

EDUARD LIMONOV:

A CRITICAL STUDY

BY

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ABSTRACT

The publication of Eduard Limonov's exhibitionist novel *Eto ia - Edichka* (It's Me, Eddie) in 1979 provoked, both among readers and critics, a great deal of negative emotion, which simmers on even now, boosted by the publication of virtually all Limonov's major writings in Russia and by Limonov's transformation into a notorious public figure of dubious political persuasions. The emotion mentioned often precludes a sober comprehensive analysis of Limonov's creative activity, an analysis which his unquestionable success requires. Limonov's infamy frequently casts an unmerited shadow over the significance of his artistic works, especially over his exquisite, innovative poetry which is often neglected nowadays. This thesis tries to repair the damage by following, step by step, Limonov's life and career (partly mythologized by him in his allegedly autobiographical prose) *sine ira et studio*, relying on the whole body of his work which includes poetry, fiction, journalism and private correspondence. (Permission to cite extracts from and refer to unpublished items was given to me by Limonov via my proxy in Moscow in the summer of 1995.) Although there is no separate chapter on Limonov's poetry in the thesis, his poems are copiously quoted throughout the whole work.

Another step which has been taken in properly evaluating Limonov's output (over twenty books altogether, translated into at least fifteen languages) is to consider it as a link in the chain of his Russian literary predecessors. The need of a reassessment of Limonov is also met through pointing to some literary sources important for this author, such as the Cossack Ataman and writer Petr Krasnov, the poet of the Russian revolution Vladimir Maiakovskii, Limonov's Russian and Western critics, his colleague from the so-called Khar'kov poetic school Iurii Miloslavskii, and the Eurasianist movement (the last two sources have been touched on in passing only).

In addition, Limonov's idiosyncratic concepts of Hero and Barbarity are discussed at some length.

Our thesis, we hope, finally makes it possible to regard Limonov not merely as an obnoxious literary hooligan, but also as a writer with roots and ideology, with an underground past and a firmly established, if slightly embarrassing, present reputation. Some theoretical issues pertaining to certain limitations in the existing definitions of literary influence and intertextuality are also raised.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis 'Eduard Limonov: A Critical Study' embodies the results of my own special work, that it has been composed by myself and that it does not include work forming part of a thesis presented successfully for a degree in this or another University.

The content of Chapter 2 is partly based on my article 'Dangerous Liaisons: Eduard Limonov and Ataman Krasnov' published in P.Pesonen, J.Heinonen, G.V.Obatnin (eds), *Modernizm i postmodernizm v russkoi literature i kul'ture*, Helsinki: Yliopistopaino, 1996, pp.419-39. The content of Chapter 3 is partly based on my article 'The *Doppelgänger*, or the Quest for Love: Eduard Limonov as Vladimir Maiakovskii' published in *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1 (Spring 1996), pp.1-44.

Andrei Rogatchevski, August 1998

INTRODUCTION

'The dirtiest of them all' - that is how W.L.Webb has characterized Eduard Veniaminovich Savenko, alias Limonov (born on 22.02.1943 in Dzerzhinsk in the Gorky, or Nizhnii Novgorod, region), when comparing him to other contemporary Russian authors.¹ The superlative degree applied to the writer in question looks more than just pertinent. It perfectly fits the repulsive image of a person whose desire to leave a lasting imprint on Russian (and, if possible, world) culture and history has driven him to extremes unparalleled by all other past and present Russian poets and novelists, except, perhaps, Vladimir Sorokin. Whatever Limonov has already attempted in order to gain as much attention from the general public as humanly possible, from being a prominent member of the Moscow underground poetic *avant-garde* in the 1960s and 1970s to fostering Russian 'dirty realism' in prose, from exploring taboo subjects (such as homosexuality) to engrossing himself completely in the dirt of today's Russian politics,² he not merely succeeds, but becomes more and more influential.

As recently as in 1990, the compiler of the Russian literary almanac *Gondvana* Vladimir Salimon had to reject a short story by Limonov 'for its (literally) unprintable language'.³ Around the same time the publisher Aleksandr Shatalov was forced to resort to the following tricks in order to reprint

¹Webb, 1995, p.8. Other critics prefer less negative labels, though. Thus, Duncan Campbell has branded Limonov 'a dissidents' dissident' (Campbell, 1984), whereas Andrei Zorin has called him 'the last genuine [Russian] avant-gardist' (Zorin, 1997, pp.326-27).

²Limonov openly admits that he aspires to the position of the ideologist of the Russian nationalist opposition (see Limonov, 1993f).

³Condee and Padunov, 1993, p.61.

Limonov's most controversial novel, *Eto ia - Edichka*,⁴ in the Soviet Union:⁵

I offered the novel to three publishers, who all turned it down. It was then that I decided to launch a publishing house of my own to be able to publish books that other publishers were afraid to touch but which I believed should be available to Russian readers. For the first time in Russian publishing, unprintable language appeared in print. Printers refused to typeset the book, so eventually it was printed in Riga (Latvia) under the supervision of a special police force. Since then almost two million copies of the book have been printed in all.⁶

Although Shatalov admits that the first publication of *Eto ia - Edichka* in Russia caused a cultural shock,⁷ by 1996 this novel had been reprinted by various publishing houses no less than four times, and produced a whole trainload of emulators, Igor' Iarkevich seeming to be the most gifted.⁸ Moreover, *Eto ia - Edichka*, which contains not only scatological outbursts, but also graphic scenes of homosexual love-making, undoubtedly 'played a decisive role in the 1994 repeal of the

⁴In his interview for Radio Liberty in summer 1981, Professor Maurice Friedberg called this novel 'pornographic' and suggested that it would be forgotten within a year.

⁵This novel, as well as Limonov's collection of poems *Russkoe* (That Which Is Russian), was originally published in 1979 in the USA and firmly secured his place in modern Russian literature.

⁶Shatalov, 1994, p.196.

⁷The impact of the very first edition of the novel back in the 1970s was even more serious. The first husband of a female prototype for *Eto ia - Edichka* reportedly died from a heart attack while he was reading the book (see Kisova, 1995).

⁸This prompted the critic and poet Aleksandr Shchuplov to re-phrase the famous one-liner, traditionally ascribed to Dostoevskii, about Gogol's novella 'Shinel': 'We all came out [...] from under Limonov's underpants' (Maklovski, Kliain and Shchuplov, 1997, p.92).

notorious article of the [Russian] Criminal Code which proscribed consensual homosexual contact'.⁹

Logically, it is hardly surprising that, in one expert opinion, it was none other than 'the eccentric writer Eduard Limonov, at one time the minister of security in Zhirinovskii's shadow cabinet, [who] taught [the notorious leader of the Liberal Democratic Party Vladimir Zhirinovskii] the practical use of exhibitionism'.¹⁰ However, Zhirinovskii soon turned out to be not extreme enough for Limonov, and the latter left his 'ministerial' post (the Head of the All-Russian Bureau of Investigations, to be exact¹¹) with the intention of forming a party of his own. Such an institution (called the National Radical Party) came into being in November 1992.¹² According to the news agency 'Interfaks', it included 4, 821 members and planned to issue a newspaper 'K toporu' [Grab an Axe].¹³ As early as at the very beginning of 1993, though, the National Radical Party suffered a split (or a 'schism', in Limonov's own words).¹⁴ In the spring of the same year Limonov abandoned his short-time party allies Sergei

⁹Shatalov, 1995, pp.42-43.

¹⁰Kartsev with Bludeau, 1995, p.6. Limonov's ill-wishers also allege that he taught the extreme Russian nationalist Aleksandr Barkashov (the Head of the militarized Russian National Unity movement) the art of self-promotion. Thus, according to one piece of gossip, in 1994 Limonov arranged an interview with Barkashov for the Moscow office of an unnamed 'well-known American newspaper' (*The Chicago Tribune*), and charged 500 US dollars for doing so (see Babich, 1996, p.1). Limonov gives a different version of the same story in Limonov, 1996a.

