* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller).

Papernyi 2002: Papernyi, Vladimir. 2002. *Kul'tura dva* (Moskva: NLO).

Petrone 2000: Petrone, Karen. 2000. *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press).

Pioner 1935a: n.a. 1935. 'Serëzha Kostrikov', *Pioner*, 2:1-6.

Pioner 1935b: n.a. 1935. 'Vozhd' Bol'shevikov Leningrada', *Pioner*, 2:26-32.

Pioner 1936: n.a. 1936. 'Zmeia razdavlena', *Pioner*, 9:3-5.

Roberts 2022: Roberts, Geoffrey. 2022. *Stalin's Library: A Dictator and His Books* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).

Setin 1972: Setin, Fëdor. 1972. *Russkaia detskaia literatura* (Moskva: Prosveshchenie).

Suny 2020: Suny, Ronald Grigor. 2020. *Stalin: Passage to Revolution* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press).

Tumarkin 1997: Tumarkin, Nina. 1997. *Lenin Lives, The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press).

Vaiskopf 2001: Vaiskopf, Mikhail. 2001. *Pisatel' Stalin* (Moskva: NLO).

Valevskii 1993: Valevskii, Aleksei. 1993. *Osnovaniia biografiki* (Kiev: Naukova dumka).

Wright 1995: Wright, Colin. 1995. 'Bulgakov, Stalin, and Autocracy' in *Bulgakov: The Novelist-Playwright*, ed. by Lesley Milne (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers), 38-50.

Archives

RGASPI 1938: Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), 'Letter from Joseph Stalin to Kirill Andreev and Vera Smirnova', Fond 1, Opis' 23, Delo 1340, 16 February 1938.

List of Images

Figure 1: A Cover of Vera Smirnova's *Comrade Sergo* [Tovarishch Sergo, 1939].

Figure 2: Elizaveta Kruglikova, *S.M. Kirov with Children* [S.M. Kirov s det'mi], engraving, exact year unknown, sometime in the second half of the 1930s. *Virtual Russian Museum,* https://rusmuseumvrm.ru/data/collections/engraving/s.gr.-8941/index.php.

Figure 3: Stalin and his political milieu standing around dead body of Kirov. Illustration on page 33 of a special volume 2 of the *Pioner* journal (1935).

Figure 4: A Cover of Nikolai Byl'ev's *The Stories about Kirov* [Rasskazy o Kirove, 1938].

Iris Uccello

Nastas'ja Kairova: dal processo giudiziario al giornalismo di guerra

Nastas'ia Kairova: From Legal Trials to War Journalism

Nastas'ia Vasil'evna Kairova (1844–1888) was a trailblazing figure in late 19th-century Russia, notable for her groundbreaking autobiographical writings and role as a war correspondent. Accused of a crime of passion in 1876, Kairova became the centre of public debate, attracting attention from figures such as Fedor Dostoevsky. Despite her acquittal, she emerged as a writer unafraid to confront taboo subjects like mental illness, maternal ambivalence, and female sexuality. Her autobiographical works blend confessional literature with diagnostic narratives, offering rare insight into the fragmented self of a "new woman" navigating societal change during the Great Reforms. Kairova's career as a war correspondent during the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878) broke gender barriers in journalism, showcasing a commitment to truth and innovation in reporting. This study examines Kairova's multifaceted legacy, highlighting her contributions to Russian autobiographical literature, gender studies, and journalism.

Nastas'ja Vasil'evna Kairova (1844–1888) emerge come una figura straordinariamente poliedrica nella Russia di fine Ottocento. Protagonista di uno dei casi giudiziari più controversi della Russia tardo-imperiale (1876), Nastas'ja Kairova viene accusata di tentato omicidio della moglie del suo amante, Aleksandra Velikanova. Nonostante l'assoluzione dell'imputata, il processo scatena un dibattito pubblico infuocato, attirando l'attenzione di intellettuali come Fedor Dostoevskij, che ne scrive in *Diario di uno scrittore*. Oltre alla sua vicenda giudiziaria, Kairova si distingue come giornalista di guerra durante il conflitto russo-turco (1877–1878) e come voce innovativa attraverso i suoi audaci scritti autobiografici.

Questo studio si propone di presentare una figura femminile originale e innovativa per il suo tempo, esplorando le peculiarità della sua produzione letteraria. Tale produzione, come vedremo, offre una nuova prospettiva sulla scrittura autobiografica e patrografica della seconda metà dell'Ottocento. Inoltre, Kairova è riconosciuta come la prima donna russa corrispondente di guerra, e la sua attività giornali-

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-013
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

stica rivela uno sguardo acuto e inedito sul conflitto bellico. Ciò emerge chiaramente nel fitto scambio epistolare con Aleksej Suvorin, attraverso il quale Kairova condivide le sue esperienze dirette al fronte.

Le informazioni biografiche su Nastas'ja Kairova si possono ricavare soprattutto dalle sue lettere e dalle cronache giudiziarie sul processo penale che la vede coinvolta. Su questi materiali, Mary F. Zirin (Zirin 2002) e Ol'ga Makarova (Makarova 2005), nei loro articoli pionieristici, delineano un profilo biografico lineare della scrittrice. Il nome di Kairova appare in due dizionari bibliografici (Golicyn 1889; Ponomarev 1891), ma questi non forniscono informazioni dirette sulla sua vita. Da un lato, il lavoro di Ol'ga Makarova (Makarova 2005) –che ha il merito di pubblicare per la prima volta il *Diario* di Kairova – si concentra principalmente sul ruolo che la scrittrice ha nella vita di Aleksej Suvorin. Dall'altro, lo studio di Zirin (Zirin 2002) inserisce l'attività giornalistica di Kairova in un contesto più ampio, confrontandola con altre due figure femminili attive nel giornalismo dell'epoca (Ol'ga Novikova e Varvara Mak-Gahan), senza però approfondire le peculiarità della sua produzione.

Questo articolo si propone di offrire un ritratto più completo di Kairova, intrecciando la sua produzione letteraria con un percorso di vita che la colloca ai margini delle convenzioni sociali del suo tempo.

Nastas'ja Vasil'evna Kairova rispetta tutte le caratteristiche di una tipica *nigilistka*[1]: si allontana dalla sfera domestica, lascia la capitale e le sue due figlie, Ol'ga (1865–?) e Ljudmila (1866–1937)[2],

[1] Le *nigilistki* sono le donne progressiste della seconda metà dell'800 che rifiutano i valori patriarcali e autoritari della società russa, sostenendo invece l'uguaglianza di genere, l'educazione femminile e la libertà personale. Spesso tagliano i capelli corti, indossano abiti semplici e pratici (in opposizione alla moda femminile dell'epoca) e si dedicano allo studio o al lavoro per conquistare l'indipendenza economica.

[2] Le figlie di Kairova avranno destini molto diversi. Ljubov' vivrà una vita da insegnante e vivendo sotto la protezione del fratello Afanasij Koni. Il nome di Ol'ga Koni, invece, compare nel 1890 nell'elenco alfabetico nel registro dello stesso ospedale, dove circa vent'anni prima era stata ricoverata sua madre. Ol'ga però nell'ospedale ci resterà per venti anni, almeno fino al 1910 (*Alfavitnaja kniga priema i vypiski pacientov bol'nicy Sv. Nikolaja Čudotvorca. Medicinskaja čast'. 1870–1920*). Della malattia mentale di Ol'ga Koni accenna anche Nikolaj Leskov nella postfazione del *Diario di Kairova* (Makarova 2005). Suvorin, che non lascerà testimonianze su Kairova, ricorda nel suo *Diario* l'incontro con la figlia della scrittrice. In

le affida al compagno Fedor Koni (1809–1879), drammaturgo e padre del famoso giurista Afanasij Koni (1844–1927). Kairova vive una vita indipendente, fa carriera nel giornalismo, gira il mondo, si innamora di uomini diversi, viene accusata di un crimine passionale e ambisce al successo letterario. La carriera di Nastas'ja Kairova inizia poco prima del suo tentativo di omicidio. Lavora come segretaria presso *Birževye vedomosti*, ma poi –delusa dalla vita nella capitale – decide di partire per Orenburg e tentare la fortuna come attrice. È lì che avviene il fatale incontro con Vasilij Velikanov, impresario teatrale della città, del quale si innamorerà e per il quale tenterà l'omicidio. Nastas'ja Kairova viene arrestata e messa in carcere l'8 luglio 1875, è lì che scriverà il suo *Avtobiografičeskij očerk (Bozzetto Autobiografico)* (Babuk 2001). L'11 novembre 1875 viene trasferita per 11 mesi presso l'Ospedale psichiatrico di San Pietroburgo *Sv. Nikolaj Čudotvorec* per essere sottoposta all'osservazione delle sue facoltà mentali, ed è lì che l'autrice scriverà il frammentato *Dnevnik Nastas'j Vasilevny Kairovoj v sumasšedšem dome (Diario di Nastas'ja Vasil'evna Kairova nell'Asilo Psichiatrico*) (Makarova 2005).

Queste opere autobiografiche si distinguono per una mescolanza di generi unica, collocandosi a metà strada tra letteratura confessionale, prosa autobiografica e narrativa diagnostica. Durante il XIX secolo, l'autobiografia femminile assume un ruolo centrale nel panorama letterario. Mary Zirin, nel suo studio sull'autobiografia femminile di fine secolo, evidenzia come il decennio del 1870 sia caratterizzato da un notevole aumento di autobiografie e memorie. Tuttavia, l'assenza di un corpus consolidato rende difficile individuare elementi comuni, poiché molti di questi testi restano ancora inediti e archiviati in collezioni pubbliche e private (Zirin 2002).

A partire dalla metà del secolo, l'autobiografia si evolve verso una crescente individualizzazione narrativa, riflesso di un atteggiamento critico e dialogico nei confronti del sé. Si accentua l'interesse per i meccanismi narrativi, le tematiche e i confini del racconto, dando vita a uno stile personale e innovativo. Non esiste più un io ideale che narra; l'io narrativo si costruisce attraverso due dimensioni temporali:

un primo momento la ragazza gli sembra una pazza che chiede di leggere le sue poesie, Suvorin, diffidente, è pronto a cacciarla ma poi ne prova pena, ascolta le poesie e rimane colpito dal talento della giovane (Suvorin 2000: 479).

una retrospettiva e cronologica, e una sincronica, che seleziona i momenti più significativi per l'autore nel processo di autocomprensione (Eremeev 2003).

Le autobiografie di Kairova riflettono caratteristiche tipiche dei testi femminili dell'epoca. Tra queste spicca l'assenza di figure maschili rilevanti nella vita delle protagoniste. La separazione tra sfera femminile e maschile è tracciata con forza, mentre il mondo di Kairova, anche nella dimensione familiare, è popolato da figure femminili centrali, come la madre e la sorella. Inoltre, le sue opere non mostrano evidenti richiami al femminismo; il messaggio è implicito nelle azioni delle protagoniste, che però si percepiscono come individui isolati dalle altre donne.

Rispetto alle autobiografie maschili, quelle femminili sono caratterizzate da un tono più urgente, emotivo e meno pacato. Questo aspetto risponde sia a un mercato sensazionalistico sia al desiderio di proporre nuove immagini e modelli di vita a un pubblico femminile. In queste opere, le donne non sono mai rappresentate felici in famiglia: possono essere libere o oppresse, ma non sono mai madri o mogli serene. Nelle autobiografie russe prevale sempre l'insolito e lo "speciale" rispetto al quotidiano e domestico (Holmgren 1996: 340).

Questo aspetto emerge in modo particolarmente marcato nei testi di Kairova, che rientrano in una categoria specifica dell'autobiografia: le patografie. La patografia è una forma narrativa in cui l'autore, affetto da una condizione patologica, cerca di esplorarne la natura, comprenderla o superarla. Nei suoi scritti, Kairova affronta con lucidità e coraggio una realtà anomala e spesso tragica, come quella della malattia mentale, fornendo un'introspezione tanto intima quanto rivoluzionaria per il suo tempo.

Secondo Konstantin Bogdanov, tra la fine degli anni Cinquanta e l'inizio degli anni Sessanta dell'Ottocento, sia la scienza sia la letteratura iniziano a manifestare un crescente interesse verso la deviazione dalla norma e la patologia. Questo si riflette nei testi realistici, dove le "физические уродства и уродства нравственные"[3] (Bogdanov 2005: 255) diventano temi centrali, ponendo al centro dell'attenzione il concetto di alterità rispetto alla norma. Nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento, in Russia, si assiste allo sviluppo

[3] Qui e altrove la traduzione è mia, tranne dove diversamente indicato – I. U: deviazioni fisiche e morali.

della psichiatria, con una letteratura che si confronta attivamente con questa nuova scienza. Tale dialogo si manifesta tanto nell'adozione di temi ispirati al naturalismo quanto nella critica alle teorie psichiatriche emergenti, come quella della degenerazione psichiatrica. Questo aspetto è esaminato in profondità da Riccardo Nicolosi (Nicolosi 2019), che ha analizzato le intersezioni tra letteratura e psichiatria nella Russia della seconda metà dell'Ottocento, concentrandosi tuttavia su una produzione letteraria prevalentemente maschile. In tale letteratura, le figure femminili, come le donne isteriche, sono spesso rappresentate come oggetti di osservazione maschile.

Kairova, invece, rappresenta un caso unico: è una donna che parla in prima persona della propria malattia mentale, divenendo soggetto narrante piuttosto che oggetto narrato. Inoltre, è una donna accusata di tentato omicidio, una figura che sfida ulteriormente le convenzioni letterarie del tempo. Nicolosi sottolinea che, nella letteratura russa, almeno fino alla fine dell'Ottocento, il criminale viene generalmente ritratto con compassione, considerato un *padšij*, ovvero una persona che ha smarrito la retta via. Tuttavia, nella maggior parte dei casi, la narrazione è scritta sul criminale e non dal criminale, come nel caso di Kairova.

I lavori della scrittrice sono patografie confessionali, sono testi violentemente sinceri, forti e onesti che cercano di fare luce su una psicologia complessa e tormentata.

Il *Bozzetto Autobiografico* si apre con un resoconto della sua infanzia e della sua vita in generale. L'autrice propone un'analisi psicologica della propria personalità, caratterizzata da un approccio straordinariamente innovativo per l'epoca. Le sue osservazioni e impressioni vengono registrate con un'onestà e una durezza che colpiscono il lettore. Il tono di Kairova sfrontato e dialogico, come dimostra l'introduzione: "Неинтересно — можно не читать, не понравится — я не виновата"[4] (Babuk 2001: 376).

Kairova si rifà alla tradizione della confessione (*ispovedal'naja proza*), un genere intrinsecamente dialogico che permea tutte le sue opere autobiografiche. La confessione, infatti, non può esistere senza un dialogo, senza un interlocutore, visibile o invisibile. È una parola che nasce sempre da un confronto, dove

[4] Se non vi interessa potete anche non leggere. Se non vi piacerà, non è colpa mia.

l'autore si rivolge a un altro, che può essere anche una proiezione del proprio io. Questo dialogismo, essenziale nella confessione, è una costante nella scrittura di Kairova.
Narrando la propria storia, l'autrice non risparmia un'analisi severa della realtà che la circonda. Un esempio significativo è la descrizione che dà della sua educazione:

> Образование: бонна — немка, бессмысленнейшая из всех бессмысленных немок, каких я когда-либо знала; гувернантка — русская, добрая, но довольно-таки глупая и ханжа. […] Нужно ли прибавлять, что все это разношерстное quasi-образование было чисто русское, т. е. вполне лишенное прочных основ, системы, смысла[5] (Babuk 2001: 376)

Kairova non risparmia la sua crudeltà nemmeno verso sé stessa:

> "Может быть вследствие особенно уродливо развившегося ума, но у меня действительно свои собственные понятия об обязанностях и чести"[6].

La scrittrice è tra le prime donne in Russia ad affrontare apertamente temi considerati scabrosi: il suicidio, la malattia mentale, l'assenza di istinto materno, la famiglia disfunzionale, l'odio verso sé stessi e verso la società. Il suo è un *io* perennemente ipersensibile, che ingloba tutto, persino la sua stessa sanità mentale, conducendola a una forte irritabilità.
Negli anni Sessanta del XIX secolo, si sviluppa un interesse sempre più morboso per il corpo, e le donne – identificate culturalmente con il corpo – iniziano a emergere come figure centrali. Da esseri asessuati e confinati alla sfera domestica, iniziano a parlare apertamente di sessualità (Holmgren 1996).
Kairova stessa, nei suoi scritti, riflette sulla libertà amorosa e sessuale, scardinando convenzioni sociali e morali:

[5] L'istruzione: la tata era tedesca, la tedesca più insensata tra le tedesche insensate che io abbia mai conosciuto; la governante era russa, buona, ma piuttosto stupida e bigotta […] devo davvero aggiungere che questa eterogenea quasi-istruzione era puramente russa? Cioè, priva di solide basi, di sistema e di senso

[6] È probabile che sia a causa di un intelletto sviluppatosi in modo peculiarmente deforme, ma io ho i miei personali concetti riguardo i doveri e l'onore.

> Половая чистота, хотя бы то и безусловная, по-моему, вовсе не есть гарантия нравственности, если с ней не соединяется много других условий, как не могу я признать безнравственной женщину, искренно и бескорыстно любившую два, три и даже десять раз в жизни[7] (Babuk 2001: 383)

Peraltro, la sessualità non è l'unico tema moderno trattato dalla scrittrice, anche la sua visione della maternità è estremamente discordante con il contesto sociale di fine Ottocento:

> Мне стыдно сознаться в этом, но le *rire argentin des enfants, leurs babils si pleins d'une naîveté délicieuse* (я говорю об этом всегда по-французски именно потому, что на этом языке все это выходит как-то особенно приторно и нелепо) et *d'une gaucherie si gracieuse* просто приводят меня в истерическое состояние. Здравый смысл и совесть говорят мне, что принуждать детей к молчанью и чинному сиденью нельзя, и я не принуждаю, но их возня и крики до того раздражают меня, что я, если долго приходится выносить их, убегаю куда-нибудь в отдельную комнату и там начинаю рыдать, теребить себя за волосы, кусать подушку, платок, руки, что попадет под зубы[8] (Babuk 2001: 384)

Le stesse considerazioni le ritroviamo in toni ancora più estremi nel *Diario*:

> Знаете, какая мне пришла сейчас в голову страшная мысль! Если я сама буду воспитывать

[7] La purezza sessuale, anche quando è assoluta, a mio avviso non garantisce la moralità, se non è accompagnata da altre condizioni. Allo stesso modo, non posso considerare immorale una donna che abbia amato due, tre o persino dieci volte nella sua vita.

[8] Mi vergogno ad ammetterlo, ma *les rires argentins des enfants, leurs babils si pleins d'une naïveté délicieuse* (lo esprimo in francese perché in questa lingua tutto suona artificiale e ridicolo) mi rendono semplicemente isterica. Il buonsenso e la coscienza mi dicono che non si può costringere i bambini al silenzio o a stare seduti in modo composto, ma il caos e le urla mi irritano a tal punto che, se devo sopportarli a lungo, scappo in un'altra stanza. Lì comincio a piangere, a strapparmi i capelli, mordere il cuscino, lo scialle, le mani, qualunque cosa mi capiti sotto i denti.

> своих девочек или даже жить с ними, они выйдут такими же безалаберными фразерками, как я. Помилуй Бог! Лучше смерть и им, и мне. Нет, довольно, не хочу писать об этом, а то допишусь до ерунды, о которой я обещала сама себе не говорить более ни с кем, даже с бумагой до времени. Будем говорить о чем-нибудь веселом, только о чем?[9] (Makarova 2005: 118)

Il suicidio è un tema ricorrente nelle autobiografie di Kairova:

> Лучше смерть, лучше жизнь в бессознательном безумии — а уж что может быть страшней этого! — чем такое состояние! Я столько раз говорила о самоубийстве шутя, что теперь даже и самой зазорно упоминать о нем, но право, право, не шутя. Смерть лучше… Ну, до свиданья пока, до завтра. Спите спокойно. Храни вас Бог[10] (Makarova 2005: 114)

Kairova nei suoi scritti autobiografici dimostra sempre di avere un io frammentato, binario e dicotomico:

> Одни говорят, что я рыба, — и они правы: я подолгу бываю совершеннейшей рыбой. Другие утверждают, что я, напротив, сама страсть, — и эти правы: бывают периоды, когда я становлюсь действительно воплощением страстности. Одни скажут — добра, как ангел небесный, другие — зла, как черт. Одни считают меня благородной и великодушной до самой высокой степени, другие — бессердечной эгоисткой.

[9] Sapete che pensiero spaventoso mi è appena venuto in mente? Se dovessi educare le mie figlie da sola, o persino vivere con loro, diventerebbero delle affabulatrici incompetenti, proprio come me. Dio abbia pietà! Sarebbe meglio la morte, sia per loro che per me. No, basta, non voglio più scrivere di queste cose, altrimenti finirò per dire una sciocchezza, cosa che avevo promesso di non rivelare più a nessuno, nemmeno alla carta, almeno per un po'. Parliamo di qualcosa di allegro, ma… di cosa?

[10] Meglio la morte, meglio vivere nella follia inconsapevole – e cosa può esserci di più spaventoso? – piuttosto che questa condizione! Quante volte ho parlato del suicidio scherzando, e ora provo persino vergogna a parlarne sul serio, ma davvero, sul serio, senza scherzare… La morte è meglio. Beh, arrivederci, ciao, a domani. Dorma sereno. Dio la protegga.

> […] Но что во всем этом странно и страшно, так это, что все правы[11] (Babuk 2001: 380–381)

Il suo spirito contraddittorio, in modo quasi assurdo e surreale, ritorna nella percezione del dolore fisico. La vita, gli atteggiamenti, il modo di percepire il circostante ha molto in comune con un atteggiamento da eroe byroniano, che non può tollerare i più lievi fastidi ma è pronto a sopportare i dolori fisici più estremi:

> Когда мне срезали нарыв, я даже упала в обморок, но ни разу я не вскрикнула, ни разу не испугалась. А какой-нибудь сущий пустяк, вроде насморка или кашля, до того злит меня, что непременно всегда сопровождается лихорадочными припадками. Если зубы болят сильно, я переношу спокойно, если же только побаливают, я просто мучусь и выхожу из себя. Какие хотите лишения: голод, холод, тряпье на плечах, — я вынесу совершенно спокойно и бодро, самый тяжелый труд с бессонными ночами для меня ничего. Но шуршанье бумагой, скрип двери, визг вентилятора, писк детей выводят меня из себя, и отсутствие простора и солнца и, в особенности, развлечения, беседы с людьми вернее всякой болезни подкосят мне силы, обратят меня в щепку[12] (Babuk 2001: 385–386)

[11] Alcuni dicono che io sia un pesce, e hanno ragione: a tratti mi comporto davvero come un pesce. Altri sostengono che io sia, al contrario, la passione incarnata, e anche loro hanno ragione: ci sono periodi in cui divento l'incarnazione della passionalità. Alcuni mi definiscono buona, come un angelo celeste, altri mi considerano cattiva come un diavolo. C'è chi mi ritiene magnanima e chi, invece, un'egoista senza cuore […]. E in tutto questo, ciò che è strano e spaventoso, è che hanno tutti ragione.

[12] Quando mi hanno tagliato l'ascesso sono persino svenuta, ma non ho urlato nemmeno una volta, né mi sono spaventata. Tuttavia, una qualsiasi sciocchezza, come un raffreddore o una tosse, mi irrita a tal punto da provocarmi febbri nervose. Se i denti mi fanno molto male, sopporto tranquillamente, ma se il dolore è lieve, mi tormento e impazzisco. Qualunque privazione – la fame, il freddo, indossare stracci – la tollero con calma e serenità. Anche il lavoro più faticoso, con notti insonni, non mi pesa affatto. Ma il fruscio delle carte, il cigolio di una porta, lo stridio di un ventilatore o il pigolio dei bambini mi mandano fuori di testa. La mancan-

Le nuove donne di quegli anni, le *nigilistki,* sono donne che scelgono di privarsi della propria femminilità e, se portatrici di ideali moderni si sentono più vicine alla sfera maschile. La defemminilizzazione del ruolo femminile è visibile anche negli scritti di Kairova:

> Один мой знакомый фельетонист постоянно подсмеивался надо мной, говоря, что я — ошибка природы: мне предназначалось свыше родиться мужчиной и жить в средние века, эпоху романтических похождений и ежедневных катастроф, а я родилась женщиной, да еще во вторую половину 19 столетия, когда все так убийственно обыденно, однообразно и старо. В этой шутке есть своя доля правды[13] (Babuk 2001: 380)

Il *Diario* di Kairova si distingue per un tono ancora più dialogico, nevrotico, frammentario, discontinuo e diagnostico rispetto all'*Autobiografia*. Lo psichiatra che l'ha in cura, Otton Čečott, le propone di osservare gli altri pazienti e scrivere riflessioni al riguardo. Kairova accetta e redige le sue osservazioni, ma mantiene un atteggiamento sfrontato nei confronti del medico, con l'intenzione chiara di non consegnargli mai il testo.

Il *Diario* ha una storia editoriale singolare. Nikolaj Leskov aveva pianificato di pubblicarlo, arrivando persino a scriverne una prefazione, ma il progetto non si concretizzò. Solo nel 2005 il testo viene finalmente pubblicato, come allegato a un articolo di Ol'ga Makarova che analizza il rapporto tra Aleksej Suvorin e Kairova, soffermandosi in particolare sull'influenza di quest'ultima sulla biografia di Suvorin e sulla storia editoriale di *Novoe vremja*.

Nel *Diario*, Kairova lascia emergere un amore malato verso il suo medico, un evidente processo di *transfert* che sfocia in epi-

za di spazio, di sole e, soprattutto, di svaghi e conversazioni con le persone, più di qualsiasi malattia, mi prosciugano le energie e mi fanno sentire come una scheggia impazzita.

[13] Un mio conoscente, che scriveva feuilleton, si burlava costantemente di me, dicendo che sono un errore della natura: ero destinata dall'alto a nascere uomo e a vivere nel Medioevo, un'epoca di imprese romantiche e catastrofi quotidiane, ma sono nata donna, e per giunta nella seconda metà del diciannovesimo secolo, quando tutto è così mortalmente banale, monotono e vecchio. In questa battuta, devo ammettere, c'è chiaramente un fondo di verità.

sodi di gelosia morbosa, contribuendo a rendere il testo un documento straordinario nella sua complessità emotiva e psicologica:

> Приступила! Приступила к писанию своих наблюдений над больными. Только что из этого может выйти доброго? То есть я говорю, что может выйти, не в том смысле, что это не послужит Вам (я не буду писать Вы с большой буквы, можно!) ни к чему, а в том, что это окажется ниже не только того, чего бы я хотела, но даже ниже того, чего вы ожидаете, может быть. А что это будет так, в этом уверена, и вот почему: начиная писать, я прежде всего ухватила лист бумаги, разграфила его аккуратнейшим манером, надписала рубрики, сон, аппетит и подобное, поставила имена и… увидела, что я ровнехонько ничего не знаю ни о сне, ни об аппетите ни одной больной, за исключением двух-трех, много четырех! Вот тебе и наблюдения! А уж кто, кажется, наблюдает больше меня! […] Вы знаете, что мне трудно начать, но еще труднее, раз начавши, остановиться, поэтому я решилась поболтать (Вы простите мне это непочтительное выражение? на бумаге. Право, я думаю, ничего. Ничего, да?[14] (Makarova 2005: 111)

Il processo di *transfert* che Kairova vive nei confronti del suo medico è evidente nel testo a varie riprese. Quando, ad esempio, lei sente che lui si comporta in modo diverso con un'altra pa-

[14] Ho iniziato! Ho iniziato a scrivere le mie osservazioni sui malati. Ma cosa può venirne fuori di buono? Voglio dire, cosa può uscirne? Non intendo dire che non vi sarà utile in alcun modo – non scriverò "Voi" con la lettera maiuscola, posso? – ma che sarà comunque al di sotto non solo di ciò che vorrei, ma anche di quello che voi vi aspettereste, credo. Ne sono certa, e so perché: quando ho cominciato a scrivere, ho prima di tutto preso un foglio di carta, l'ho sistemato con grande precisione, ho creato delle colonne – sonno, appetito, eccetera – ho scritto i nomi e… mi sono resa conto di non sapere assolutamente nulla sul sonno o sull'appetito di nessuno, tranne forse due, tre o quattro pazienti! Alla faccia dell'osservazione! E chi mai potrebbe essere meno osservatore di me? […] Sapete, mi è difficile iniziare, ma una volta cominciato, smettere è ancora più difficile; quindi, ho deciso di chiacchierare (mi perdonate per questa espressione poco rispettosa sulla carta? In fondo, credo, non importa. Non importa, vero?).

ziente, la Kolzakova, e Kairova inizia a impazzire di gelosia:

> Знаете что? Я вас ненавижу. То есть, кажется, еще не ненавижу, но возненавижу непременно и в самом скором времени, возненавижу за то, что никогда никто — даже тот, кто именно хотел этого, — не доказывал мне с такою поразительной очевидностью мою собственную несостоятельность. […] Вы давно уже не даете мне темы, не рассказываете, где бываете, кого видите, о чем говорите, что слышите, какое мнение подаете. Бог вам судья. Чем я виновата, что вы вообразили меня несравненно лучше, чем я есть на самом деле. Я тоже в значительной степени разочаровалась в вас, да ведь не переменилась же я к вам, даже не перестала любить вас, хотя уважать стала на 50% меньше. Господи помилуй, этот человек не даст мне успокоиться! Ну не дальше как сегодня утром я торжествовала победу по поводу совершеннейшего своего равнодушия к его ни с чем не сообразным выходкам, нет-с, он вечером сумел-таки отыскать во мне забытую слабую струнку и заставить ее болезненно прозвучать[15] (Makarova 2005: 112–118)

Una delle cose più straordinarie di questi testi è l'innovazione ideologica. Kairova presenta delle critiche rivoluzionarie sulla Chiesa, che troveranno spazio solo dopo quasi trent'anni in *Voskresen'e (Resurrezione)* (1899) di Lev Tolstoj:

[15] Sapete cosa? Vi odio. O meglio, mi sembra di non odiarvi ancora, ma vi odierò inevitabilmente molto presto, perché nessuno – nemmeno chi ci ha provato – mi ha mai fatto percepire la mia inferiorità con una tale chiarezza. […] È da molto tempo che non mi date uno spunto, non mi dite dove siete stato, chi avete visto, di cosa avete parlato, cosa sentite, che opinioni avete. Sono affari vostri. Ma io cosa c'entro se mi avete immaginata incomparabilmente migliore di quello che sono in realtà? Anch'io, sapete, sono rimasta molto delusa da voi, ma il mio atteggiamento nei vostri confronti non è cambiato, non ho nemmeno smesso di amarvi, anche se il mio rispetto per voi si è dimezzato. Dio abbia pietà, quest'uomo non mi dà tregua! Proprio stamattina festeggiavo la mia vittoria per l'indifferenza con cui ho accolto le sue battute inappropriate. Ma questa sera, ancora una volta, è riuscito a trovare la corda più debole in me e a farla vibrare dolorosamente.