¹¹Limonov apparently fancied himself as chief of what he envisaged as a Russian analogy of the FBI (see Dolgoplov, 1993).

¹²Limonov's and Zhirinovskii's political 'divorce', however, formally took place only in January 1993 (see Dolgoplov, 1993).

¹³See *Trud* of 12 January, 1993, p.2. For a description of certain members of the National Radical Party and its unhappy relationship with the authorities see Limonov, 1993d.

¹⁴See Dolgoplov, 1993.

Zharikov and Andrei Arkhipov, only to found another party, the National Bolshevik Party, which he governs at present.¹⁵ In the first half of 1995 the National Bolshevik Party comprised 'up to 500 members'.¹⁶ In mid-1998 the number of its members was estimated at 'five to six thousand'.¹⁷ As the National Bolshevik Party has not been officially registered (although it now boasts the existence of at least 27 regional organisations registered by the local authorities¹⁸), it cannot be included on ballot forms.¹⁹ Therefore in the December 1995 elections to the Russian Parliament (Duma) Limonov had to stand as an independent candidate (in the Leningrad electoral district no.194 in Moscow; he gained only 2% of the votes and lost to the democrat Vladimir Lysenko).²⁰ In October 1997 he tried to enter the Duma again, this time as a candidate in the Georgievskii electoral district no. 52 (on the border with Chechnia), and lost again, now to the Communist Party candidate Ivan Meshcherin (this time Limonov received 2.5% of the vote).²¹ The Party newspaper *Limonka*, of which

¹⁵See Womack, 1993; Pribylovskii, 1994, pp.8, 14. Rosalind Marsh states, however, that Limonov 'stood for election in December 1993 as a member of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's neo-fascist Liberal Democratic Party' (Marsh, 1995, p.219). In fact, Limonov stood as an independent candidate in electoral district No.172 in the Tver' region and lost to Tat'iana Astrakhankina, who was supported by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (see Pribylovskii, 1996, p.221).

¹⁶Khomchuk, 1995, p.42. An opinion poll conducted in Russia in July 1995 showed that only 0.2% out of 2 404 informants knew about the existence of the National Bolshevik Party (see <http://www.ria-novosti.com/dr/1996/dd10095.htm>).

¹⁷Likhachev and Pribylovskii, 1998.

¹⁸See Likhachev and Pribylovskii, 1998.

¹⁹See, for example, Dugin, 1995.

²⁰See Gokhman, 1995.

²¹See RFE/RL Newline of 15 September, 1997, vol.1, no.117; Eliseenko, 1997. In a desperate bid to obtain a seat in the Russian Parliament in the 1999 elections, Limonov has recently formed a coalition with two left-wing political movements, the Officers' Union led by Stanislav

Limonov is editor-in-chief, is similarly not very popular with the masses,²² but, given its boss's energy and persistence, there is some chance that the size of the print-run and of the party's membership will steadily increase.²³ In the meantime Limonov travels across the former Soviet Union and appears on TV, propagating his radical nationalistic political views.²⁴ As a result, he is liable to be charged under article 114 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code for instigating attempts to damage the territorial unity of the Ukraine (viz., for declaring that the Ukrainian city of Sebastopol is Russian property that has been captured by a hostile state and should be defended by force of arms, if necessary); he will be prosecuted if he enters Ukraine.²⁵

Terekhov and the Working Russia led by Viktor Anpilov (see Karam'ian, 1997; Zhelenin and Kamakin, 1997).

²²On 4 July, 1996, the Khamovniki office of the public prosecutor in Moscow instituted proceedings against Limonov for his publications in *Limonka* which allegedly instigate war and national hatred (file no. 202061). The file was closed on 3 September, 1996 (see the unsigned publication 'Kratkii kalendar' N[atsional-] B[ol'shevistskoi] P[artii] v 1996' in *Limonka*, no. 51, 1996, p.2).

²³According to one source, in 1996 the circulation of *Limonka* was 5500 copies (see Grabel'nikov, 1996, p.45). If we are to believe *Limonka's* editor-in-chief, in August 1997 its circulation reached 10000 copies (see Limonov, 1997).

²⁴The frequent inconsistency of these views often puzzles even the close followers of Limonov too. Thus, the OMRI Daily Digest of 12 February, 1996, informed its subscribers that Limonov surprisingly called on nationalist forces to support President Boris Eltsin's candidacy in the Russian presidential elections in June 1996. This news led to the resignation of Limonov's party comrade Egor Letov (see Limonov, 1996). Then came the news that Limonov endorsed the candidacy of the Russian weight-lifter turned nationalist writer Iurii Vlasov (see Aleksandrov, 1996). As Paul Bailey puts it, Limonov 'seems to enjoy expressing calculatedly unpopular opinions' (Bailey, 1992).

²⁵See Limonov, 1995d; see also the unsigned information 'Odin Limonov na dve prokuratury' in *Moskovskie novosti*, no.14, 1996, p.3,

All these facts strongly suggest that the Limonov phenomenon is marked by unusually solid bonds between the writer's politics and his poetics,²⁶ his journalism being almost inseparable from his fiction.²⁷ What made Limonov what he is? What brought the son of an NKVD officer through years of menial labour in the Soviet Union and the USA, through the hardships of three consecutive emigrations,²⁸ to the offices of *Libération*, *Playboy*, *Globe*, *Le Journal Littéraire*, *L'Idiot International* and, finally, to such newspapers as *Den'*,

and the unsigned notice 'Grim po-limonovski' in *Al'manakh Panorama*, no.834, 1997, p.4.

²⁶Cf.: 'It seems to me that poetry and politics are the same thing' (Limonov at a meeting with his readers in Ostankino (Russian TV) on 13 September, 1992 (12.05-13.00)). One could indeed make out a good case for seeing Limonov's political views as an extension of his fiction. Limonov often seems to be driven by the need to shock and to outrage, and to that extent his political actions are part of his art, as well as a political programme to be interpreted literally. On the kinship between Limonov's politics and poetics see also Dugin, 1997.

²⁷The violent outbursts in Limonov's writing sometimes affect real life and inflict physical damage on Limonov's opponents, as well as on Limonov himself. Thus, he struck Paul Bailey on the head with a champagne bottle in the lobby of the Hilton Hotel in Budapest in 1989 (see Bailey, 1992). In 1996 he had a fist fight with a 'veteran of the Russian patriotic movement' in St. Petersburg (see Stepakov, 1996) and was badly beaten in Moscow by unknown assailants, allegedly for his journalistic attacks on General Lebed' (see Limonov, 1996f; A.F., 1996; Builo, 1996; E.K., 1996; for Limonov's anti-Lebed' articles see Limonov, 1996b and Limonov, 1996c).

²⁸Limonov emigrated to the West in 1974, partly against his own wishes, under the pressure of the KGB. He settled in New York City in 1975 and then moved to Paris in 1980, where he eventually acquired French citizenship. Regularly visiting Russia since 1989 (Soviet/Russian citizenship was returned to him in 1991; see *Vedomosti s'ezda narodnykh deputatov SSSR i Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR* of 25 September, 1991, p.1539), Limonov finally decided to move back to Moscow, where he resides for most of the time now.

Izvestiia, Komsomol'skaia pravda, Krasnaia zvezda, Novyi vzgliad, Sobesednik, Sovetskaia Rossiia, Zavtra and Sokol Zhirinovskogo? What took him to the Croat- and Muslim-Serbian conflicts in the former Yugoslavia (1991-92), to the turmoil in Pridnestrov'e and in Abkhaziia (1992), and to Ostankino and the Russian 'White House' during the Moscow 1993 uprising?²⁹ The meticulous study of Limonov's biography seems to be no less significant for answering these questions than the search for the literary sources of his intellectual background and artistic vision.

Chapter 1 deals with Limonov's (auto)biography,³⁰ which, impressive in itself, has been additionally fictionalized in his work (in it the protagonist and/or the narrator almost always carries the same name as the author). By recourse to methods which are perhaps more appropriate for criminal investigations and court procedures than for literary criticism, that is, cross-examining all the information available, we try to separate fact from fiction in Limonov's countless stories about Limonov, and thereby piece together the true picture of Limonov's real life. In particular, Limonov's dependence on the writings of Iurii Miloslavskii is seen as circumstantial

²⁹For some accounts of Limonov's experiences at war see Aleksandrova, 1992; Limonov, 1993g; Limonov, 1993h. In quite a few instances Limonov did not merely write about what he witnessed, he actually took sides and fought as a soldier - for the Serbian cause, for example. Limonov's 'misbehaviour' in Bosnia caused public outrage (see, for example, Bailey, 1992; ironically, the writer recalls that in 1989, at a writers' international conference in Budapest, Limonov suggested that Salman Rushdie should be publicly executed 'for insulting the Muslim people and their noble religion'). Arguably the most eloquent condemnation was provided by the writer Georgii Vladimov, the winner of the 1995 Russian Booker prize (see Vladimov, 1993). Limonov's response is to be found in Limonov, 1993i.

³⁰For an undeservedly brief account of it see Kasack, 1992, pp.663-65; a longer entry by Helen L. Tilly, regrettably, contains a number of factual errors (see Tilly, 1998).

evidence in support of the reasonable doubt invariably aroused by Limonov's accounts of his own criminal past.³¹

The question of the literary origins of Limonov is especially important in the light of the alleged absence of any Russian precursors - a view shared by many critics.³² Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to the influence of the writers Petr Krasnov and Vladimir Maiakovskii on Limonov. The methods of close reading and social and historical contextualization of numerous works by these three authors enable us to detect various aspects and consequences of this influence. The choice of Krasnov and Maiakovskii from 'Limonov's literary predecessors of varying calibre'³³ was governed by the fact that, in contrast to Limonov's own unequivocal statements,³⁴ he is often described as one of those who today stand 'on the extreme right'.³⁵ What we actually encounter is in fact an unusual mixture of conservative and revolutionary features in Limonov, as he equally favours the 'White' Krasnov and the 'Red' Maiakovskii. Limonov's proximity to the ideology of the Eurasianist and National Bolshevik movements³⁶ which emerged between the two Wars also proves the same point.

³¹A survey of the major writings by Limonov and his concept of the Hero, pivotal for an understanding of the Limonov phenomenon, is also given here.

³²See, for instance, Vail' and Genis, 1982, p.107.

³³Bokov, 1979.

³⁴Cf., for example, the following words by Limonov: 'the programmes of the left and of the right are not so relevant today. Today's politics is made by leaders' (Bol'shakov, 1992). The critic Dmitrii Bykov notes that Limonov 'calls upon the extreme left to merge with the extreme right, uniting them on the basis of extremes' (Bykov, 1994). Limonov also calls his National Bolshevik Party 'the ultra-left among the right-wing parties and the ultra-right among the Left' (Limonov, 1996d, p.2).

³⁵Kartsev with Bludeau, 1995, p.162.

³⁶See specifically Chapter 2. An analysis of Limonov's original concept of Barbarity is also to be found here.

Another unusual feature of Limonov - using the critique of his writings as a substantial source of inspiration - is given due consideration in Chapter 4. Its emphasis on the recently deceased Vladimir Maksimov and Iosif Brodskii is dictated by the material we analysed: both writers, in their own way, were major exponents of aesthetics alien to Limonov. In our opinion, it was the constant polemics with Maksimov and Brodskii (now hidden, now explicit) which eventually turned Limonov himself into a critic. Then Limonov's literary criticism developed into full-scale political journalism (we touch on the latter only in passing), which in its turn eclipsed everything else Limonov has done so far.

This research was carried out within the traditional framework and methodology of literary history, with no intention whatsoever of making any contribution to literary theory. Our working definition of a literary source, which we followed throughout the thesis (tangible textual parallels between works by two authors, inherent to these two authors only, providing a reasonable likelihood of the acquaintance of the 'recipient' with the legacy of the 'donor') is by no means a discovery. However, from the point of view of the theory of literary influence - the discipline which is normally held responsible for literary sources - some methods of analysis applied in this research might seem incommensurate. On the one hand, the biographical method, unavoidable in a monographic study of one author, presumes the domination of the writer over his or her texts. On the other hand, the technique of close reading, indispensable in detecting literary sources, implies a significant degree of independence of the texts from their authors, and, therefore, the relative irrelevance of the writer's biography.³⁷ Is it possible to marry both approaches? This and other theoretical problems are discussed in the Conclusion.

All translations from Russian are by the author, unless indicated otherwise. Russian words and names are normally

³⁷See Clayton and Rothstein, 1991, p.14.

transliterated in accordance with the Library of Congress system, unless they appear in quotations from the works of other scholars who have chosen a different system of transliteration. An exception has also been made for place names, such as Moscow, which have a commonly used English form. Translations of the original Russian titles of Limonov's works are usually given in brackets when they appear in the thesis for the first time, and are accompanied by the date of first publication, if known. The poetry, as a rule, is quoted in the original Russian, with no translation and transliteration provided.

Chapter 1

DICHTUNG UND WAHRHEIT:

Limonov and Limonov

Q.: Mr Limonov, when are you really sincere - in your interview to *Moskovskii komsomolets* and in *Eto ia - Edichka*, or in your articles published by *Sovetskaia Rossiia*?

A.: I am always sincere, although I guess I am more sincere in my articles, because in them I speak on my own behalf.

Limonov at a meeting with readers in Ostankino (Russian TV) on 13 September, 1992 (12.05-13.00)

1.1. EDUARD LIMONOV'S TRUE LIES.

1.1.1. Limonov and his (autobiographical?) character.

When speaking of Limonov's prose and journalism, virtually everyone, whatever their background, asks the same questions: "Did it really happen as he describes?" and "Does he really mean what he says?". Even literary experts are baffled and cannot come to a definitive conclusion as to when exactly Limonov's alleged autobiographism gives way to fiction, and what exactly in his statements should be accepted as fact. Thus, David Lowe in his study of contemporary Russian writing, when analysing Limonov's novels *Eto ia - Edichka*, *Dnevnik neudachnika, ili Sekretnaia tetrad'* (The Diary of a Loser, or The Secret Notebook, 1982) and *Podrostok Savenko* (Savenko the Raw Youth, 1983), classifies him as a non-fictional writer.³⁸ Such an attitude is based on at least two significant assumptions: first, in the case of Limonov there is

³⁸See Lowe, 1987, pp.39-40.

no substantial difference between the author and his main protagonist, and, secondly, Limonov ignores the boundaries between life and art.

The point of view which identified Limonov the writer with Limonov the character seems to have been introduced for the first time in an exegetic essay by Arvid Kron which accompanied the publication of an abridged version of *Eto ia - Edichka* in the magazine *Kovcheg* and was intended to play the role of an air-bag for the reader, crushed by Limonov's abusive political incorrectness.³⁹ Kron's interpretation met with strong opposition, led by those for whom the clear distinction between the outlook of an author and that of any of his literary characters had been axiomatic. Leonid Geller grumbled: 'It is not clear on what grounds [...] the author and the main character of *Eto ia - Edichka* have been identified [with one another] in Kron's essay'.⁴⁰

It is curious that the Kron-like treatment of Limonov's prose had been anticipated even before Kron's essay actually came out. When the excerpts from *Dnevnik neudachnika, ili Sekretnaia tetrad'* appeared in the magazine *Ekho*, Vladimir Maramzin decided that it was necessary to attach to the publication an explanatory article, in which he stated:

The Russian reader has always been inclined to suspect that behind the narrator there is the author, with all [the narrator's] individual features. After finishing *Sekretnaia tetrad'* you start worrying about Limonov: if only a rare reader does not inwardly blame the money-lender woman on Dostoevskii, what will people say about Limonov's loser who, above all, is devised as a first-person narrator? Does one really have to ask the reader not to confuse the writer with his characters?⁴¹

³⁹See Kron, 1979, pp.89-96.