Верите ли, как мне противно стоять в церкви, какое горькое чувство унижения испытываю я там! [...] Смотрела я на всю эту комедию богослужения, где люди пресерьезно, с неким благоговением даже проделывают раз навсегда заученные штуки, движения, шаги на данном месте в данную сторону, выкрикивают более или менее нелепые слова, по команде становятся на колени, по команде крестятся, заранее зная, что вот тут надо молиться с благоговением, а здесь можно и без благоговения, смотрела я и думала: Господи, чем это лучше сцены и актеров, чем наше каждение курительницей с ладаном выше китайского жжения золотых и серебряных бумажек! Но Бог с ними — я не хочу никого осуждать, да и смешно было бы пускаться в детские рассуждения о нецелесообразности обрядов, — еще бы я стала доказывать, что днем светло, а ночью темно[16] (Makarova 2005: 112–113)

Kairova aveva di certo delle ambizioni letterarie e probabilmente pensava di pubblicare questi testi. Una lettera ad Aleksej Suvorin – figura di spicco nella Russia di fine Ottocento – tradisce questa intenzione: "Романы я писать не умею. Пробовала в былые времена, да никогда ничего не выходило. Вот воспоминания 'Из тюрьмы' и 'Из дома умалишенных' могла бы написать"[17] (*Archiv A.S., A.A., M.A. Suvorinyc*h, f. 459. op. 1, l.

[16] Credetemi! Stare in una chiesa mi è così odioso, che provo un sentimento amaro di umiliazione ogni volta! [...] Guardavo tutta questa commedia della messa, dove la gente, con un'aria serissima e una sorta di riverenza, ripeteva ciò che aveva imparato a memoria: i movimenti, i passi in un dato posto al momento giusto, gridando parole più o meno ridicole, inginocchiandosi a comando, facendosi il segno della croce a comando, sapendo esattamente che ora bisognava pregare con riverenza e, più tardi, si poteva pregare senza. Guardavo e pensavo: Signore, in cosa tutto questo è migliore di un palcoscenico e dei suoi attori? In cosa il nostro sventolare un incensiere è meglio dei cinesi che bruciano foglietti d'oro e d'argento? Ma Dio sia con loro! Non voglio giudicare nessuno, e sarebbe ridicolo entrare in discussioni infantili sull'inutilità dei rituali: ci manca solo che mi metta a dimostrare che di giorno è luminoso e di notte è buio.

[17] I romanzi io non so scriverli. Ho provato in tempi passati, ma non n'è mai uscito niente. Ecco, le memorie 'Dalla prigione' e 'Dalla casa psichiatrica' potrei scriverle.

5). Inoltre, l'autrice scrive a Nikolaj Leskov e, parrebbe, con la decisa intenzione di diventare sua assistente letteraria. Presso l'Archivio Statale Russo di Letteratura e Arte (RGALI) è conservata una favola che Kairova scrive per lo scrittore, *Skazka o nužde: Flamandskaja legenda* (Favola di Necessità: Leggenda fiamminga), accompagnata da una lettera:

> Простите меня, дорогой Николай Семенович: вместо понедельника присылаю Вам сию чепуху в четверг. Перерыла все сундуки, все уголки, где можно было заподозрить рукопись, не нашла - пришлось написать вновь. Вышел остов, канва, по которой Вы, если оная канва пригодится Вам, можете, Вашей мастерской, художественной рукой, вышить прелестнейшие и разнообразные узоры. До свиданья - льщу себе надеждой, что до скорого[18] (l. 1)

La favola, come sottolinea la stessa Kairova, è concepita come un canovaccio, un soggetto letterario destinato allo scrittore. Il testo è intriso di motivi folclorici e popolari. Tra questi spicca l'apparizione di San Nicola Taumaturgo, che si reca da Necessità (*Nužda*) per metterne alla prova le virtù e ricompensarla. San Nicola è una figura profondamente radicata nel folklore russo (Zabylin 2014). Un altro elemento significativo è la personificazione della morte, che rimane simbolicamente bloccata su un pero, incapace di scendere.

Il testo riflette tratti caratteristici della poetica di Leskov: Necessità, l'eroina della favola, vive isolata dai tumulti del tempo, in un villaggio ai margini della vita sociale. Il termine Nužda non si limita al significato di "necessità" (*neobchodimost' v čem-to)*, ma include anche quello di "coercizione" (*nasilie*, p*rinuždenie*). È proprio Necessità a trattenere simbolicamente chiunque salga sul pero, costringendolo a restare in quella condizione. All'inizio, Necessità è raffigurata come una vecchietta debole e impotente; alla fine, è lei a eser-

[18] Perdonatemi, caro Nikolaj Semenovič: invece che lunedì, vi mando soltanto oggi, giovedì, questa sciocchezza. Ho rovistato nei bauli e in ogni angolo dove il manoscritto avrebbe potuto trovarsi, ma invano: ho dovuto riscriverlo da capo. Ne è uscita una nuda intelaiatura, una tela sulla quale voi, con la vostra mano di maestro e d'artista, potrete - se vi sarà utile - ricamare i più vari ornamenti. A rivederci: mi conforta la speranza che ci sentiremo presto.

citare la coercizione (p*rinuždenie*). Come spesso accade nelle opere di Leskov, Kairova inserisce un indovinello nel nome del personaggio principale, la cui soluzione si svela solo alla fine del racconto.

Nonostante le ambizioni letterarie della donna, la sua carriera in letteratura non subisce grandi sviluppi. Parallelamente, però, Kairova ottiene notorietà come giornalista di guerra durante il conflitto russo-turco (1877–1878), un ambito ancora poco esplorato nei suoi contributi. In questa fase, il noto editore, scrittore e giornalista Aleksej Suvorin manifesta un vivo interesse per Kairova[19].

Suvorin parte personalmente per la Serbia tra giugno e agosto del 1876 e, successivamente, decide di assumere Kairova come corrispondente per seguire la crisi serba. Solo sei mesi dopo il processo giudiziario che la vede coinvolta, la giornalista si trova a Belgrado. Nella Sezione Manoscritti dell'Istituto di Letteratura Russa (RO IRLI f. 268, op. *1*) e nell'Archivio Statale Russo di Letteratura e Arte (RGALI f. 268, op. 1) sono conservate lettere appassionate che Kairova scrive dal fronte a Suvorin. Sebbene le lettere di quest'ultimo siano andate perdute, quelle di Kairova suggeriscono un legame profondo tra i due, che potrebbe essere interpretato come una forma di innamoramento, bruscamente interrotto da un avvenimento a noi sconosciuto.

Il termine affettuoso "passerotto" (*golubčik*), utilizzato all'inizio della corrispondenza, lascia spazio a un tono ben diverso nell'ultima lettera, in cui emerge la brusca fine del rapporto tra Kairova e Suvorin:

> Я, Алексей Сергеевич, не заслужила от вас. Я часто говорила о вас, может быть, менее почтительно, чем следовало. Но, во-первых, вы платили мне сторицей, а во-вторых даже вы не можете указать ни одного такого действия с моей стороны, которое не было бы вполне безупречно по отношению к вам. [...] Можно прекратить с кем-нибудь дружеские отношения, я это понимаю, но оскорблять его, да еще через своего... фактотума, это непозволительно, в особенности когда этот кто-нибудь

[19] Il rapporto tra Suvorin e Kairova è analizzato ampiamente nel sopraccitato articolo di O. Makarova.

женщина и женщина одинокая[20] (l. 25 o.)

Ciò che, però, risulta particolarmente interessante in queste lettere non è tanto la vicenda personale tra Kairova e Suvorin, quanto piuttosto le impressioni dirette e vivide di Kairova sulla guerra, che appaiono più immediate ed emotive rispetto a quanto riportato dalla donna nei giornali: "здесь живешь в таком каком то вихре противоречий, неожиданностей, превращений, что поневоле голову потеряешь"[21] (l. 4). Kairova non manca di condividere con Suvorin delle curiosità belliche, a volte con toni quasi ironici:

Здесь, говорят, дождь вообще обусловливает собой нечто вроде приостановки военных действий на неопределенное время: турки боятся туфли промочить и в дождь ни за что на свете носа из лагеря не высунут, а сербы этому рады радешеньки и тоже не лезут куда не следует. Если бы не варварские жестокости совершаемые турками, так это был бы самый разлюбезный враг, какого только можно пожелать, Да уж насчет деликатности и уважения к чужому покою, так просто не знаешь, кому отдать преимущество, туркам или сербам. Дождь – все запрутся в своих шалашах и не шевелятся, ночью – ни за какие блага в мире не обеспокоят друг друга. Ночных атак, внезапных нападений не только не делают, их даже не знают[22] (l. 6 o.)

[20] Io, Aleksej Sergeevič, non mi sono meritata da parte vostra tale comportamento. È vero che ho parlato di voi, forse, in modo meno rispettoso di quanto avrei dovuto. Ma, in primo luogo, voi mi avete ripagato con abbondanza, e in secondo luogo, nemmeno voi potreste indicare un solo gesto da parte mia che non sia stato del tutto irreprensibile nei vostri confronti. [...] Si possono interrompere relazioni amichevoli, lo capisco, ma offenderle, e per giunta tramite il proprio... factotum, è inammissibile, soprattutto quando si tratta di una donna, e per di più di una donna sola.

[21] Qui si vive in un vortice di contraddizioni, imprevisti e trasformazioni tali che si perde inevitabilmente la testa.

[22] Qui, dicono, la pioggia causa una sorta di sospensione delle operazioni militari a tempo indeterminato: i turchi temono di bagnarsi le scarpe e non escono mai dall'accampamento quando piove, e i serbi ne sono ben felici e rimangono al loro posto. Se non fosse per le barbariche atrocità commesse dai turchi, sarebbero i nemici più adorabili che si possano desiderare. Per delicatezza e rispetto della quiete altrui, è difficile dire se abbiano la meglio i turchi o i

I dettagli, di cui sono ricche le corrispondenze di Kairova nei giornali, sono talvolta giustificati nelle lettere con il suo consueto tono fiero e tagliente:

> Мне скажут, как говорили уже многие, что я придаю слишком большое значение отдельным фактам, что я слишком пессимистически смотрю на вещи. Нет! Я не придаю слишком дурного большого значения единичным фактам – я только имею уши, чтобы слышать, глаза, чтобы видеть, каплю здравого смысла, чтобы понимать и много храбрости, чтобы сказать вслух то, что все сколько-нибудь порядочные люди здесь передают друг другу шопотом[23] (l. 8 o.)

Colpiscono particolarmente le riflessioni politiche, che difficilmente avrebbero superato il vaglio della censura:

> Государственным мужам всех сортов следовало бы вспоминать иногда, какую громадную ответственность они берут на себя и с одной стороны не насиловать слишком резко то, что должно прийти и придет без насилия, с другой стороны не натачивать зубы раньше времени: можно доточить до того, что они поломаются, не успев укусить[24] (l. 5 o.)

Il tono patriottico e fiero delle corrispondenze di Kairova talvolta contrasta con quello delle lettere in cui lei riflette sul senso della guerra:

> Ведь эти люди, приехавшие сюда писать, Бог их

serbi. Con la pioggia si chiudono nelle loro capanne e non si muovono; di notte non si disturbano mai a vicenda con attacchi improvvisi o incursioni. Non solo non li praticano, ma nemmeno li contemplano.

[23] Mi diranno, come molti già hanno detto, che attribuisco troppa importanza ai singoli fatti, che guardo le cose con un pessimismo eccessivo. No! Non attribuisco troppa importanza ai singoli fatti: semplicemente ho orecchie per sentire, occhi per vedere, un po' di buon senso per capire e molto coraggio per dire ad alta voce ciò che tutti qui, almeno le persone rispettabili, si sussurrano all'orecchio.

[24] Gli uomini di stato, di ogni genere, dovrebbero ricordare di tanto in tanto la responsabilità immensa che si assumono. Da un lato, non dovrebbero forzare troppo ciò che deve accadere e accadrà naturalmente; dall'altro, non dovrebbero affilare i denti troppo presto: si rischia di affilarli così tanto da spezzarli ancor prima di usarli.

> ведает что, может быть фельетонный роман, что ли? ведь это русские, соотечественники мои. А те несчастные, что пришли по их призыву из далекой родины положить свою голову за святое дело и умирающие под их бессмысленным руководством, ведь это тоже русские, тоже братья и братья тем более дорогие, что они бескорыстно, самоотверженно бросили все, чтобы прийти вот таким образом погибнуть без толку и цели[25] (l. 8)

La guerra russo-turca si intreccia direttamente con la questione femminile e segna un cambiamento duraturo nel modo di raccontare gli eventi bellici. Questo conflitto apre opportunità senza precedenti per le donne. Con gli uomini impegnati al fronte, le donne assumono un ruolo sempre più attivo nella vita sociale (McReynolds 1991). Diversamente dal conflitto franco-prussiano (1870–1871) e da quello di Crimea (1853–1856), che non avevano avuto una copertura significativa da parte della stampa, la guerra russo-turca è la prima nella storia russa contemporanea a essere ampiamente documentata attraverso reportage in presa diretta, con tirature enormi. Il fenomeno è reso possibile anche dall'introduzione del telegrafo e dall'influenza della stampa inglese, che già dal 1876 aveva iniziato a denunciare gli orrori perpetrati dai turchi in Bulgaria. In Russia, giornali come *Novoe Vremja* e *Golos* svolgono un ruolo cruciale nel plasmare l'opinione pubblica e nell'orientare la scelta dell'intervento (McReynolds 1991).

Kairova si inserisce con forza in questo scenario, contribuendo attivamente alla storia del suo paese. Scrive per i due quotidiani più influenti della capitale e, attraverso le sue corrispondenze, aiuta a ridefinire la cronaca dal fronte. Tra il 1877 e il 1878, i *reporter* presenti nei Balcani raccontano gli eventi direttamente dal campo di battaglia, infiammando l'opinione pubblica. La carriera giornalistica di Kairova è stata finora trattata in un solo

[25] Queste persone, arrivate qui per scrivere – Dio sa cosa, forse un romanzo feuilleton? – sono russi, miei connazionali. E quei poveretti che hanno risposto al loro appello, lasciando la loro terra lontana per sacrificarsi per una causa sacra e che ora muoiono sotto la loro guida insensata, anche loro sono russi, fratelli miei. Fratelli ancora più cari, perché hanno abbandonato tutto con altruismo per venire qui, per morire inutilmente, senza scopo né senso.

articolo accademico, quello di Mary Zirin (Zirin 2002). Tuttavia, esso non rende giustizia alla portata del lavoro di Kairova, che in due anni scrive più di trecento corrispondenze dal fronte. È, infatti, la prima donna russa a riportare notizie direttamente dai luoghi del conflitto. Inizia a scrivere sulla crisi serba (1876) per *Novoe Vremja* e successivamente sulla guerra russo-turca (1877–1878) anche per *Golos*. Curiosamente, in uno dei suoi primi articoli per *Novoe Vremja* utilizza forme verbali e aggettivi al femminile (A. K. 1876: 4), ma in seguito adotta esclusivamente forme grammaticali al maschile, firmandosi con pseudonimi come A. K., A. V., o N. S. Anche il contesto in cui lavora, vive e si muove è fortemente dominato da figure maschili.