⁴⁰Geller, 1980, p.87.

⁴¹Maramzin, 1978, p.69.

The writer and critic Igor' Efimov-Moskovit polemicized with Maramzin. He pointed out that literary characters vary a great deal, and

Gogol' did not need to turn into either Chichikov, or Vii; Dostoevskii did not need to rape a teenage girl and take an axe in his hands; Camus did not need to kill an Arab. But the Marquis de Sade had to be what he was, as well as [...] Louis Céline [, who] had to visit the end of the night in order to write his book. The same applies to Limonov.⁴²

Needless to say, Efimov's words backfired. None other than Sergei Dovlatov accused Efimov himself of 'thinking that life and literature are the same'.⁴³ Unfortunately, this did not help to solve the problem of pinpointing the real Limonov, as opposed to that of his principal character called Eduard Limonov/Savenko.⁴⁴

⁴²Efimov, 1978, pp.120-21.

⁴³Dovlatov, 1978, p.122. See also Losev, 1978, p.125.

⁴⁴Apart from the first-person narration, in *Eto ia - Edichka* Limonov employs the *Er-Erzählung* technique (for an analysis of the interaction between the two types of narration see Ryan-Hayes, 1995, pp.137-38). Later on, in other autobiographical works, Limonov resorts to more and more advanced forms of third-person narration, but it does not alter the way his writings are read by the public, chiefly because the fictional character continues to carry the name of his creator. Moreover, some critics tend to see Limonov's true 'I' looming in the background even in those belletristic works which are not part of his autobiographical saga. For example, Mikhail Lemkhin noted that in Limonov's thriller *Palach* (The Executioner, 1986; in the 1992 Dutch translation re-christened as *De kus van de kakkerlak* [The Kiss of the Cockroach]), which was devoted to the life and death of the professional sexual sadist Oscar, 'it is very difficult to distinguish between the author and the hero of the novel' (Lemkhin, 1987, p.396; see also Liamport, 1993; Remizova, 1993; Ponomarev, 1996, p.209). The significance of this observation has recently been increased by Limonov's ex-wife's interview, in which she asserts that her divorce

A slightly more sophisticated answer to this moot question has been offered by Inna Prussakova. Here is her judgment of all Limonov's prose to date:

All these stinking revelations have been perceived as a straightforward confession owing to the main intonation used, that of lacerating sincerity (*nadryvnaia iskrennost'*). It works more effectively than any contrivances of 'neutral' prose! Although it is known that there is nothing more questionable truth-wise than a confession, still a spontaneous confidence in the narrator springs up.⁴⁵

In other words, Limonov only pretends from time to time that it is just his namesake speaking. As Nina Voronel', in her analysis of *Eto ia - Edichka*, concludes, Limonov 'is talking about himself, not about his "lyrical hero"'.⁴⁶

A slightly different understanding of the same subject can be found in Igor' Shelkovskii's review of documentary books by

with the writer was 'caused by cockroaches. This is a scourge in America. Limonov loved them. I could not stand it. The cockroaches would not leave, so I did' ([Shchapova De Carli], 1995, p.71). The key phrase in *Palach* belongs to Oscar's Polish friend Jacek Gutor, who pesters people with the question, 'Could you kiss a cockroach?'. Cf. also the following dialogue: 'I remember that Edik Good [i.e., Limonov in a good mood] came up to me at a party in New York and asked: - And you, Lena, could you kiss a cockroach? - I honestly answered that I could not. - You can see now that you are not emancipated enough' (Shchapova De Carli, 1984, no pagination). It is also worth mentioning that in one of his interviews Limonov compares himself to a cockroach when referring to his first impressions of New York: 'I woke up early in the morning and went to Fifth Avenue. [...] I felt as if I was a cockroach walking amidst cupboards.' (Iakushkin, 1989.)

⁴⁵Prussakova, 1995, p.200.

⁴⁶Voronel', 1979, p.190. The title of this piece by Voronel' refers to a ridiculous poem in Dostoevskii's novel *Besy*.

Limonov, *Ubiistvo chasovogo* (The Murder of a Sentinel, 1993) and *Limonov protiv Zhirinovskogo* (Limonov Versus Zhirinovskii, 1994). As the critic puts it, in his fiction Limonov made people believe that 'all his maxims should be treated leniently, as they were pronounced by a literary character. Well, then, what is [to be done] now, when Limonov [...] talks about current historical events and his attempts to participate in them, somehow or other?'.⁴⁷ According to Shelkovskii, Limonov only pretends that the opinions expressed by Limonov the character do not necessarily belong to Limonov the writer, and at the same time uses his protagonist as an excuse and a shield to propagate (unpopular) views that are very much his own.⁴⁸

Some Western scholars see this problem in a broader perspective. Limonov, they reckon, being only too well aware of the old controversy 'life versus art', simply plays with it, constantly changing the balance between fact and fiction.⁴⁹ For instance, Ann Shukman notes with regard to *Eto ia - Edichka* that 'Limonov's novel [...] plays with the genre boundaries between fiction, confession, and reportage: the I-narrator may or may not be identified with the real author, Limonov'.⁵⁰ Karen Ryan-Hayes, referring to the same work of Limonov, maintains that his artistic manner involves the

⁴⁷Shelkovskii, 1995.

⁴⁸Cf., however, the following assessment of Limonov's social and political journalism: 'Perhaps the best that can be said of these extraordinary outpourings is that their author's psychology does not permit him to distinguish between "literature" and "life", that his "word output" *in toto* can be perceived as an extended "happening", one of those dramatic events of the 1960s and 1970s which involved shock tactics and audience participation' (Porter, 1994, p.187).

⁴⁹Essentially, the main body of Limonov's work is based on a well-known principle of the so-called *Schlüsselroman* (or *roman à clef*), which features, under fictitious names, real people whom the reader is expected to identify. The reader is also expected to assume that the events described in such novels are historically authentic.

⁵⁰Shukman, 1983, p.6.

intentional 'obscuring [of] the line between art and life, between his *Ich-Erzählung* narrator Edichka and himself', with the occasional result that 'the distinction between author and narrator blurs to identity'.⁵¹ Evgenii Dobrenko confirms the validity of this opinion in his foray into another Limonov novel, *U nas byla velikaia epokha* (We Lived in a Great Epoch, 1989), in which, he says, 'the author turns into a protagonist'.⁵² Dmitrii Lekukh even makes an effort to outline the general direction of Limonov's metamorphosis. The critic terms it 'the degradation of the writer Eduard Limonov to [the level of] his own fictional hero Edichka'.⁵³

Perhaps the best illustration of the amazing scope of Limonov's 'author-cum-character' identity is the view to which Aleksandr Zholkovskii subscribes. His standpoint contrives to combine the two opposite approaches to Limonov's output when stating, on the one hand, that 'Limonov as a person and professional is by no means equal to the character Edichka whom he subjected to life experiments in his writings',⁵⁴ and, on the other, that 'Limonov's inability to differentiate between art and life, unfortunately, has been preserved intact until the present day'.⁵⁵

Because puzzling the critics and teasing the reader seem to be one of his favourite occupations, Limonov himself is unwilling to shed much light on the subject. In one of his interviews he answers the queries as to whether everything that happens to

⁵¹Ryan-Hayes, 1993, pp.1, 28.

⁵²Dobrenko, 1990, p.172.

⁵³Lekukh, 1993, p.155. See also Lekukh, 1992.

⁵⁴Zholkovskii, 1991, p.17. This opinion has been independently confirmed by the émigré journalist Vladimir Kozlovskii in Kozlovskii, 1982, p.7. Cf. also the confession of a journalist who had imagined that Limonov did match the descriptions of his fictional self in his books, until she came to interview the author and found out otherwise (see Leont'eva, 1992a).

⁵⁵Zholkovskii, 1995, p.202.

Limonov's fictional namesake in *Eto ia - Edichka* actually took place in real life as follows: 'Yes. I am not afraid of saying so. People do certain things and then reject them, renounce them, when they are getting older. They become very virtuous and say: no, I never did *this*. I did! I did! Nothing is made up'.⁵⁶ (Above all, this answer implies that he committed sodomy with black drop-outs in the back streets of New York - quite a shocking confession in the eyes of a typical Russian audience!) In another interview concerning *Eto ia - Edichka* Limonov contradicts himself, however: 'One should still distinguish me from my hero, of course. I am definitely *not a Trotskyite*, no'.⁵⁷ In his letter to Nikolai Bokov of 5 March, 1979, when speaking about Edichka, Limonov goes even further: 'Many [political] invectives of my hero are unjustified, but he himself at every opportunity repeats that he is biased. It is somehow naive to make the *hero* (albeit with the same first name and surname as mine) responsible'.⁵⁸ In the 1990 foreword to *U nas byla velikaia epokha and Podrostok Savenko* he makes the following remark: 'I hope that even the most stupid reader will not ascribe to the author all the illusions of his characters'.⁵⁹

Limonov also distances himself from his hero when saying that the autobiographical character of his works is not a goal, but only the means for recreating something more ambitious than just the story of his own life:

The figure of Edichka is, of course, only the pretext for writing about everything else, about the world, about his

⁵⁶Mirchev, 1989, p.89.

⁵⁷Gidoni, 1980, p.157. Cf. also: 'Of course, the book [*Eto ia - Edichka*] is autobiographical. [...] When I finished it, I still hadn't outgrown that stage. I was that Eddie for another year or year and a half. **But we all know that for each of us every moment yields a multitude of personalities** [here and henceforth the bold-face is mine. - A.R.]' (Glad, 1993, p.265).

⁵⁸Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection.

⁵⁹Limonov, 1994, p.7.

friends or adversaries in the world, about that boiling broth named mankind. E.Limonov, Edi-baby and other avatars... are a sort of capriciously shaped vessel into which the plankton of life is being poured each time. The pretext is less important, the vessel is less important than what is in it (the content). However, methodologically I prefer him/me myself: Edichka, Ed, Edi-baby... as though I have chosen myself as the object of a critical biography. (This genre is now in fashion [...].) It is an ideal opportunity to show, first of all, the epoch, the landscape, the background, the décor.⁶⁰

Then, in yet another interview, Limonov declares his solidarity with his literary hero again: 'The process [of revolutionary changes *per se*] is dear to me as a writer and as a character'.⁶¹ This is apparently an important part of Limonov's general literary strategy. It is not by chance that he includes the following words of praise in his account of the poetic world of his old acquaintance Igor' Kholin: 'Kholin has the courage [...] to identify his [lyrical] hero with himself [...]. He does this with the aim of achieving a greater expressiveness'.⁶²

In another interview Limonov claims that he has a multiple, and yet unified, personality: 'I have been changing masks very often and unashamedly. I am not afraid of undergoing yet another metamorphosis and appearing in a different mask, [when] I am leaving one book and entering another. [...] However, all this is held together by me myself, by the way I see things. This vision remains practically unchanged in my numerous books'.⁶³ Still, a consistent and harmonious picture

⁶⁰Mirchev, 1989, p.96.

⁶¹Limonov, 1994a, p.11.

⁶²Limonov, 1980, p.318. Exactly the same observation is made by the critic Dmitrii Bykov with regard to Limonov: he 'found the courage to go to the end and to splice the fate of the author with the ideal fate of his hero' (Bykov, 1994).

⁶³Limonov and Erofeev, 1990, p.19.

of Limonov's real life and real self is hardly ever attainable, especially because the degree of autobiographism in his novels varies significantly. For example, Limonov admits that *Podrostok Savenko* is more complicated than *Eto ia - Edichka* because it was created 'almost a quarter of a century after the events described. [...] [It] is not a carbon copy of reality. It represented a version of reality that existed at the moment it was written'.⁶⁴ On *U nas byla velikaia epokha*, the subject of which is even more remote in time, he says: 'I am seeking the artistic and aesthetic truth [*khudozhestvennaia i esteticheskaia pravda*], not the authenticity [*pravda vremeni*]''.⁶⁵

Limonov's deliberate elusiveness is intended to keep the reader permanently intrigued. Here the author's attitude clearly coincides with that of his fictional hero, who says: "As for me, I would prefer either not to have an official biography at all, or to have half a dozen of them, so that I could choose. The same facts, you see, can be represented in different ways, hence these six biographies will be altogether more truthful than one".⁶⁶ Therefore, Limonov, let alone his protagonist, very rarely offers the ultimate naked truth to anyone, although he is remarkably good at convincing people that he comes clean every time he opens his mouth. This is why approaching Limonov in an attempt to clear out those

⁶⁴Glad, 1993, p.265.

⁶⁵Limonov and Erofeev, 1990, p.18.

⁶⁶E.Limonov, 'Amerikanskii kanikuly' (The American Holiday), in Limonov, 1992, p.309. Limonov's desire to ascribe to his namesake a fictional biography can be spotted already in his poems 'Kto-to vrede Limonova' (Someone like Limonov) and 'Zhivet on u teplogo moria' (He Lives by the Warm Sea) - see Kuz'minskii, Tsvetkov and Limonov, 1981, pp.55, 69. The 'lyrical' hero of the first poem, Limonov, serves in Arabia, crosses the borders of Chile and is wounded in Beirut. In the second poem Eduard is a bisexual millionaire who lives in a submarine and in a palace inside a cliff. This kind of fictionalization had been abandoned by Limonov, perhaps because the fantasizing was too blunt.

contradictions which emerge from his writing does not seem a particularly fruitful idea. The full truth might be unearthed by juxtaposing all available versions of this or that particular event (in particular, by tracing the possible literary origins of such events) and by studying various interviews, memoirs and archival documents, not necessarily written by Limonov himself. It goes without saying that information provided by Bohemians should not normally be taken as gospel, even if we find it in their private correspondence, because they are accustomed to mystifying people in any circumstances - not in order to harm anyone, of course, but simply because their artistic nature tells them to do so. Still, from time to time it is quite feasible to look into a mass of contradictory data and then to be able to expose facts more or less in complete accordance with the truth.

1.1.2. The 'Konkret' hoax.

Here is the story of the poetic group 'Konkret' [Concrete]. In 1975 Limonov wrote a number of articles devoted to it, and published them in the Russian émigré newspaper *Novoe russkoe slovo*.⁶⁷ In 1977 they were printed in a heavily abridged version in Mikhail Shemiakin's almanach *Apollon-77*.⁶⁸ In these articles Limonov wrote about a literary group supposedly formed in Moscow in 1971. According to Limonov, it was called 'Konkret' because its members (the poets Vagrich Bakhchanian, Igor' Kholin, Vladislav Len, Eduard Limonov, Vsevolod Nekrasov, Genrikh Sapgir, Ian Satunovskii and Elena Shchapova) wanted to return to Russian poetry its concreteness, 'the same as Catullus, the medieval lyricists, Derzhavin and people's folklore had'.⁶⁹ Besides, the name of

⁶⁷See Limonov, 1975g and Limonov, 1975h. Extracts from these two publications were reprinted in Kuzminsky and Kovalev, 1980, vol.1, pp.283-84, 317-18, 323, 501-02.

⁶⁸See Limonov, 1977.