Kairova si distingue come un corrispondente moderno: sa catturare l'attenzione del lettore e introduce tecniche innovative nel giornalismo. Spesso apre i suoi articoli con una domanda retorica, una strategia tipica della retorica giornalistica moderna: "согласиться ли Турция на предложения держав или не согласиться? Это теперь составляет вопрос для всей Европы, а у нас, конечно, более чем где-нибудь"[26] (N. S. 1877: 2). Nel riportare dalla Conferenza di Pace a Costantinopoli, afferma di non poter fornire tutti i dettagli stenografici, ma riesce comunque a cogliere le repliche più appassionate e vivaci:

> Эдхем-Паша в волнении вскочил с своего места.
> Да, ведь, вы требуете от нас невозможного, воскликнул он: —вы требуете самоубийства! Такие условия может предписывать только торжествующий победитель разбитому и уничтоженному врагу, а мы еще не побеждены, мы в состоянии ещё сражаться и с оружием в руках отстаивать свою независимость!
> — ну, так чего же вы хотите? В свою очередь, не вытерпел пылкий граф Шодорди: — вы хотите непременно заставить Россию объявить вам войну? Ну и прекрасно, вызовите ее на это, подите, сражайтесь; только помните, что Европа пальцем не шевельнет,

[26] Sarà d'accordo la Turchia riguardo le proposte delle altre potenze? Questa ora è la domanda che si pone tutta l'Europa, e da noi ovviamente ancora più che in altri posti.

чтобы защитить вас [27] (N. S. 1877: 2)

Kairova, lungo tutta la sua carriera, sia nelle lettere che negli articoli, dimostra una visione dell'etica giornalistica sorprendentemente moderna, imperniata sulla ricerca incessante della verità. Questa necessità di esprimere la verità, per lei vitale, si scontra spesso con limiti imposti dalle convenzioni sociali del tempo. L'autrice lamenta ripetutamente di non poter scrivere ciò che vorrebbe, attribuendo questo ostacolo non tanto alla censura ufficiale, quanto a una paura radicata nei confronti della verità (*pravdobojazn'*), che considera una caratteristica innata della società russa.

Circa dieci anni dopo la guerra russo-turca, pubblicherà *Vospominanija gazetnogo korrespondenta o Bolgarii* (*Ricordi di un corrispondente sulla Bulgaria*), un'opera in cui affronta questa tematica in modo diretto. In un episodio significativo, racconta di una conversazione con A. N. (?) Zertelevij, allora console generale russo a Filippopoli. Zertelevij le narra la storia di due satrapi usando un linguaggio esopico, un tipo di comunicazione che sorprende e sconcerta Kairova. Incredula, gli chiede come sia possibile che nei suoi dispacci diplomatici egli non si limiti a dire la verità, ma si affidi a un linguaggio carico di ambiguità e bugie. La risposta del console non è una difesa della veridicità, bensì una conferma del problema: secondo lui, in Russia nessuno è in grado di sopportare la verità. Kairova si trova d'accordo, riconoscendo lo stesso atteggiamento di disprezzo per la verità anche nel mondo giornalistico (N. S. 1886).

Questa tensione verso la verità rappresenta il *fil rouge* della carriera di Kairova, un ideale che la accompagna fino alla morte. A tal proposito, scrive a Nikolaj Michajlkovskij (*Archiv Michajlkovskogo f. 181 op. 1*), lamentandosi del fatto che *Golos* non le consenta di pubblicare un articolo sulla Galizia. La lettera rivela ancora una volta il suo impegno etico e la frustrazione per i vincoli che le vengono imposti:

[27] Edhem-Paša, visibilmente preoccupato, balzò dal suo posto. "Voi esigete da noi cose impossibili!" – esclamò. "Pretendete un suicidio! Tali condizioni può imporle solo un vincitore che trionfa su un nemico distrutto e sconfitto. Ma noi non siamo ancora vinti, possiamo ancora combattere e, con le armi in pugno, difendere la nostra indipendenza!". "Che cosa volete, dunque?" – intervenne con fervore il conte Šorodi. "Volete forse costringere la Russia a dichiararvi guerra? Bene, perfetto, costringetela, venite, combattete; ma ricordatevi che l'Europa non muoverà un dito per difendervi!"

В “Голосе” я не могу говорить о Голиции так, как я считаю нужным, добросовестный. [...] Теперь же такое умалчивание кажется мне просто преступным, преступным и перед Голицией и перед русским обществом. Позволите ли вы мне прислать вам статью об этом предмете дня? [...] Я получаю достаточно от голоса и не ради лишнего заработка пишу работы помимо его, а ради возможности сказать то, что считаю своим долгом сказать. Если бы "Голос" хоть раз напечатал одну из моих корреспонденции о Галиции, хоть раз позволил мне говорить о поляках не во враждебном тоне, я никогда не стала бы искать иного помещения для своих статей (l. 1) [28]

Le corrispondenze di Kairova si concentrano sulla quotidianità, rendendole preziose per un’analisi storico-culturale del periodo. Ad esempio, il 14 gennaio 1877, scrivendo da Costantinopoli, offre uno spaccato vivido della città: “яркое солнце обливало почты горячими лучами волшебные берега Босфора, придавая им особенно блестящий, сказочно прекрасный вид”[29] (N. S. 1877: 3). Attraverso le sue parole, possiamo percepire l’atmosfera di una città in fermento, con le persone che si preparano alla guerra e le loro impressioni sconcertate e stupite.

Nei suoi *Ricordi sulla Bulgaria* (N. S. 1866), scritti da un traghetto che la riporta in patria insieme a uno degli ultimi soldati russi rimasti nel paese, la giornalista descrive le tradizioni e le usanze del popolo bulgaro. Tra queste, menziona l’usanza di mettere sotto sale i neonati, una pratica dolorosa e talvolta letale, considerata una prova di forza

[28] Sulle pagine di *Golos* non posso scrivere della Galizia nel modo che considero giusto e coscienzioso [...]. Questo silenzio mi appare ormai una grave omissione, una mancanza tanto verso la Galizia quanto verso la società russa. Mi permettete di inviarvi un articolo su questo tema? [...] Ricevo già abbastanza da *Golos* e non scrivo altri articoli per guadagnare di più, ma per avere la possibilità di dire ciò che considero un mio dovere esprimere. Se *Golos* avesse pubblicato anche solo una delle mie corrispondenze sulla Galizia, se mi avesse consentito una sola volta di parlare dei polacchi senza ostilità, non avrei mai cercato un’altra sede editoriale.

[29] il sole luminoso inondava con raggi quasi incandescenti le rive incantate del Bosforo, donando loro un aspetto brillante e favolosamente meraviglioso.

per gli infanti. Tuttavia, i bulgari, sebbene alleati, non godono della simpatia dei soldati russi, i quali, paradossalmente, preferiscono i turchi. Secondo i soldati, l'inimicizia tra i paesi è una questione imposta dall'alto, estranea alla loro esperienza diretta. Nei racconti di Kairova, la guerra non scaturisce da ragioni innate nell'animo umano, ma è piuttosto il risultato delle decisioni del potere, lontane dai bisogni e dai desideri della gente comune.

L'autrice dimostra grande capacità di entrare in contatto con i soldati semplici, instaurando un dialogo che le consente di raccogliere informazioni preziose. Allo stesso tempo, però, sa come rapportarsi a personaggi influenti e trarre informazioni anche da fonti ufficiali, spesso discostandosi dalle versioni ufficiali dello zar (B. A. 1877, 3).

Oltre al suo legame professionale con Aleksej Suvorin, la donna può contare anche su un altro alleato importante: il drammaturgo Fedor Koni. Quest'ultimo, fino alla sua morte, sarà un punto di riferimento e una guida per la giornalista. Dalle lettere di Koni emerge chiaramente il ruolo di sostegno che il drammaturgo svolge per lei, mentre è al fronte. Spesso è Koni a consegnare i suoi articoli alle redazioni e a gestire i rapporti con gli editori. Un segno della popolarità di Kairova si coglie in una lettera di Koni datata 28 settembre 1877, in cui egli menziona i saluti calorosi del ministro della guerra Dmitrij Miljutin: "военному министру я передал твой поклон: он шлет тебе душевный привет и спасибо за память об нем"[30] (Koni 1977: 3). Oltre ai suoi contatti strategici, Kairova si distingue per l'efficienza e la velocità con cui riceve e invia informazioni. Scrive copiosamente e con rapidità, tanto da anticipare persino le fonti ufficiali dello zar, come si evince chiaramente da una lettera:

> Прежде всего расскажу тебе, какую ты наделала здесь кутерьму телеграммою об открытии парламента и речью султана. Вообрази, что военный министр в тот день при докладе государю, в 9 часов утра, завел об этих предметах речь. Государь спросил, откуда он почерпнул эти сведения, потому что он официальной телеграммы еще не получал. Министр указал на "Голос". Тотчас же потребовали No, и пошла потеха. До-

[30] Ho riportato il tuo inchino al ministro della guerra: ti manda un caloroso saluto e un ringraziamento per esserti ricordata di lui.

несение посольства пришло только в 4 часа. Можешь представить последствия. “Голос” с тех пор появляется в императорский кабинет в 8 часов[31] (Koni 1977: 3)

Kairova cessa la sua attività di corrispondente a metà maggio del 1880, ma continuerà a scrivere fino alla morte (1888) per riviste molto prestigiose: *Vestnik Evropy*, *Russkaja mysl’*, *Delo*, collaborando anche come traduttrice per *Istoričeskij vestnik (*Zirin 2002: 154–155) fino agli ultimi giorni della sua vita.

Tra i testi della piena maturità, i più significativi sono senza dubbio i già citati *Ricordi dalla Bulgaria* (N. S. 1886: 1-54), oltre a una serie di articoli su George Sand, pubblicati rispettivamente il 3 marzo, il 5 maggio e il 6 giugno 1883 (N. S. 1883). Questi testi sono dedicati alla presentazione delle corrispondenze della scrittrice francese e riflettono una profonda ammirazione e rispetto per George Sand, figura iconica tra le nuove donne di fine secolo. Kairova dedica a Sand scritti dettagliati e ampi, dimostrando ancora una volta una notevole conoscenza del panorama politico europeo. I suoi articoli rappresentano una vibrante difesa delle idee politiche di Sand, che la scrittrice analizza e contestualizza con magistrale abilità nella complessa situazione politica francese.

Nastas’ja Vasil’evna Kairova muore di *angina pectoris* il 23 febbraio 1888, a soli 44 anni (*Russkaja mysl’* 1881: 201). La sua morte non passa inosservata: colleghi e contemporanei la ricordano con necrologi commossi, ricchi di stima e dispiacere (*Kolos’ja 1888: 302; Delo* 1888: 87-88). La scrittrice viene seppellita al Nikol’skoe kladbišče, ma la sua tomba, con ogni probabilità lasciata in condizioni di abbandono, oggi non è più riconoscibile.

Nastas’ja Kairova è una figura pionieristica. I suoi testi autobiografici e giornalistici non solo riflettono una personalità com-

[31] Prima di tutto, lascia che ti racconti la confusione che hai creato qui con il telegramma sull'apertura del parlamento e il discorso del sultano. Immagina: il ministero della guerra, lo stesso giorno, durante il rapporto al sovrano alle 9 del mattino, ha cominciato a parlare di questa questione. Il sovrano ha chiesto da dove avessero preso tali informazioni, visto che non aveva ancora ricevuto i telegrammi ufficiali. Il ministro ha indicato come fonte *Golos*. Immediatamente il sovrano ha preteso di vedere il numero del giornale, e da lì è cominciato il divertimento. Il comunicato ufficiale del consolato è arrivato solo alle quattro del pomeriggio. Puoi immaginare le conseguenze: *Golos* era sulla scrivania dell’imperatore già dalle otto del mattino.

plessa e innovativa, ma sfidano anche le convenzioni di una cultura letteraria dominata dagli uomini. Come sottolinea Irina Savkina, le donne di quell'epoca dovevano trovare un modo per far sentire la propria voce in un panorama culturale che le relegava a una posizione subordinata o le costringeva entro paradigmi letterari patriarcali (Savkina 2023). Kairova si distingue per il suo rifiuto di queste limitazioni, dando vita a una narrazione autobiografica che mescola la libertà sessuale, maternità conflittuale e introspezione psicologica.

Nel suo lavoro autobiografico, Kairova adotta un tono deciso e tagliente, lontano dalla compassione e dalla passività che spesso caratterizzano i ritratti femminili dell'epoca. La letteratura del tempo che affronta temi di psichiatria e patologia è quasi esclusivamente maschile, e quando tratta delle donne, le riduce a oggetti di analisi. Kairova, invece, prende parola sulla propria malattia e analizza la propria psiche in modo diretto e senza freni.
Il suo ruolo come corrispondente di guerra è altrettanto significativo. In un campo dominato dagli uomini, Kairova dà un volto femminile al giornalismo bellico, offrendo una visione priva di retorica patriottica e ricca di riflessioni personali sul dolore della guerra. Le sue lettere ad Aleksej Suvorin rappresentano una testimonianza preziosa, capace di fornire una narrazione alternativa e più autentica degli eventi bellici. Nonostante ciò, Kairova rimane una figura marginale nella storiografia letteraria, condividendo il destino di molte altre autrici del suo tempo.
Come sottolinea Irina Savkina (Savkina 2023), l'accettazione delle donne nella letteratura russa, intrapresa da Nikolaj Karamzin, rappresenta solo un'apparente apertura alla scrittura femminile, poiché al contempo confina le donne entro ruoli predefiniti e subordinati. Alcune donne, però, reagiscono a queste restrizioni sfidando le convenzioni di genere, e Kairova non fa eccezione. Pur non potendo essere definita propriamente femminista, la sua vita e la sua opera incarnano idee antipatriarcali e un destino fuori dagli schemi, che rivendicano una libertà individuale rara per l'epoca. Come osserva Irina Jukina (Jukina 2024), nel periodo dal 1858 al 1905, il movimento femminile in Russia non ha ancora una direzione univoca o organizzata (*napravlennost'*), e dunque è impossibile parlare di femminismo o di idee femmini-

ste. Le donne, però, trovavano il modo di trasformare le proprie vite in veri e propri manifesti di ribellione e autodeterminazione. Riscoprire figure come Kairova è essenziale per arricchire lo studio della letteratura femminile e delle autobiografie del periodo tardoimperiale. Creare un corpus dedicato a queste opere consentirebbe di ampliare il panorama della prosa confessionale, oggi dominato da voci maschili. La vita e l'opera di Kairova, intrecciando temi di malattia, crimine, guerra e identità, aprono la strada a una rivalutazione delle narrazioni femminili, sottolineando la necessità di considerarle fondamentali per una comprensione più completa delle dinamiche culturali e sociali della Russia di fine Ottocento.

Bibliografia

Materiali d'archivio

Alfavitnaja kniga priema i vypiski pacientov bol'nicy Sv. Nikolaja Čudotvorca. Medicinskaja čast'. 1870–1920 gg., Sankt-Peterburg, CGIA, f. 216, op. 3.

Kairova, Nastas'ja. "*Skazka o nužde*: Flamandskaja legenda", Pis'mo N.V. Kairovoj N.S. Leskovu, pervaja polovina 1870-kh; Priloženie: konvert s nadpisej N.S. Leskova "Legenda o gruš'e, Moskva, RGALI, f. 275. op. 1. Ed. chr. 347. 30 l.

"*Pis'ma (29) Kairovoj A.V. k Suvorinu A.S.*", Archiv A.S., A.A., M.A. Suvorinych, Sankt-Peterburg, OR IRLI, f. 268. op. 1. Ed. chr. 28.

"*Pis'ma* Kairovoj A.V. k Suvorinu A.S.", 1877–1880-e, Moskva, RGALI, f. 459. op. 1. Ed. chr. 1667 14.05.

"*Pis'mo* Kairovoj A.N. k Michajlovskomu N.K.", Archiv N.K. Michajlovskogo, Sankt-Peterburg, OR IRLI, f. 181. op. 1. ed. chr. 287. ot 30.10 (b. g.) l. 1–2.

A. K. 'Vnešnie izvestija. Belgrad, 5-go oktobrja', *Novoe vremja*, 6 oktjabrja 1876, 218.

B. A. 'Vnešnie izvestija. Konstantinopol', 27 aprelja (9 maja)', *Novoe vremja*, 28 aprelja 1877.

Babuk 2001: Babuk, Oleg. 'Avtobiografičeskij očerk A. V. Kairovoj', in *Istoria otečestva v svidetel'stvach i dokumentach XVIII-XX vekach: Al'manach,* a cura di Oleg Babuk, Moskva, (Studija TRITE: Ros. Archiv), 375–387.

Bogdanov 2005: Bogdanov, Konstantin. *Vrači, pazienty, čitateli: Patografičeskie teksty russkoj kul'tury XVIII–XIX vekov* (Moskva: OGI).

Ekštut 2010: Ekštut, Sergej *Rossija pered golgofoj: Epocha Velikich reform* (Moskva: Veče).

Giolicyn 1889: Golicyn, Nikolaj. *Bibliografičeskii slovar' russkich pisatel'nic* (Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografija B. S. Balaševa).

Holmgren 1996: Holmgren, Beth. 'Gendering the Icon: Marketing Women Writers in Fin-de-siècle Russia', in *Russia. Women. Culture*, a cura di Helena Goscilo e Beth Holmgren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 321–346.

Jukina 2024: Jukina, Irina. *Ot dam-patroness do ženotdelovok. Istorija ženskogo dviženija Rossii* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie).

McReynolds 1991: McReynolds, Louise. *The News under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

Makarova 2005: Makarova, Olga. 'Sud'ba kakim-to rokovym obrazom stavit menja poperek Vašej dorogi…: «Delo Kairovoj» i ego sled v biografii A. S. Suvorina. Dnevnik Nastas'i Vasil'evny Kairovoj v sumasšedšem dome', *NLO*, 75: 110–121.

N. S. 'Žorž Sand o francuzskoj revoljucii 1848 g. i o eja dejateljach', *Russkaja mysl'*, kniga 3, 1883, 220–254; kniga 5, 1883, 197–229; kniga 6, 1883, 63–94.

N. S. 'Vospominanija gazetnovo korrespondenta o Bolgarii. (Pis'ma k izdatelju). Pis'mo pervoe.', *Delo*, ijunja 1886, 2.

N. S. 'Zagraničnye izvestija. Konstantinopol', 2-go janvarja, *Golos*, 3 janvarja 1877, 3.

N. S. 'Zagraničnye izvestija. Konstantinopol', 14-go janvarja, *Golos*, 16 gennaio 1877, 16.

'Nekrolog', *Delo*, 1888, 1.

'Nekrolog', *Kolos'ja*, 1888, 3.

Nikolozi 2019: Nicolosi Riccardo 2019. *Vyroždenie. Literatura i psichiatrija v russkoj kul'ture konca XIX veka* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie).

Ponomarev 1891: Ponomarev, Ivan. 1891. *Naši pisatel'nicy: (bibliografičeskij slovar' russkich pisatel'nic, knjazja N. N. Golicyna)* (Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografija Imperatorskoj Akademii Nauk).

Reitblat 2009: Rejtblat, Abram. 2009. *Ot Bovy k Bal'montu* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie).

Savkina 2023: Savkina, Irina. 2023. *Puti, pereput'ja i tupiki russkoj ženskoj literatury* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie).

Suvorin 2000: Suvorin, Aleksej. 2000. *Dnevnik* (Moskva, Londra: The Garnett Press).

Worman 2004: Wortman, Richard S. 2004. *Vlastiteli i sudii. Razvitie pravovogo soznaniia v imperatorskoi Rossii* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie).

Zabylin 2014: Zabylin, Matvej. 2014. *Russkij narod. Ego obyčai, obrjady, predanija, i poezija* (Moskva: Institut russkoj civilizacii).

Zajončkovskij 1964: Zajončkovskij, Petr. 1964. *Krizis samoderžavija na rubeže 1870–1880 godov* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta).

Zirin 2002: Zirin, Mary. 2002. '"A Particle of Our Soul": Prerevolutionary Biography by Russian Women Writers', in *A History of Women's Writing in Russia*, a cura di Adele Marie Barker e Jehanne M. Gheith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 239–255.

Materials and Discussions

Michela Romano

Interview with Egana Dzhabbarova

Egana Dzhabbarova is a poetess, a novelist, and PhD. She was born and raised in Ekaterinburg by Azerbaijani parents. Her life has been characterized by continuous moves from Russia to Istanbul, Baku and then Germany (with a year-long stay in Taiwan in 2022).
She is the author of the novels Руки женщин моей семьи были не для письма (*The Hands of My Family's Women Were Not for Writing,* No Kidding Press, Dzhabbarova 2023), Дуа за неверного (*Dua for the Infidel*, NLO, Dzhabbarova 2024), *Terra Nullius* (NLO, Dzhabbarova 2025) and of the poetry collections Босфор (*Bosphorus*, Dzhabbarova 2015), Поза Ромберга (*Romberg's Pose*, Dzhabbarova 2017), Красная кнопка тревоги (*Red Alert Button*, Dzhabbarova 2020) and the collection Деколониальность: настоящее и будущее. Сборник статей (*Decoloniality: Present and Future,* Gorizontal', Dzhabbarova 2022). Her poems have been shortlisted for the Arkadii Dragomoshchenko Prize (2019) and published in international anthologies, such as F-Letter (Britain), DEARS (Switzerland), and PENopp (Sweden).
In this interview, Dzhabbarova reflects on autofiction as a form of resistance, on Russophone literature beyond the imperial canon, and on writing in Russian in the context of war, exile, and dissent. The interview was conducted by Michela Romano in May 2025.

Michela Romano: In the literary world you construct, the body is both the object and subject of observation and analysis, especially the female body. The body is detected, its codes are extracted, and the various social forces passing through it, such as patriarchy, colonialism, power, identity, stereotypes, norms, and languages, are closely studied. What is clear in your poetic vision is that concepts such as coloniality and decoloniality play a crucial role in the experimentation and creation of new meanings. The aim of this dialogue is to understand how your biography is intertwined with your works against the background of recent developments in Russophone literature.
Could you begin by telling us about your life journey and your relationship with literature? How does your work reflect your own inner world?
Egana Dzhabbarova: I've always loved reading—ever since early childhood. Words felt like the safest place on earth; they helped me make sense of events and my own emotions. I don't fully understand

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-014
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

why I was drawn to books—reading wasn't something encouraged at home. I think, in part, it was the influence of my grandfather, whose house had a small library, even if it was mostly medical books.
As a child, I signed up at the local children's library and began visiting it regularly. I loved picking out different books, especially Japanese or Spanish ones, and reading them while hiding behind a big armchair in the living room. I quickly developed a deep affection for Orhan Pamuk and devoured everything he had written. Around that same time—when I was about ten—I began writing stories of my own. I would fill school notebooks with tales that mixed imaginary events with characters borrowed from other books or invented by me.
My literary awareness began to deepen in high school and especially during my time at university. Studying philology pushed me to take literature and language more seriously. I began publishing my work as a student—first a short story, then poetry. Around that time, I also immersed myself in contemporary poetic practices and began reading writers like Lida Yusupova, Galina Rymbu, Oksana Vasyakina, Anna Alchuk, Warsan Shire, Athena Farrokhzad, and many others.
That period marked a turning point in my relationship with language: I realized that words could be radically different from one another, and still equally powerful, equally enriching. I hope that my writing, among other things, can become a space of empathy and coexistence for different human voices and experiences, including those voices that have previously been denied subjecthood.
MR: Your written work, including your poetry as well as the most recent novels you wrote, seems to absorb aspects of your biography, and vice versa. You are a composite of many things, each of which comprises a key part of your work as well, including religion, family, identity, language, and love.
The "particular" you describe always reverberates within society in general, and there is always a sort of movement of "expansion" towards the external world, as well as a "retreat" to your inner experience, your inner self.
Could you explain what you believe to be the function of literature? How does autofiction enter your literary world? What are the themes you feel closest to and that you consider fundamental?
ED: The question of autofiction is truly important and often provocative. Authors who write autofiction are frequently met with the same kind of criticism: that it's too raw, too personal, too entangled with trauma or suffering, and therefore somehow exploitative. I find such

accusations absurd. All literature, in one way or another, draws from the fabric of the writer's life; autofiction simply makes that connection more transparent.

That said, I believe it's crucial to remember that literature is not art therapy or emotional sublimation. A text shouldn't be a dumping ground for feelings—it should still function as a crafted aesthetic work, something shaped and purposeful, not just a private story laid bare. Good literature gives more than just personal confession; it offers reflection, insight, resonance.

For instance, in my first novel, I wasn't just telling a story—I was trying to represent the experience of living with a serious illness, to reflect on the patriarchy embedded in cultural systems, to question what we inherit beyond biology. In the second novel, I explored masculinity and how it affects men, as well as the relationship with one's country and city, among other themes.

It's difficult to name just one set of topics that define my work. But I would say that recurring motifs include: the relationship with culture and language, the relationship with the body, and the notion of inheritance—both tangible and intangible.

MR: In your view, how can autofiction be leveraged as a strategy to resist political repression? How do you deal with the vulnerability that this type of writing usually triggers?

ED: I believe it's no coincidence that many authoritarian regimes and dictatorships are hostile to autofiction or attempt to censor it. This genre often gives voice to the lived experiences of marginalized and oppressed communities—those who are systematically denied the right to speak or to be represented. In that sense, autofiction is a form of resistance.

At the same time, this kind of writing is incredibly vulnerable. It demands honesty—sometimes to the point of confession—and that isn't easy for me as a writer. In fact, I often wish I could write in a less exposed way. But perhaps this openness is simply the nature of my writing, something I can't (and maybe shouldn't) escape.

MR: On this matter "Дуа за неверного" (*Dua for the Infidel*, Dzhabbarova 2024), your last novel, among others, seems to strike this delicate balance between intimate personal family experiences and the broader destiny of Russia. How is this story, in particular, related to you, to Russia, and, more generally, to the broader world around you?

ED: I first conceived this novel many years ago, but it's clear to me now that all those years were necessary—to live through grief and the loss of

my brother. In many ways, it was his death that pushed me to examine our relationship more closely, to look at it with care and attention. Through that process, I came to understand something unexpected: my brother was, in many ways, a reflection of the country I was born and raised in.

His complicated relationship with that country—with his origins—may ultimately have played a role in his death. Alongside this personal story, the novel also explores my own relationship with Russia. I had just returned from a year in Taiwan, and that distance allowed me to see things I hadn't been able to see before. In 2022, I was fortunate enough to find a job at National Chengchi University [in Taipei] and work there as a teacher of Russian as a foreign language. It was an amazing and happy year, but, unfortunately, circumstances forced me to return to Russia. After my return, I focused on writing my second novel and realized that, to some extent, my return was inevitable. It was impossible to write about my brother outside of Russia.

MR: Your perspectives on minorities, queer and feminist issues are mirrored in your poetry contributions and prose such as "Ф-письмо: Новая русская феминистская поэзия" (F-Letter: New Russian Feminist Poetry, Rymbu et al. 2020) and the novel "Руки женщин моей семьи были не для письма" (The Hands of My Family's Women Were Not for Writing, Dzhabbarova 2023). If we take decolonisation to consist of more than merely geographical events, how is it possible to decolonise a culture, a language, or a gender? What is the role of feminist literature in this decolonizing process?

ED: It is important to distinguish between *decolonization* as a political process—in which a colony gains independence—and *decoloniality* as an ongoing critical practice of rethinking dominant norms and recovering suppressed aesthetic and experiential frameworks.

At the same time, it's worth acknowledging that the concept of decoloniality is not without its critiques—Tuck and Yang's well-known article "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor" (Tuck et al. 2012) is a striking example. Nonetheless, I believe that decoloniality—as a reconfiguration of aesthetic, academic, cultural, and sensory norms—is of vital importance.

In this sense, the emergence of new experiences, languages, and voices in literature and culture—voices previously denied the right to be heard or to exist—is essential. Alternative imaginaries and modes of perception that have been excluded from the canon are crucial for re-

shaping the world and unsettling coloniality as a dominant framework of values.

From this perspective, a feminist lens, or writing that emerges from within feminism, should also be seen as contributing to the resistance against coloniality, challenging inherited structures, and expanding the space for new forms of knowing and feeling.

MR: How have you navigated this process in your own life and work? Do you still "want blue eyes"?[1]

ED: Studying the works of postcolonial theorists and decolonial thinkers has, in many ways, been a liberating experience for me—or more precisely, it has prompted a shift in how I relate to myself, my cultural heritage, and the forms of internalized coloniality I carry.

What matters deeply to me is the ongoing process of reassembling my own aesthetics in writing—allowing the text to become a space where multiple practices, experiences, languages, and bodies can coexist.

MR: In an essay published online in 2024 for Swedish Penn entitled "Between" you affirm having begun

to love [the Russian] language, because it gives me literature. It gives me Virginia Woolf, Marina Tsvetaeva, Ursula Le Guin, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Warsan Shire, Athena Farrokhzad – they speak and their fancy Russian words hit me with an arrow of recognition. I read all letters by Tsvetaeva in one gulp, as people drink vodka, and would [will] forever remember a phrase she wrote February 25, 1931, in a letter to Anna Teskova: 'Here I am not needed. There I am impossible'.[2]

Can you expand on this reflection by explaining the role of the Russian language in your life, particularly with respect to the influence of the wartime situation of Ukraine? I am referring to texts such as "мёртвое тело языка" (*The Dead Body of Language*, 2022).[3]

ED: It so happened that Russian became the primary language of my writing, my work, and my everyday life. I was born and raised in Russia, and world literature first reached me through Russian translations. Yet

[1] The topic of eye colour is addressed in the novel *Руки женщин моей семьи были не для письма* (*The Hands of My Family's Women Were Not for Writing*, Dzhabbarova 2023), where the desire to have blue eyes instead of brown is construed as a way of escaping imposed body canons and conforming to a more broadly acceptable and admired appearance.

[2] https://www.penopp.org/articles/between [accessed 1 December 2025].

[3] Poem by the author. See https://discours.io/expo/poetry/anything/russian-poetry-against-violence [accessed 1 December 2025].

in recent years, political events have laid bare the historical violence embedded within the Russian language—violence stemming from the legacy of a former (or perhaps ongoing?) empire and its relationship with other nations.

Still, I want to believe that the Russian language can become a tool for dialogue—or rather, dialogues—a space of attentive listening and mutual respect. I'm reminded here of the well-known debate between two African writers, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe, on the use of the English language in literature. I feel close to Achebe's belief in the potential of English to serve meaningful purposes. At the same time, he never abandoned his native language, even within novels written in English, always retaining expressions rooted in his own linguistic heritage.

I'd like to believe that something similar might one day be possible for Russian—that it, too, could become a language of coexistence rather than domination.

MR: Definitions about Russian/Russophone literature continue to proliferate and become more complex each day. Nevertheless, how do you see the distinction between Russophone literatures and Russian literature? Is this a relevant dichotomy when speaking about a literature of dissent? How do you feel about belonging to the body of literature of resistance?

ED: The distinction between Russian literature and Russian-language (Russophone) literature lies primarily in their relation to the centre—to political authority, to the cultural canon, and to language as an institution. Russian literature, especially in its imperial and post-imperial formation, has historically operated as a state-driven and national project, where language and literature were closely tied to ideas of identity, mission, and power.