⁶⁹See Limonov, 1977, p.43. The poems by Bakhchanian, Kholin, Len and others can be found in Shemiakin, 1977, pp.47-89, along with the poems of Evgenii Kropivnitskii, who influenced the members of

the group conveniently recalled that of an international poetic movement (led by Eugen Gomringer, with Carlo Belloli, Öyvind Fahlström, Ian Hamilton Finlay, H.C. Artmann and numerous other participants) which had become known in the late 1940s in the West and, some twenty years later, in Russia.⁷⁰ Any speculations on the degree to which 'concrete' poetry had inspired the above-mentioned Russian poets⁷¹ would be fruitless, because 'Konkret' never existed. One of its alleged members, Vsevolod Nekrasov, called it 'pure fiction'.⁷² Another poet who was named by Limonov as belonging to the group, Genrikh Sapgir, said:

I do not know when and how Limonov invented the title 'Konkret'. At any rate, he did not tell us anything [about it], and we did not call ourselves 'concretists'. I do not think that Limonov had Western 'concrete' poetry in mind. You see, we understood 'concreteness' differently, as looking [at the subject] straight, with no 'bookishness' (*literaturshchina*). And this really united us all, somehow or other.⁷³

According to a recent account by Vladislav Kulakov, the poets who found themselves unauthorizedly 'united' in a literary group by their colleague Limonov indeed had something in common. The unity, if not union, was based on the so-called Lianozovo group,⁷⁴ which consisted of a few artists (Oskar Rabin, Vladimir Nemukhin, Lidia Masterkova, Nikolai Vechtomov) and poets, grouped around their *maître* Evgenii

'Konkret'. Limonov's literary portrait of Kropivnitskii is to be found in Limonov, 1975i (a shortened version of this piece also appeared in Kuzminsky and Kovalev, 1980, vol.1, pp.270-72).

⁷⁰See Williams, 1967.

⁷¹Cf.: '[Limonov's, Kholin's and Vsevolod Nekrasov's] creative activity is bracketed with what is termed "concrete" poetry in the West' (Kasack, 1981, p.129).

⁷²Nekrasov, 1985, p.48.

⁷³Kulakov, 1991, p.28.

⁷⁴See also Sapgir, 1995.

Kropivnitskii, who lived not far from Lianozovo (a railway station on the outskirts of Moscow). Kholin and Sapgir were Kropivnitskii's poetic disciples, Vsevolod Nekrasov and Ian Satunovskii were merely close to the other three. To the Lianozovo poets Limonov wilfully added himself (he *had been* a disciple of Kropivnitskii, however),⁷⁵ his then wife Elena Shchapova, Len and Bakhchanian. It is curious that the publication of 'Konkret' in *Apollon-77* was illustrated by a slightly stylized group photo, taken in a Moscow studio on the Arbat, which pictured all the parties involved in Limonov's hoax, apart from Shchapova, Nekrasov and Kropivnitskii. Kulakov even suggests that 'for Limonov this very photo served as a pretext for inventing the never-existent "Konkret". The invention, however, turned out to be felicitous, and the title befitting'.⁷⁶

⁷⁵See Bokov's obituary of E.L.Kropivnitskii (*Russkaia mysl'*, 8 February, 1979, p.9). It is interesting that in Aleksandr Glezer's magazine *Tret'ia volna*, which promptly reprinted Bokov's obituary in its fifth issue, the following phrase was omitted in the aftermath of the publication of *Eto ia - Edichka* in *Kovcheg*: 'Eduard Limonov, who has left for America and continues his rebellion over there, was brought up [...] under [Kropivnitskii's] undoubted influence.' Bokov protested (see his 'Zaiavlenie' in *Russkaia mysl'*, 8 March, 1979, p.7). Glezer retorted: 'The editorial board of *Tret'ia volna* reserves the right to [make] run-of-the-mill excisions, especially on the grounds that Limonov's work, published in *Kovcheg*, only defiles the memory of his teacher' (A.Glezer, 'Protest A.Glezera', *Russkaia mysl'*, 22 March, 1979, p.12). The editorial note to Glezer's 'protest' read: 'Reprinting an article, from which only one name is deleted, however odious this name seems to the publisher, is at variance with journalistic ethics' (ibid.). The full story was re-told in *The New Leader* of 21 May, 1979, by Abraham Brumberg, who commented: 'I relate these tiresome details, I hasten to add, not because I consider them intrinsically fascinating or because I wish to side with one or another of the injured parties, but simply because they illustrate the political and intellectual climate - indeed, the mentality - of so much of the Russian émigré community.' (Brumberg, 1979, p.5.)

⁷⁶Kulakov, 1991, p.6.

Apparently not everyone shared this view, especially back in the 1970s. Vsevolod Nekrasov, for instance, filled his letters to Nikolai Bokov, the editor of *Kovcheg*, with irate reproaches addressed to Limonov. In his letter to Bokov of 30 September, 1979, Limonov, who had become aware of Nekrasov's opinion, gave the following explanation of the mystification, which he did not deny:

Nekrasov (Seva) has not the slightest understanding of what is going on here or why. This is why he is an active anti-Limonovian, I feel. I wrote about the group 'Konkret' for the local *Village Voice*, and they were interested in 'Konkret' because a group is an interesting phenomenon in Soviet life. They are not interested in individuals, whether these individuals do creative writing or not. Then, in 1975, we could not come to an agreement, and I passed my articles on to *Novoe russkoe slovo*. Later these articles were shortened and reprinted by Shemiakin in *Apollon*. Maybe I am not perfect, but I had my reasons: Sapgir's, Kholin's, Bakhchanian's, Len's and my conversations and frequent meetings, often together with Satunovskii; [and] the book *Svoboda est' Svoboda* by the six of us, published in Switzerland.⁷⁷ The Austrian and Swiss Slavists wrote about us as if we were a group; they had published [our] poems and documents in the Swiss and Austrian press before I wrote about the group. On Seva's part (he has always been a coward, and when we were asked to send a group photo for an Austrian book he did not come to the meeting), this is a bit foolish, although he has the right to express his opinion.⁷⁸

Whichever side one would prefer to take, Limonov's or Nekrasov's, one thing is perfectly clear: it is not always

⁷⁷Limonov is referring to the book *Freiheit ist Freiheit: Inoffizielle sowjetische Lyric* (Zürich: Die Arche, 1975), named after the line 'Svoboda est' svoboda' in a poem by Vsevolod Nekrasov.

⁷⁸Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection.

possible to find out the truth behind the artistically licensed fabrications of Limonov as easily as in the present example. Limonov's early years are poorly documented, at least to our knowledge, so that many of his declarations about himself, as well as about other people, will probably never be authenticated. We will try to list Limonov's most doubtful statements with regard to his 'autobiography' when analysing the novels and novellas of his autobiographical cycle, arranged not in the order of their publication, but in chronological order of their author's/hero's progress from childhood through adolescence and youth to his current state of mind, as this has been presented in one of his latest novels, *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia* (A Foreigner in the Time of Troubles, 1992).

1.1.3. The Great Epoch.

U nas byla velikaia epokha was written in 1987 to illustrate Limonov's argument that the 'world had lived for 40 years under the Ialta regime, and now, in the epoch of unrest, we can see what a quiet and happy time that was'.⁷⁹ A good way to advocate this unusual standpoint was to choose a protagonist who was not older than ten in 1945, thus solving the problem of the labour camps (it is unlikely that a little boy would have noticed them, unless he or his close family had suffered themselves), which otherwise would have put Limonov's original thesis in jeopardy. Therefore the novel portrays the little Edik from his birth in 1943 until 1950, the year he went to school. The main events, however, are set in 1947. The book is loaded with copious and minute details (concerning food, fashions, various forms of popular entertainment at the time in Khar'kov, formerly the capital of the Ukraine, etc.) which the memory of a four-year-old child simply could not retain, but which serve regardless as signs of the Great Epoch. The content of the novel leaves the impression that the scant reminiscences of Limonov's

⁷⁹Limonov, 1993, p.55. Cf. also: 'the most powerful epoch in our history (1917-53) was branded the "bloody past" and "Stalinism"' (ibid., p.93).

childhood were generously supplemented by what Limonov was told by his parents and, perhaps, by what a little subsequent research enabled him to discover.⁸⁰ Therefore it is no surprise that *U nas byla velikaia epokha* is dedicated to Limonov's mother and father, Raisa Fedorovna Zybina and Veniamin Ivanovich Savenko, and starts off with the story of their marriage. As early as here, Limonov takes every chance to make his hero more interesting than he perhaps could be, when, on the shaky basis of a family legend, he claims that Edik has a dash of Ossetian and Tartar blood in his veins. This does not seem absolutely impossible, however; nor do the two sauciest scenes in the novel: little Edik sticking a pencil into the vagina of his thirteen-year-old neighbour Ida at her request, and little Edik dirtying his pants on New Year's Eve, just before the clock starts striking midnight.