Russian-language literatures, by contrast, often emerge outside the centre—on its geographical, political, or cultural peripheries. These are literatures written in Russian but not necessarily "within" or "for" Russia. They may be produced by authors from Central Asia, the Caucasus, Ukraine, Belarus, or diasporic communities. What defines them is a multiplicity of perspectives, a direct engagement with trauma, displacement, and the deconstruction of linguistic norms and cultural dominance.

When it comes to the literature of dissent, especially in today's political context, I believe this dichotomy is not only relevant but also essential. It highlights the fact that the Russian language is not the property of a

single state, and that writing in Russian can be a tool of resistance rather than complicity. Russian-language literatures that stand in opposition to militarized or authoritarian regimes create alternative spaces—for memory, empathy, critique, and reflection.

For me personally, belonging to this literature of resistance is also a poetic, ethical, and embodied position. It is a space where language aches, where it undergoes doubt, translation, and reimagining. I write in Russian, but not from "within" Russia. The Russian language for me is a space of tension, of searching, and of hope, not an instrument of power. I do not reject the language, but I do refuse to accept it as fixed or neutral. I try to rewrite it from within the personal experience of the language, to let other bodies, voices, and experiences enter its frame. That, to me, is the essence of Russophone literature: to create multiplicity where there used to be a single sanctioned truth.

MR: As the current situation continues to influence the role of literature written in Russian, as well as that of the writers themselves, do you think that a new genre of anti-war literature has emerged? If yes, what are its main features? What do you think should be the role of writers in this emerging context?

ED: On the one hand, we are indeed witnessing the emergence of publishing houses operating outside of Russia and openly releasing anti-war works—such as Freedom Letters, Vidim, Babel, and Meduza. On the other hand, I believe it is still too early to clearly define the genre of anti-war literature; this requires time and deeper critical reflection.

At the same time, it is impossible to ignore how profoundly the current political situation has affected the literary landscape. We now see the rise of so-called Z-writers who actively support the war, organize their own festivals, and publish pro-state books. Unlike most anti-war authors, they remain within the country and receive financial and institutional backing.

Yet if the 20th century has taught us anything, it is that increased political pressure often triggers the emergence of anti-war texts, independent publishers, and underground literature (samizdat). In moments of historical rupture or catastrophe, writers inevitably find themselves in a position where they must bear witness—recording the era, testifying to its horrors, and refusing to forget its victims.

MR: In one of your latest contributions, "Самая темная ночь" (*The Darkest Night*, 2025) for the book *Nein!: Stimmen aus Russland gegen den Krieg* (*Nein!: Voices from Russia Against the War,* Lebedew 2025) edited by Sergej Lebedew you speak about January 2024 and the urgent

need to escape, to the point that your leg started to become responsive again despite the chronic condition affecting it. Indeed, constant movement seems to be the narrative thread of your life, as you cross borders, and borders cross through you.

Can you describe your experience of leaving Russia and whether you identify yourself as part of this latest wave of migrant Russian/Russophone writers?

ED: In truth, it was such a deeply traumatic experience that I still find it difficult to speak or write about it. In that sense, I believe the short story I wrote offers a fairly complete account of those events—it was, in fact, written during that very same period, while I was in Istanbul.

For me, prose became a way to process that experience. My third novel will, in many ways, explore the themes of migration and homelessness. Leaving felt like a raw and aching wound; for a long time, I dreamed of home, and even now, I sometimes wake up surprised not to find myself "back there."

As for the second part of your question, I think it's important to view this process from a distance: does this so-called "wave" exist, and who defines it? In some ways, I am part of it; in others, I truly don't know where this path will lead—or how, or if, it will end.

MR: Finally, according to the information I found, it appears that you now live in Germany. How do you feel about your life there, and how do you envision your future projects, including the project of constructing your own life, your literary work, and the combination of the two that your creative work so brilliantly expresses? Also, in which languages "do you exist now"?

ED: By a twist of fate, I ended up in Germany, and it has been far from easy. On the one hand, I found myself in a space of silence—without the language, unknown, and seemingly unnecessary. For most of my time here, I have lived in very difficult everyday conditions.

On the other hand, I haven't lost hope. I'm learning German, and it has already begun to seep into my poetry. If all goes well, a German edition of my first novel will be published this autumn. I like to believe that this is just the beginning of my creative journey in this new place.

Bibliography

Dzhabbarova 2015: Dzhabbarova, Egana. 2015. *Bosfor* (Moscow: Polifem).

Dzhabbarova 2017: Dzhabbarova, Egana. 2017. *Poza Romberga* (Moscow: Svobodnoe marksistskoe izdatel'stvo).

Dzhabbarova 2020: Dzhabbarova, Egana. 2020. *Krasnaia knopka trevogi* (Moscow: Paradigma).

Dzhabbarova 2022: Dzhabbarova, Egana. 2022. *Dekolonial'nost': nastoiashchee i budushchee. Sbornik statei* (Moscow: Gorizont).

Dzhabbarova 2023: Dzhabbarova, Egana. 2023. *Ruki zhenshchin moei sem'i byli ne dlia pis'ma* (Moscow: No Kidding Press).

Dzhabbarova 2024: Dzhabbarova, Egana. 2024. *Dua za nevernogo* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie).

Dzhabbarova 2025: Dzhabbarova, Egana. 2025. *Terra nullius* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie).

Lebedew 2025: Lebedew, Sergej (ed.). 2025. *Nein! Stimmen aus Russland gegen den Krieg* (Hamburg/Berlin: Rowohlt Verlag GmbH).

Rymbu et al. 2020: Rymbu, Galina, Eugene Ostashevsky, and Ainsley Morse. 2020. *F-pis'mo: Novaia russkaia feministskaia poeziia* (New York: Isolarii).

Tuck et al. 2012: Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1-40.

Reviews

Patrizia Deotto

Scherbakova, Irina. 2024. Le mani di mio padre. Una storia di famiglia russa (Milano: Mimesis), pp. 477.

Con il libro *Le mani di mio padre. Una storia di una famiglia russa* Irina Ščerbakova, storica e saggista, ha vinto il Premio "Friuli storia" 2025. In questo libro di memorie l'autrice ripercorre, attraverso il destino di tre generazioni, i momenti cruciali che hanno caratterizzato la storia russa dall'inizio del XX secolo fino ai giorni nostri. Il periodo rivoluzionario e il successivo costituirsi dello stato sovietico, con un alternarsi di slanci entusiastici e di azioni tragiche, si riflettono nelle figure dei nonni materni che, come tanti ebrei russi, condividono con entusiasmo gli ideali della rivoluzione, liberi finalmente dalle misure discriminatorie imposte per più di un secolo dall'impero zarista.

Uno degli elementi originali che caratterizzano questo libro è la rilettura della condizione altalenante degli ebrei nella società russa e sovietica alla luce delle esperienze della famiglia dell'autrice. Il nonno materno, Jakov Roskin, fa carriera all'interno del partito bolscevico. Nel 1924, nominato consigliere politico al Comitato esecutivo del Comintern e direttore della rivista l'*Internazionale comunista*, viene trasferito a Mosca con la famiglia e si stabilisce nel famoso Hotel Lux, dove abiterà fino al 1945, scampando miracolosamente alle grandi purghe staliniane e alle repressioni dovute alle politiche antisemite, culminate nel dopoguerra (1948-1953) con la campagna contro il *cosmopolitismo*. Una campagna che lascerà per lungo tempo, anche dopo la morte di Stalin, tracce evidenti nella società sovietica. Al padre di Irina, che non si era mai identificato con le origini ebraiche, ma bensì con la cultura russa, una volta intrapresa la professione di critico letterario, fu chiesto di adottare uno pseudonimo, perché con il cognome Šindel sarebbe stato molto più difficile pubblicare i suoi scritti. E così cominciò a firmarsi con il nome di Lazar' Lazarev, non propriamente russo, ma meno eloquente.

Attraverso la figura del padre, mobilitato all'età di 18 anni sul fronte di Stalingrado e gravemente ferito – della mano destra si salvarono soltanto due dita – Irina Ščerbakova ricorda commossa il tragico destino di un'intera generazione sacrificata, traumatizzata nel corpo e nell'anima. Una generazione costretta al silenzio, a tacere sui ricordi della guerra e

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-015
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

sulle sofferenze patite, per non turbare la visione trionfante della vittoria sul nazismo. Le mani ferite del padre diventano il simbolo tangibile del prezzo incommensurabile pagato per la vittoria e della necessità di far emergere la verità sulla guerra e sulle azioni belliche, condotte spesso con crudeltà da superiori cinici e inetti, nel disprezzo della vita umana.

La questione del silenzio emerge in forme diverse nel racconto di Irina Ščerbakova: silenzio sul Gulag, silenzio sugli eccidi degli ebrei, silenzio imposto dalla censura, di cui è vittima anche il padre, redattore della *Literaturnaja gazeta*, che per i suoi articoli sulla letteratura di guerra, vista e vissuta nella sua tragicità, e per i suoi tentativi di far pubblicare testi che raccontassero quell'esperienza con autenticità, sarà costretto, negli anni dell'imperante retorica brežneviana, a lasciare il giornale.

Ad incrinare a poco a poco il silenzio si farà strada il *Disgelo* con i "rumori della modernità" e i suoi "colori", che Irina Ščerbakova ci trasmette magnificamente attraverso le sensazioni vissute da adolescente, affascinata dalle promesse di libertà e di leggerezza del vivere - promesse accolte con entusiasmo dalla gioventù dell'ambiente intellettuale a cui lei appartiene. Non meno avvincenti sono le pagine dedicate al lungo periodo della *Stagnazione* brežneviana durato due decenni, quando l'antidoto alla delusione per le speranze infrante sono la lettura dei libri in samizdat, gli incontri e le lunghe discussioni con gli amici nelle cucine davanti a una tazza di tè. Ed è proprio in quegli anni che Irina Ščerbakova, sollecitata dalla lettura in samizdat dell'*Arcipelago Gulag* di Solženicyn, comincia a raccogliere in sordina le testimonianze dei sopravissuti al Gulag, un'attività che avrebbe continuato all'interno dell'Associazione Memorial, fondata nel 1989 e insignita del premio Nobel per la Pace 2022. Tra i suoi numerosi testimoni si contano anche alcuni personaggi di spicco come Nadežda Mandel'štam, con la quale l'autrice stabilisce un dialogo intenso, alimentato da grande empatia, come emerge dalle diverse pagine dedicate a quegli incontri**.** L'interrogativo doloroso sulle circostanze della morte di Osip Mandel'štam era un tema ricorrente di quelle conversazioni, che per l'autrice erano una conferma dell'importanza del lavoro di ricostruzione della memoria da lei intrapreso.

Sulla soglia del 2000 Irina Ščerbakova avverte la necessità di coinvolgere nella riflessione sul passato le nuove generazioni e organizza con il supporto di Memorial un concorso per i giovani, invitandoli a scrivere sulla storia delle loro famiglie e su Stalin. Il successo dell'iniziativa è straordinario, partecipano studenti e insegnanti di diverse scuole. Ma

sedici anni dopo il concorso viene praticamente proibito, considerato anti-patriottico, perché colpevole di trasmettere una visione del passato contrapposta alla retorica nazionalista e trionfalistica che andava nuovamente affermandosi come dominante in quegli anni. Memorial viene percepita come un'associazione pericolosa, infiltrata da "agenti stranieri", e quindi destinata, dopo qualche anno, ad essere definitivamente liquidata.

Irina Ščerbakova, animata dalla necessità di dire la verità, si è dedicata instancabilmente non solo alla ricostruzione fedele della storia del sistema totalitario sovietico, ma anche alla difesa dei diritti nella società russa post-sovietica. In queste memorie intreccia, con grande maestria e in modo coinvolgente, la storia intima della sua famiglia con la Grande Storia, con il difficile e tragico destino del suo paese. È una storia di grandi speranze, ma anche di cocenti delusioni che segnano tre generazioni: è deluso il nonno materno che, dopo le rivelazioni del XX congresso, si rende conto tragicamente di aver servito una causa dai risvolti orribili; è deluso il padre che, agli inizi del nuovo millennio, assiste alla strumentalizzazione in chiave nazionalistica della memoria della vittoria nella seconda guerra mondiale; e infine è delusa lei, Irina, che, dopo le aspettative alimentate dal *Disgelo* e le promesse di trasparenza e di cambiamento prospettate dalla *Perestrojka*, ripiomba in un regime che la costringerà, nel marzo del 2022, a lasciare la Russia.

La lettura di queste memorie è molto coinvolgente, tuttavia non possiamo non rilevare una certa trascuratezza formale: le traslitterazioni seguono il sistema dell'alfabeto tedesco, i titoli delle riviste russe vengono riportati in tedesco o in inglese, le traduzioni di termini culturospecifici non sempre sono corrette.

Viviana Nosilia

Szyszko-Grzywacz, Anna. 2024. *La mia vita nel gulag. Memorie da Vorkuta 1945-1956* (Milano: Guerini e associati), pp. 191

Il volume *La mia vita nel gulag. Memorie da Vorkuta 1945-1956* è l'ottavo della collana "Narrare la Memoria", fondata dall'associazione Memorial Italia, dedicata alla pubblicazione delle narrazioni autobiografiche di voci che difficilmente avrebbero potuto essere conosciute prima del 1991, per lo meno in versione integrale. Pubblicate originariamente in polacco, nel 2002, col titolo *Łagierniczka. Relacja z Workuty 1945-1956*, le memorie di Anna Szyszko-Grzywacz sono ora accessibili anche al lettore italiano nella traduzione di Luca Bernardini.

Anna Szyszko (1923-2023) era una donna polacca nata nella regione di Vilnius, conquistata dalla Polonia *manu militari* dopo la fine della guerra polacco-bolscevica. Come molti altri giovani, aveva partecipato alla resistenza contro i nazisti nelle file dell'*Arma Krajowa* ("Esercito dell'Interno", nella traduzione di Bernardini, cfr. Szyszko-Grzywacz 2024: 11), nell'ambito dell'*Akcja Burza* (Operazione Tempesta), che prese avvio nei territori lituani nel 1944 per liberare la regione e proseguì anche dopo lo scioglimento ufficiale dell'armata polacca, ma il 23 febbraio 1945 cadde in una trappola e fu arrestata dall'NKVD (Szyszko-Grzywacz 2024: 15). I polacchi disposti a portare avanti una guerriglia partigiana per liberare la Polonia dagli occupanti difficilmente sarebbero stati docili servitori del potere sovietico, quindi erano ricercati e catturati sistematicamente dalla polizia politica dell'URSS.

Con l'arresto iniziò per la protagonista un lungo periodo di detenzione, trascorso per la maggior parte nel gulag di Vorkuta. Questo libro di memorie racconta per l'appunto il tempo dal coinvolgimento nell'attività clandestina nel 1939 alla riconquista della libertà nel 1956. La testimonianza di Anna Szyszko-Grzywacz è stata raccolta in forma orale dalla figlia, Barbara Grzywacz, che l'ha registrata nel 1994 e successivamente trascritta e preparata per la pubblicazione in Polonia nel 2002 (Bernardini 2024: 165). Questa particolare genesi condiziona moltissimo la narrazione da svariati punti di vista. Troviamo infatti spesso ripetizioni, frequenti "non mi ricordo", uno stile piano, un linguaggio semplice. Tutto ciò conferisce al racconto una vivacità che traspare

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-016
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

malgrado l'opera di adattamento alla forma scritta e di cui la traduzione di Bernardini rende pienamente conto.
Il libro è suddiviso in capitoli disposti in ordine cronologico, secondo i cambiamenti di luogo e di mansioni della protagonista che, nel corso degli undici anni di permanenza a Vorkuta, vedrà le sue condizioni di vita e di lavoro mutare più volte, con una serie di vicissitudini rocambolesche che potrebbero costituire episodi di un romanzo d'avventura, se non si trattasse di episodi tratti da una realtà terribile. È così possibile conoscere più ambienti all'interno del gulag, dalla sartoria alla miniera, dall'ospedale alla fabbrica di mattoni, scoprendo così l'eterogeneità e la complessità di questo sfaccettato sistema repressivo. Alle donne non erano risparmiati i lavori più pesanti: per molto tempo Anna Szyszko (che all'epoca portava il cognome fittizio Norska) lavorò in una miniera di carbone, dove ai rischi del sovraffaticamento si sommavano quelli derivanti dal pericolo di crolli, senza tener conto dell'ambiente assolutamente insalubre. Quando fu trasferita in una mattonaia, si ritrovò a trasportare carichi pesantissimi sulle spalle. Le donne, quindi, subivano il lavoro come forma di tortura alla pari degli uomini. Rispetto ai detenuti maschi, però, le prigioniere devono affrontare umiliazioni peggiori, legate proprio al loro genere.
Il denudamento al momento dell'ingresso nel gulag finalizzato a determinare la categoria di lavoro cui adibire le persone appena arrivate è una pratica che riguardava sia i detenuti, sia le detenute, ma queste ultime erano soggette a palpeggiamenti lascivi:

> Gli uomini dovevano svestirsi completamente. Non mi ricordo esattamente come stesse la cosa per le donne. Sicuramente bisognava denudarsi fino a metà. Ti "visitavano" a occhio, guardandoti e pizzicandoti le natiche (Szyszko-Grzywacz 2024: 50).

Questo è solo un esempio di come la promiscuità del gulag finisse per risultare particolarmente gravosa per le prigioniere, che erano alla mercé del personale maschile del campo e dei detenuti uomini.

> Effettuarono la *sanpodgotovka*, come chiamavano gli interventi igienico-sanitari. Ci tagliarono i capelli, ci rasarono. Wanda ritiene che a rasarci sia stato un uomo, e dappertutto, io però non me lo ricordo (Szyszko-Grzywacz 2024: 41).

E ancora, a proposito della miniera n. 2:

> All'interno della baracca, nel *tambur*, c'era la *paraša* in cui facevamo i nostri bisogni. [...] Anche alla *strojkontora*, al cantiere, cercavamo di nasconderci da qualche parte, ma non sempre era possibile. Alcuni uomini particolarmente molesti non solo non si giravano, ma ti guardavano apposta, quando bisognava esporre le natiche all'aria (Szyszko-Grzywacz 2024: 47).

Come osserva Bernardini (2024: 172-173), della condizione delle donne e della doppia morale che imperava nel campo aveva scritto anche Gustaw Herling-Grudziński in *Un mondo a parte* (*Inny świat*) (cfr. Herling 2017: 183-184), opera divenuta paradigmatica per la letteratura del gulag polacca. Nel capitolo *La caccia notturna* l'autore narra di come fossero braccate le donne appena arrivate nel campo che, per qualche ragione, si avventuravano fuori dalla loro baracca quando era buio, usando l'espressione "cacce notturne alle donne" (Herling 2017: 38). Herling attribuisce questa pratica ai soli *urka*, i criminali comuni che esercitavano un particolare potere, ma la situazione presentata da Szyszko è ben diversa: anche lei si serve della metafora della caccia, adottando in questo caso il punto di vista della preda:

> Eravamo indifese. Quando siamo entrate, abbiamo visto [...] uno schieramento di uomini che letteralmente ululavano e si dibattevano da tutte le parti. Era incredibile: tutti quegli uomini e noi povere donne indifese. Era terribile, ci sentivamo *braccate*. (Szyszko-Grzywacz 2024: 94 – il corsivo è nostro).

Le donne sono ripetutamente usate come merce di scambio per convincere i detenuti – prevalentemente quelli comuni – ad accettare di svolgere qualche lavoro (Szyszko-Grzywacz 2024: 85-86).
Nel mondo distorto del gulag, anche la maternità viene dissacrata, e anche in questo caso la visione di Herling e quella di Szyszko differiscono sostanzialmente. Per il primo, la gravidanza è un mezzo per assicurarsi nove mesi di esenzione dal lavoro pesante, mettendo al mondo un neonato "che veniva poi tolto alla madre e portato via per qualche ignoto destino" (Herling 2017: 184-185); solo verso i figli nati dalle donne libere e concepiti nella casa degli incontri traspare dell'empatia (Herling 2017: 134). Anche Szyszko è consapevole dell'utilizzo della maternità come scappatoia da parte di alcune detenute, ma il suo tono non è giudicante, e l'attenzione si focalizza piuttosto sulla sorte dei bambini,

portati via dal nido del campo mentre le madri erano fuori al lavoro (Szyszko-Grzywacz 2024: 66-67).
Rispetto a *Un mondo a parte*, il racconto di Szyszko si differenzia anche per la strategia di sopravvivenza: a differenza di Herling, la protagonista di *La mia vita nel gulag* insiste molto sulla solidarietà e l'assistenza reciproca, in particolare tra le sue amiche più strette. Anna Szyszko e altre quattro detenute polacche si prendono cura le une delle altre, si sostengono moralmente, condividono sentimenti e pensieri e creano un legame così forte da indurle a definirsi giocosamente "le Cinque Gemelle" (Szyszko-Grzywacz 2024: 115-117). In effetti, come scrivono nell'epilogo le figlie Barbara Grzywacz-Sanfilippo e Bogusława Matuszewska, le donne avrebbero mantenuto a lungo i contatti anche una volta libere. La descrizione delle relazioni umane, di genere diverso, che s'instaurano anche in un ambiente così spersonalizzante come quello del gulag è a ben vedere uno dei perni tematici/nodi cruciali di queste memorie. Osserviamo così la stratificazione ed eterogeneità dell'umanità del campo: oltre al rapporto detenute-carcerieri (uomini, per lo più, come risulta da queste memorie), vi è anche quello fra le prigioniere politiche e quelle comuni (le *blatnjački*) e tra recluse con privilegi (*pompobytki*) e senza. Sulle relazioni grava anche l'appartenenza nazionale o etnica: Anna Szyszko è orgogliosa del suo essere polacca (cfr. l'episodio in cui reagisce con veemenza agli insulti alla Polonia da parte di un'altra detenuta, Szyszko-Grzywacz 2024: 83-84), ricerca i contatti coi connazionali, ma non nasconde la sua delusione nel momento in cui essi si comportano meschinamente, contravvenendo alle sue aspettative.
Sarà proprio attraverso una corrispondenza con altri detenuti polacchi che Anna Szyszko incontrerà l'uomo che diventerà suo marito, Bernard Grzywacz – una storia fatta di biglietti e lettere contrabbandati ingegnosamente, di attese e di gelosie, di malintesi e bisticci, il cui romanticismo non viene scalfito e risulta anzi accresciuto dal fango del gulag e dai cenci consunti dei protagonisti.
Tutto ciò è narrato con spontaneità e vivacità, attraverso lo sguardo di una donna che, a distanza di molti anni, non giudica la ragazza che era, rievocando gli eventi senza avere la pretesa di trarne conclusioni universali, insegnamenti da tramandare, riflessioni metafisiche. In questo il libro di Anna Szyszko è profondamente diverso da quello di Herling.
Queste memorie sono senz'altro un documento importante dell'esperienza concentrazionaria sovietica, in particolare di quella specifica della popolazione polacca. La postfazione di Luca Bernardini rie-

sce concisamente a fornire le coordinate necessarie al lettore per orientarsi nelle diverse ondate di deportazioni di cittadine e cittadini polacchi nel sistema dei gulag e a inserire questa pubblicazione nel contesto più ampio della letteratura concentrazionaria.
Un notevole pregio di quest'edizione è costituito dall'appendice iconografica, con foto d'epoca dell'archivio di famiglia della protagonista.

Bibliografia

Bernardini 2024: Bernardini, Luca. 2024. *Postfazione. Il riso dei vinti*. In: Szyszko-Grzywacz, Anna. 2024. *La mia vita nel gulag. Memorie da Vorkuta 1945-1956* (Milano: Guerini e associati), pp. 163-176.

Herling, Gustaw. 2017. *Un mondo a parte* (Milano: Mondadori).

Szyszko-Grzywacz 2024: Szyszko-Grzywacz, Anna. 2024. *La mia vita nel gulag. Memorie da Vorkuta 1945-1956* (Milano: Guerini e associati).

Jakub Adamiak

Ветлугина, Анна; Максименко, Дмитрий. *Таривердиев*. Москва: Молодая Гвардия, 2025. 239 с.

Серия биографий “Жизнь замечательных людей” (“ЖЗЛ”), существующая уже более ста лет, является одним из старейших и наиболее авторитетных биографических проектов в русскоязычном книгоиздании. По состоянию на начало 2026 года серия насчитывает свыше 2000 выпусков, посвященных выдающимся людям, чьи имена вошли в анналы мировой истории.

В 2025 году к этому престижному списку присоединилось имя Микаэла Леоновича Таривердиева – выдающегося композитора, чья музыка к кинофильмам *Ирония судьбы* и *Семнадцать мгновений весны* стала неотъемлемой частью культурного кода нескольких поколений. Фигура Таривердиева иллюстрирует сложность советской многонациональной идентичности: он армянин, выросший в Тбилиси, получивший музыкальное образование в классе Арама Хачатуряна в Московской консерватории, а затем сумевший завоевать всесоюзное и международное признание. Не вписываясь в рамки идеологического официоза, Таривердиев создал уникальное транскультурное пространство, в котором органично переплелись различные традиции и мировоззрения. Сегодня анализ его наследия представляется особенно актуальным. Сквозь призму его судьбы можно проследить механизмы существования субъекта в условиях специфики культурной гетерогенности империи, а также выявить стратегии сохранения творческой суверенности в современном интер- и транскультурном мире (Mignolo *et al.* 2018: 1–11).

Авторами книги, включившей знаменитого композитора в канон серии “ЖЗЛ”, стали музыканты-органисты Анна Ветлугина и Дмитрий Максименко. Выход книги приурочен к двойной годовщине – 95-летию со дня рождения композитора и 30-летию со дня его смерти. Эти даты послужили поводом для появления нового исследования, освещающего жизненный путь, творческое наследие и мировоззрение Микаэла Леоновича. Структурно работа состоит из двадцати одной главы, эпилога и двух приложений: подробного перечня фильмов, в которых звучит музыка Таривердиева, а также хроники основных дат его жизни и творчества. Повествование, выстроенное по хронологическому принципу, охватывает

DOI: 10.25430/2281-6992/v14-017
distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

весь жизненный путь композитора и завершается обзором ключевых инициатив по увековечению его памяти в период после 1996 года.

Такой подход к повествовательной структуре работы соответствует канону традиционной биографии, основанному на линейном восприятии судьбы героя как процесса последовательного становления личности. Подобная стратегия во многом определяет и позицию авторов – Ветлугина и Максименко не стремятся стать активными участниками событий, выступая скорее в роли повествователей, связывающих факты или "рассказчиков без биографии", если воспользоваться известным определением Юрия Лотмана (Лотман 1992: 365–367). Это подталкивает читателя сфокусироваться непосредственно на фигуре Таривердиева, воспринимая авторский голос как объективный инструмент структурирования исторического материала.

Авторы биографии *Таривердиев*, пересказывая жизнь Микаэла Леоновича, смотрят на него с позиции восхищенных учеников, что неизбежно влияет на тональность повествования, которое временами приобретает черты агиографии. В подобном изложении факты из жизни композитора выстраиваются в безупречную логическую цепочку – от одаренного школьника до признанного гения. Такой подход обусловлен как традициями серии "ЖЗЛ", так и спецификой авторской позиции: не будучи лично знакомыми с Таривердиевым и не являясь профессиональными исследователями его творчества, Ветлугина и Максименко зачастую вынуждены ограничиваться отсылками к уже существующим работам или свидетельствам современников. Вследствие этого книга носит преимущественно компилятивный характер, а роль авторов сводится к позиции интерпретаторов, чье присутствие в тексте ограничено.

Ветлугина и Максименко с самого начала утверждают, что наследие Таривердиева остается живым и продолжает функционировать в повседневных ритуалах постсоветского пространства: "Все эти прекрасные мелодии до сих пор на слуху и с первых нот погружают нас в совершенно определенный и узнаваемый мир советской культуры, причем ее самого официального варианта" (Ветлугина *et al.* 2025: 5).

Таким образом, в свете концепции культурной памяти Яна Ассмана (Ассман 2004: 19–21), Ветлугина и Максименко фактически интегрируют наследие Таривердиева в актуальный канон культурной памяти постсоветского пространства. Авторы акцентируют внима-

ние на универсализме музыкального языка композитора, который, по их мнению, “не привязан к конкретному времени или стилю, как и человек с его чувствами и эмоциями” (Ветлугина *et al.* 2025: 231). Такой подход позволяет представить фигуру Таривердиева не просто как исторический персонаж, но как живую часть современной культуры, чье значение выходит за рамки традиционного биографического описания.

Более того, ввиду уходящего времени и все более удаляющегося горизонта непосредственных воспоминаний, образ композитора постепенно выходит за пределы коммуникативной памяти, так как уходят те, кто лично помнил концерты самого Таривердиева и премьеры фильмов с его музыкой. Вместе с тем его наследие, прочно вписавшееся, к примеру, в новогоднюю традицию благодаря музыке к фильму Эльдара Рязанова *Ирония судьбы*, о чем также упоминают Ветлугина и Максименко, продолжает жить в ритуалах, воспроизводимых людьми, не помнящими или лишь вскользь заставшими советскую эпоху. Таким образом, творчество Таривердиева – как в виде отдельных песен, так и в составе масштабных проектов – окончательно укореняется в культурной памяти постсоветского общества.

В своей работе авторы опираются на базу источников, насчитывающую 18 позиций, перечисленных в разделе “Литература” в конце книги (Ветлугина *et al.* 2025: 237–238). Стоит отметить, что не все используемые в тексте материалы приводятся в этом списке. В своем труде авторы обращаются также к документальным фильмам и интервью (как печатным, так и звуковым), отсылок к которым читатель не найдет в упомянутом перечне. Однако необходимо помнить, что серия “ЖЗЛ” не является строго академическим изданием и нацелена прежде всего на популяризацию знаний о выдающихся людях среди широкой читательской аудитории.

Исследовательский материал дополняется сведениями, полученными “из первых уст” от коллег, друзей и родственников композитора. Отдельного внимания заслуживает участие в создании книги вдовы композитора – Веры Гориславовны Таривердиевой, словами благодарности которой и открывается труд Ветлугиной и Максименко. Она была третьей и, согласно утверждению самого композитора взятому из его автобиографии *Я просто живу*, его единственной “настоящей” женой (Таривердиев 1997: 208). Вера Гориславовна, являясь автором книги воспоминаний *Биография музыки* (Таривердиева 2004), на которую авторы *Таривердиева* неодно-

кратно ссылаются, внесла заметный вклад в подготовку данной работы. Таривердиева также предоставила уникальные фотоматериалы, дополнившие издание в лучших традициях серии “ЖЗЛ”.