Another family legend presented in the novel features the revolutionary romantic Russian poet Eduard Bagritskii (1895-1934) as the person after whom Limonov was allegedly named.⁸¹ This instantly attaches a special poetic halo to Limonov the child, virtually determining his future in general. As Limonov puts it elsewhere,

When they phoned and told him that he had a son, my Dad was sitting in his office and enjoying himself reading Bagritskii... The problem was what to call the child. Naturally, my Dad looked at the book cover and found the name for me... [...] My Daddy Veniamin believed that I became a poet [...] only because he had given me a poet's name.⁸²

⁸⁰See, for instance, the episode with summer lightning entering the Savenkos' home, which Edik did not witness, and an extensive quotation from a secret report of the US Joint Security Committee (1945), taken by Limonov from the magazine *International Security* (Limonov, 1994, pp.126, 102-103).

⁸¹Limonov, 1994, p.33.

⁸²Kuzminsky and Kovalev, 1986, vol. 3A, p.31.

All in all, *U nas byla velikaia epokha* is perhaps the most tranquil and innocent novel by Limonov, although it still carries a rebellious message, suggesting that ordinary people in the Soviet Union in the late 1940s were leading a predominantly happy life, being almost unaffected by Stalinism, at least to the extent usually assumed.⁸³ Limonov tries to undo the effect of what he sees as an awry picture of Soviet life given by Russian dissident literature, and one cannot say that he does not succeed. It is truly amazing what a penetrating effect is produced by a disorderly sequence of corny pictures, such as of Edik's father, a lieutenant in the troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, cleaning his pistol in the lightspot of a desk lamp or soldering home-made radios; his mother reading George Sand; the solemn funeral of Major Soldatenko (Edik's first encounter with the phenomenon of death)... Being 'uncunningly' strung together, these nostalgic scenes appeal not only to anyone who lived through this time, but even to a person who has never had the slightest idea of what ordinary Russian existence, ever so charming in its petty trivia, was like. Besides, the narration is so cleverly balanced that it is not possible to blame Limonov for the misrepresentation of the *Zeitgeist*. In response to such allegations he can always refer to a considerable distance in time, which normally helps us to look at the past through rose-tinted spectacles and reshapes the events as they really were; to the prejudices which Limonov's main informants, i.e., his parents, were doomed to share with the majority of 'law-abiding' Soviet citizens of the time; to the clearly naive vision of a child who had only recently ceased to be a toddler and, therefore, can bear no responsibility for the idealization of the world surrounding him; and so on, and so forth. It is quite remarkable, though, that Limonov applies his favourite technique of making controversial statements about his namesake's ability to distinguish between reality and imagination even to the less-than-ten-year-old hero. On the one hand, Limonov characterizes Edik in the following fashion:

⁸³Some critics, on the contrary, sense a caustic irony in Limonov's definition of Stalin's epoch as 'great' (see Karpov, 1989).

'The factual and the imaginary in him **have not yet agreed** on where the line [between them] should be drawn'.⁸⁴ Twenty pages later, when commenting on the episode in which Edik responds to a theatrical performance (Glière's ballet *Krasnyi mak*) as if it were real, Limonov says just the opposite: '**Even then** [Edik] did not make any distinction between art and life'.⁸⁵

1.1.4. The adolescence of a bandit.

Podrostok Savenko was written in 1982, and, by contrast, this is probably Limonov's most cruel work. It pictures several days in the life of the fifteen-year-old Edi-bebi. The year is 1958, and the site is a working-class area of Khar'kov, where almost every youth carries an offensive weapon. According to Limonov, this is a wrong time and place to live in. His hero desperately needs money to take Svetka, a fourteen-year-old girl he fancies, out (it is the eve of the anniversary of the October Revolution). However, he fails to borrow any roubles from his pals and has no other choice but to rob a canteen (such are the customs on the Saltovka housing estate). The robbery, however, brings the hero only a small sum of money, less than 30 roubles. Apart from working as a burglar, Edi-bebi masturbates, takes part in a brutal fight between drunken soldiers and the locals, wins a public open-air competition for poets and closely witnesses a gang rape and a murder. When he eventually gets to Svetka and has his first ever proper experience of sexual intercourse, he finds out that when she was twelve she lost her virginity to a drunken friend of her late father, and since then has been sleeping around. Edi-bebi's heart is broken, and he leaves town for Novorossiisk, a Russian city on the shores of the Black Sea.

⁸⁴Limonov, 1994, p.79.

⁸⁵Limonov, 1994, p.99. It goes without saying, however, that the distinction between art and life is not always the same as between fact and imagination. For want of space, I would simply like to refer to several works which examine this problem from various angles (see, for instance, Wilson, 1936; Howell, 1945; and Smith, 1994).

Did these rites of passage really occur to the real teenager Savenko? In all honesty, masturbation appears to be the only one which raises no doubts. As for the rest, they do not seem very credible. Take, for instance, the public competition for poets (which was nearly replaced by a competition for readers reciting poems as there were not enough poets willing to compete). Edi-bebi is not on the programme, he is added at the last moment, straight from the audience, and all the censorship he is subjected to is a request to show, prior to the performance, a jotter with his poems to the compère. It is very unlikely that at the time such precautions would have been considered sufficient, if only because a person could read to a large number of people not the poem he claimed he would be reading, but another one (in fact, this is precisely what Edi-bebi does). This might cause a (political) scandal, and the 'offender' might disappear without trace, leaving the compère to bear full responsibility. Would such a person so carelessly risk his or her own neck so early on in the Thaw, with memories of prompt and cruel Stalinist punishment still alive? If so, it would have been extremely unusual. Besides, it is well known that the first unauthorized poetry readings in public took place in the summer of 1958 at the unveiling of a monument to Maiakovskii in Moscow, and these readings were stopped on orders from above as soon as they became a regular occurrence.⁸⁶ The event in Khar'kov is said to be happening in the late autumn of 1958, which one might put down to an unexpectedly quick provincial response to a new fashion in the capital. However, the compère mentions that there had been a similar competition a year before, which makes the scene look even less plausible.⁸⁷

It is also hard to bring oneself to believe in the burglary of the canteen. One does not have to be a professional law-breaker to know that it is not safe to do such things completely on your own. Somebody has to stay on guard

⁸⁶See Bukovskii, 1978, pp.127-28.

⁸⁷Limonov, 1994, p.346.

when the others are breaking in, to start with. In addition, one could scarcely imagine a teenager having enough courage and skill to do it entirely by himself. (However, Limonov's claims in this respect might not be entirely unsubstantiated. In his letter to Vladimir Maksimov of 2 November, 1977, (currently kept in V.E.Maksimov's collection in the Historisches Archiv, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, University of Bremen) Limonov states that he - and his friends - broke into a Khar'kov shop when he was fifteen years old.)