Именно два указанных выше источника – автобиография самого композитора и воспоминания его вдовы – легли в основу труда Ветлугиной и Максименко. Диалог между этими тремя точками зрения становится композиционным стержнем, вокруг которого выстраивается повествование. При этом в тексте прослеживается определенная закономерность: фрагменты из книг Таривердиевой и Таривердиева, как правило, служат отправной точкой для рассуждений авторов биографии. Зачастую глава открывается цитатой из автобиографии Микаэла Леоновича, задавая тематическую рамку, которую авторы развивают в дальнейшем. Нередко встречается и инверсия: сначала авторы вводят читателя в конкретную ситуацию, чтобы затем “предоставить слово” самому Таривердиеву или его жене. В этом случае личное свидетельство выступает в роли высшего авторитета, который легитимизирует авторскую позицию и подтверждает достоверность их высказываний.

Местами авторы допускают избыточное цитирование, практически полностью копируя логику изложения, представленную в автобиографии композитора. Так, в пятой главе *Танец с саблями*, описывая поступление Таривердиева в Московскую консерваторию, биографы фактически копируют – лишь с незначительными изменениями – описание данного события самим музыкантом в книге *Я просто живу* (Ветлугина *et al.* 2025: 57–59; Таривердиев 1997: 26–28).

Кроме того, в тексте Ветлугиной и Максименко ощущается отсутствие тщательной координации между соавторами, что приводит к повторам уже известной читателю информации. К примеру, вторая глава (*Тбилиси*) открывается следующим образом:

> ‘Синее небо моего детства, небо Тбилиси, жаркое лето, воздух, напоенный запахом южной зелени и настолько густой, что, кажется, его можно резать ломтями. И мама. Мама, которая идет мне навстречу. У меня захватывает дух, я не вижу ее лица – только сияние, исходящее от него’ – так пишет композитор в автобиографической книге с неслучайным названием ‘Я просто живу’ (Ветлугина *et al.*, 2025: 15).

Однако всего через шесть страниц, в начале третьей главы (*Родовое гнездо*), авторы вновь обращаются к тем же строкам: “Микаэл Леонович начинает автобиографию с описания синего тбилисского неба и воздуха: ‘…кажется, его можно резать ломтями’. А потом уже идет сияние лица его матери, научившей сына самому главному – любви” (Ветлугина *et al.* 2025: 21).

Стоит также отметить, что авторы практически не вступают в критический диалог с воспоминаниями композитора и его жены, принимая их как данность. Вследствие этого они зачастую подпадают под влияние того, что Пьер Бурдье называл “биографической иллюзией” (Бурдье 2002: 75–76) – свойственной биографам черты, выражающейся в конструировании прямого линейного повествования по схеме, которую в случае *Таривердиева* можно изобразить следующим образом: талантливый ребенок → выдающийся студент → подающий надежды молодой композитор → музыкальный гений. Подобное изложение, хотя и является традиционным для жанра, выглядит излишне схематичным и, как подчеркивал Бурдье, лишает исследователя возможности рассмотреть более широкий спектр обстоятельств, определяющих судьбу героя. Смена оптики позволила бы Ветлугиной и Максименко не только глубже раскрыть личность композитора, но и избежать излишних повторений и пересечений с автобиографией Таривердиева и трудом его вдовы.

В силу своей специализации, предполагающей постколониальный и деколониальный ракурсы анализа литературного текста, я также не могу обойти вниманием встречающееся в финале биографии утверждение о том, что Таривердиев – “совершенно русский композитор” (Ветлугина *et al.* 2025: 229). Трудно согласиться с подобной дефиницией, причем моя позиция основывается не на факте рождения Микаэла Леоновича в армянской семье, проживавшей в Тбилиси, а на убеждении, выходящем за рамки узких национальных идентичностей. В этом контексте мне гораздо ближе другой тезис авторов, согласно которому “интонации его музыки не принадлежат ни одной из возможных национальностей”, ибо они “общечеловеческие и говорят на том универсальном языке эмоций и ощущений, который каждый человек воспринимает как свой родной” (Ветлугина *et al.* 2025: 231). Подобный взгляд на творчество Таривердиева позволяет увидеть в нем не просто “национальное достояние”, но транскультурную фигуру (Тлостанова 2004: 27–32),

чей музыкальный язык преодолевает границы любого дискурса – будь он (пост)имперским или сугубо националистическим.
Ввиду всего сказанного выше следует заключить, что, хотя работа Ветлугиной и Максименко имеет определенные изъяны и во многом является компиляцией уже имеющихся сведений о жизни Микаэла Таривердиева, данное издание представляет несомненную ценность для широкой публики, интересующейся творчеством композитора, а также функционированием “полуофициального” искусства (в частности, таривердиевского “третьего направления”) в рамках советской культуры. С академической точки зрения биография *Таривердиев* может служить качественным вспомогательным источником, синтезирующим литературу о творчестве Микаэла Леоновича, особенно в тех контекстах, где фигура композитора не является центральным объектом исследования, а рассматривается как часть широкого культурного ландшафта эпохи.

Библиография:

Ассман 2004: Ассман, Ян. 2004. *Культурная память. Письмо, память о прошлом и политическая идентичность в высоких культурах древности*, пер. с немецкого М. М. Сокольской (Москва: Языки славянской культуры).

Бурдье 2002: Бурдье, Пьер. 2002. 'Биографическая иллюзия', пер. с французского Е. Ю. Мещеркиной, *Интеракция. Интервью. Интерпретация*, том 1, 1: 75–81.

Ветлугина *et al* 2025: Ветлугина, Анна, Дмитрий Максименко. 2025. *Таривердиев* (Москва: Молодая гвардия).

Лотман 1992: Лотман, Юрий. 1992. 'Литературная биография в историко-культурном контексте (К типологическому соотношению текста и личности автора)', в его же, *Избранные статьи в трех томах. Том I. Статьи по семиотике и типологии культуры* (Таллинн: Александра).

Mignolo *et al.* 2018: Mignolo, Walter D., Catherine E. Walsh. 2018. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham and London: Duke University Press).

Таривердиева 2004: Таривердиева, Вера. 2004. *Биография музыки*, в Таривердиева, Вера, Микаэл Таривердиев. *Я просто живу; Биография музыки* (Москва: Зебра).

Таривердиев 1997: Таривердиев, Микаэл. 1997. *Я просто живу* (Москва: Вагриус).

Тлостанова 2004: Тлостанова, Мадина. 2004. *Жить никогда, писать ниоткуда. Постсоветская литература и эстетика транскультурации* (Москва: УРСС).

Authors

Jakub Adamiak is a PhD student at the Doctoral School of Languages and Literatures at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. He is conducting his doctoral research at the Institute of East Slavic Philology under the academic supervision of Professor Bartosz Osiewicz. His main research areas include identity issues within the USSR and the post-Soviet space, with a particular focus on decolonial and postcolonial perspectives in Russophone literature and culture. He specializes in the Russian-language literature of the (post)Soviet peripheries, analysing the works of Fazil' Iskander, Chingiz Aitmatov, and Olzhas Suleimenov. He was the principal investigator for two research projects: one exploring the heritage of the Soviet era in contemporary Estonia, and another investigating the impact of Chingiz Aitmatov's literary works on the formation of modern Kyrgyz national identity.

Maria Bidovec, PhD, is Associate Professor of Slovene language and literature at the 'L'Orientale' University of Naples. Her interests include: the 17th century, the teaching of language and literature and the reception of Slovene literature in Italy. She has published some 50 works, including two monographs and various studies on J.W. Valvasor, an anthology of Slovene fairy tales and an extensive Slovene grammar book for Italian speakers. She has edited several Italian editions of Slovene authors, including some new translations into Italian. She is a member of several Italian and Slovene scholarly associations and series/magazine editors.

Claudia Criveller is Associate Professor in Russian Literature and Language at the University of Padua. Her main research areas are Russian modernism and early twentieth-century Russian literature, with a particular focus on the works of Andrei Belyi. She has also worked on intersemiotic translation, working on Fëdor Dostoevskii as well as Belyi. She has authored theoretical works on Russian autobiographical fiction with a focus on Vladimir Nabokov, Venedikt Erofeev, Andrei Siniavskii and Evgenii Kharitonov. She is the PI of the project *Medicine in Eastern Slavic and Georgian cultures* (MedSlavGeo).

Andrea De Carlo is Associate Professor of Polish Language and Literature at the 'L'Orientale' University of Naples since 2011. From 2006 to 2011 he worked at the University of Salento in Lecce. His research focuses mainly on three areas: Italian-Polish literary connections, poetry translations and textual criticism. He publishes regularly in Italian and

foreign journals. He is the author of a monograph entitled *Dantes maxime mirandus in minimis. Kraszewski e Dante* [Dantes maxime mirandus in minimis. Kraszewski and Dante] (Naples 2019; second edition 2024). One of his latest research is an analysis of Józef Ignacy Kraszewski's translation of Dante's Divine Comedy.

Patrizia Deotto is Associate Professor of Russian Language and Literature at the University of Trieste. Her research activity has been mainly aimed at investigating twentieth-century Russian literature, with a particular focus on Russian emigration and the cultural ties between Italy and Russia, an area which she further developed in her monograph work *In viaggio per realizzare un sogno. L'Italia e il testo italiano nella cultura russa* [On a Trip Towards a Dream. Italy and the Italian Text in Russian Culture] (2002), as well as in a number of articles and in the volume *Rimskie pis'ma* [Letters from Rome], co-edited with Michail Talalay, which collects and annotates a series of travel reports published in 1926 by Pavel Muratov in the Russian émigré newspaper *Poslednie Novosti*, published in Paris. She has also devoted her research to the literary genres of biography and autobiography, with particular attention to Nina Berberova and Ol'ga Berggolts.

Annalisa Di Santo is a Research Fellow in Slavic Studies at the 'L'Orientale' University of Naples, where she defended her doctoral thesis on the 'Linguistic Means of Persuasion in Contemporary Russian Judicial Discourse'. Di Santo is currently working on applying certain categories of semantics and pragmalinguistics to the judicial discourse of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly in the legal addresses by Anatolii Koni and Sergei Andreevskii.

Andrea Gullotta is Associate Professor in Russian at the University of Palermo. He has also worked for the University of Glasgow, the Ca' Foscari University of Venice and the University of Padua. His main field of research is the literature of the Gulag. He is the author of several articles and of the monograph *Intellectual Life and Literature at Solovki 1923-1930. The Paris of the Northern Concentration Camps* (2018). He is the principal investigator of the Research Project of National Interest (PRIN) *Literature of Socialist Trauma: Mapping and Researching the Lost Page of European Literature*, funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research.

Ekaterina Gurtovaya is a PhD student at the University of Palermo affiliated with the PRIN project *Literature of Socialist Trauma: Mapping and Researching the Lost Page of European Literature*. She is currently researching Soviet women's autobiographical writing and gendered experiences of political repression. She holds a BA in Philology and an MA in Russian and Comparative Literature from the Higher School of Economics (Moscow). Her research interests include Gulag memoirs, trauma theory, and unofficial memory of Stalinist terror.

Andrijana Kos Lajtman is Full Professor at the Faculty of Teacher Education of the University of Zagreb. Her interests are primarily related to contemporary literature. She has published around sixty academic papers and three monographs: *The Autobiographical Discourse of Childhood* [Autobiografski diskurs djetinjstva, 2011], *Poetics of Shapes – Contemporary Conceptual and Hypertextual Prose* [Poetika oblika – suvremene konceptualne i hipertekstualne proze, 2016], and *Poetic Tension of Death – From Scream to Silence* [Poetski napon smrti – od krika do tišine, 2022]. She is the author of seven poetry collections and is also engaged in literary criticism.

Danijela Lugarić Vukas is a literary scholar and cultural historian who holds a PhD from the University of Zagreb, where she works as an associate professor. She has undergone professional training at the Faculty of Philology of the St. Petersburg State University (2006) and at the University of California, Berkeley (2011). She was a virtual open research laboratory associate at the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Centre at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (spring 2022) and a 'Value of the Past' fellow at Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur und Kulturforschung with her book project *Temporalities of the Post-Soviet Russophone Novel in the 2010s: Spectres of the Soviet Past*. Dr. Lugarić Vukas is interested in comparative Slavic studies (former Yugoslav and former Soviet cultures), with a focus on contemporary culture and the second half of the 20th century, particularly on topics such as the paradoxes, complexities, and inner ambivalences of (post)modernity and pluralities of (post)modernist subjectivities. She has written numerous articles and monographs and edited several volumes in the fields of literary and cultural studies in Eastern European and Central European contexts.

Giovanni Magliocco is Associate Professor of Romanian Language and Literature at the University of Bari. He holds a PhD in Romance Studies from the University of Turin. His research focuses on modern and contemporary Romanian literature. He has published several essays on Romanian literature, including studies on Mihai Eminescu, Alexandru Macedonski, Lucian Blaga, Mircea Eliade, Panaït Istrati, Paul Păun, Radu Stanca, Dora Pavel and Ruxandra Cesereanu. He is a member of several international research centres and serves on the editorial and scientific boards of academic journals and book series in the fields of Romanian and comparative literary studies.

Viviana Nosilia is Associate Professor of Slavic Studies at the University of Padua. Her research focuses on the culture of the borderlands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, predominantly in the Baroque period. She has studied in particular the interconfessional polemics amongst Latin-rite Catholics, Byzantine-Slavonic-rite Catholics, and Orthodox Christians in the seventeenth century.

Polina Popova is a Ph.D. candidate at the History Department of UIC (University of Illinois Chicago) finishing a dissertation titled *The Representation of Power in Soviet Children's Literature in the 1920s and 1930s: Biographies of Party Leaders, Red Army Commanders, and Famous Historical Figures*. Popova is an adjunct history instructor at Columbia College Chicago. She is a guest contributor to the Cotsen Children's Library blog, where she writes about Soviet children's books of the interwar period. Popova is a host for the New Books Network podcast.

Michela Romano is a PhD candidate in World Literature at the University of Bologna. Her research focuses on contemporary Russian and Russophone literature in exile. She holds MAs in Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe (2019) and Modern, Comparative and Postcolonial Literatures (2023). She has undertaken research and study periods in Scotland, Armenia, the Baltic States, Russia, and Germany. Her interests include literature, cultures of dissent, identity, and diaspora studies. Her latest publications appeared in *eSamizdat* (2021), *Dive-in* (2024), and *Andergraund* Journal (2024/26).

Irina Talevska is Associate Professor of Italian Literature at the Department of Italian Language and Literature of the Faculty of Philology Blaže Koneski in Skopje. She holds a PhD in Italian literature. Her re-

search focuses on literature and political theory, Holocaust studies, gender studies, and translation theory, with particular attention to questions of memory and narrative. She is the author of several monographs, including *Antisemitism and the Holocaust* (2023) and *European Literature of the Holocaust* (2018).

Eva Toulouze (PhD hab) is a professor of Finno-Ugric languages at the Institute of Eastern Languages and Cultures (INALCO, Paris), and a researcher at the Department of Ethnology, University of Tartu, Estonia. Her main fields of interest are the cultures of Russia's Finno-Ugric peoples, the emergence of a written culture in Finno-Ugric areas, Forest Nenets culture and Udmurt religious practice.

Iris Uccello is a PhD candidate in Russian literature at the University of Verona. Her research interests lie in 19th-century Russian literature, microhistory, and the intellectual history of the late Russian Empire. Her doctoral project examines the works of Fëdor Dostoevskii within the framework of contemporary legal and social debates. She has published in international peer-reviewed journals, including *Dostoevskii: Materialy i issledovaniia*, *Esamizdat*, *Umanistica Digitale*, and *Mir russkogo slova*; has presented her work at several international conferences (BASEES, University of Cambridge, 2024; University of Glasgow, 2023; University of Warsaw, 2023, etc.); and has held research fellowships at the State Hermitage Museum of Saint Petersburg (2017), the Institute of Russian Literature – Pushkin House in Saint Petersburg (2021), and Georgetown University in Washington DC (2025).