In a review of *Podrostok Savenko* in *Le Figaro* a French critic remarks that Saltovka bears a suspicious resemblance to the workers' 'ghettos' just outside Paris. In the eyes of the critic it testifies to the non-documentary character of the book, which is regarded as a product of the novelist's imagination.⁸⁸ However, in our opinion the strongest argument in favour of the fictitiousness of certain aspects of *Podrostok Savenko* is provided by their evident literary dependence on the short stories by Limonov's old acquaintance from Khar'kov, Iurii Miloslavskii. Miloslavskii was born in Khar'kov in 1946, graduated from the Philological Faculty of Khar'kov University, emigrated to Israel in 1973, worked there as a journalist for a while, then voluntarily left what he called the 'middle-class establishment' and was even baptized. The publication of his first novel, *Ukreplennye goroda* (Jerusalem: Moskva-Ierusalim, 1980), caused an uproar in the Russian émigré press, comparable to that made by *Eto ia - Edichka*. A collection of Miloslavskii's 1978-82 short stories, *Ot shuma vsadnikov i strelkov* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1984), came out later than *Podrostok Savenko*, but its contents had previously been printed in the Russian émigré periodicals *Dvadtsat' dva*, *Ekho* and *Kontinent*, and Limonov could not possibly have missed them.

The best of these short stories, in our opinion, is the cycle 'Gorodskie romansy', which comprises four narratives: 'Tolik Pravoturov', 'Foma', 'Vuliary' and 'Oruzhie'. Each story,

⁸⁸See Limonov, 1994, p.6.

allegedly based on Miloslavskii's own experiences in the semi-underground world of Khar'kov's criminals,⁸⁹ is attached to a specific period of time, so that the cycle can be read almost as a historical document rather than as a work of literature. 'Tolik Pravoturov' contains a sympathetic portrait of a local character, an ageing city wino with a criminal past, who was beaten to death by the police, just for the fun of it, in the winter of 1961. 'Foma' is set in the winter of 1959. It describes how a certain one-legged Foma, nicknamed 'God', who in his time had spent 10 years in labor camps for armed robbery, pitilessly tortures, together with his male lover Belka, a group of teenagers whom he happens to meet in the street. The story 'Vuliary' takes place in the spring of 1962. It presents an episode from the life of the Vuliar family, when a horny robber, who returns home after a spell in a labour camp, sleeps with his own prostitute mother, but does not pay her, so she accuses him of rape, reports him to the police, and he is sent to jail for 10 years. The events in 'Oruzhie' happen sometime in 1960 (one can calculate the date, assuming that the 'I'-narrator in this story is Miloslavskii himself, since he is no older than the other main characters in it, who are all under fourteen). It tells us about the thirteen-year-old son of a prosecutor who gets himself a pistol and kills one of his mates of the same age and wounds another, merely out of interest.⁹⁰

The effect of the cycle is absolutely shocking. It is written in a detached, unemotional manner which recalls that found in medieval chronicles. And yet this is genuine art, and it leaves nobody indifferent. Limonov probably paid even more attention to these short stories than did the average reader,

⁸⁹An autobiographical entry preceding one of Miloslavskii's interviews somewhat enigmatically informs the reader: 'In his early youth he had connections in Khar'kov criminal circles' (Miloslavskii, 1982, p.49).

⁹⁰See Miloslavskii, 1979, pp.33-40. A couple of other short stories by Miloslavskii are adjacent to this cycle, most notably 'Smert' Manona' (see Sumerkin, 1982, pp.117-23).

because they feature the milieu in which Limonov had grown up almost at the same time, which he knew down to a 't' and which would supply any writer with a multitude of original themes and off-beat characters. Furthermore, even the problem of the author-versus-narrator is similar in 'Gorodskie romansy' to the corresponding problem in Limonov.

Miloslavskii's narrator appears in 'autobiographical' disguise. He says: 'Ah! I narrowly escaped the path of evil, because anti-Semitism stood in my way. I was forced to study in the university, write poems, fight for human rights... Only for three or four years did I live as a man [namely, among delinquents; presumably watching, not emulating them, - A.R.]'.⁹¹ In *Podrostok Savenko* Limonov adopts a practically identical attitude. However, he goes further than Miloslavskii and boldly declares that he not only smoked, but indeed inhaled, so to speak. Whereas a teenager in Miloslavskii's short story 'Syn Liudmily Ivanovny' is sentenced to two years just for touching a girl's *buton* (naked breast) during a group rape,⁹² Edi-bebi sticks his whole fist in someone's vagina during a gang rape - and gets away with it!⁹³

In a way Limonov supersedes Miloslavskii, because, when working on the same material, he applies the same technique but on a much greater scale. The marks left by the genre of the novel normally last longer than those of the short story, and Limonov uses this truism to his advantage. Miloslavskii also feels the urge for some kind of generalization, otherwise he would not have tried to frame at least some of his stories into a cycle. Still, his manner is perhaps more suitable for sketches than for panoramas. Limonov's range of characters is wider, and he manages to find a place in *Podrostok Savenko*

⁹¹Miloslavskii, 1979, pp.35-36.

⁹²Miloslavskii, 1979a, p.76.

⁹³Limonov, 1994, p.375. It is worth noting that Limonov, when asked specifically about the credibility of the rape scene in *Podrostok Savenko*, refers to it as to his hero's action, and underlines the fact that Edi-bebi only 'grabbed someone - and that was it' (Mogutin, 1994, p.169).

not only for drunkards, felons and sluts, but also for all sorts of strange characters, such as the worker Bor'ka Churilov who buys and reads books, and the electrician Vovka Zolotarev who introduced automation into his flat, so that he does not even have to stand up to open the front door: he presses some buttons, sits back and relaxes. Another of Limonov's advantages is that he very seldom resorts to slang, whereas this slightly impedes the reading of many works of Miloslavskii, because quite often it is not possible to find the meaning of expressions like *baklany*, *tovary*, *buton*, *prigovarivat' na palku* even in specialized dictionaries of Russian argot.

Miloslavskii's and Limonov's creative interaction should not surprise anyone. It started a long time ago. In Limonov's own words, in late 1966 - early 1967 he wrote a cycle of 'very surrealistic' short stories, one of which, 'The Butcher Okladnikov', was parodied by Miloslavskii.⁹⁴ Miloslavskii was the first person who published an excerpt from the troublesome *Eto ia - Edichka*; it appeared in the Israeli Russian-language newspaper *Nedelia v Izraile* when he was its editor-in-chief. He also wrote one of the few supportive and understanding reviews of *Eto ia - Edichka*, when a fuller version of the novel came out.⁹⁵ An interesting passage on similarities in Limonov's and Miloslavskii's émigré prose can be found in the essay 'Shramy rossiiskogo Odisseia' by Nataliia Gross.⁹⁶ It is hardly a coincidence that at the 1987 conference of émigré writers in Vienna both Miloslavskii and Limonov were defiantly dressed in greatcoats.⁹⁷ Then again, both writers come from essentially the same background. Here is a very characteristic note by Miloslavskii: Limonov, he asserts, 'possesses some subconscious Khar'kovian organs of taste'.⁹⁸ Hence it is only natural that a life-size figure of

⁹⁴See Kuzminsky and Kovalev, 1986, vol. 3A, p.29.

⁹⁵See Miloslavskii, 1979b, pp.177-82.

⁹⁶See Gross, 1980, p.202.

⁹⁷See Vladimov, 1993.

⁹⁸Kuzminsky and Kovalev, 1986, vol. 3A, p.108.

Miloslavskii appears in the next part of Limonov's grand epos, *Molodoi negodiai* (The Young Scoundrel, 1986). Miloslavskii once stated that in his short stories he tries to 'focus on the "lower" class when it is moving towards the "middle" class'.⁹⁹ This is exactly the main subject of the next novel by Limonov, which we will now be examining.

1.1.5. The making of a poet.

Molodoi negodiai was started in 1982, almost simultaneously with *Podrostok Savenko*, but finished only in 1985. It is devoted to the process of turning the young offender Savenko into the poet Limonov (late 1964 - early 1965 are named as the turning point). The sets change from Khar'kov working-class suburbs to the city centre. Intellectual conversations, poetry readings and casual drinking in cafés and at friends' flats, amongst poetic rivals and admirers, replace the disturbing scenes of crime and alcohol abuse. The ruffians yield the stage to the bohemians. Only a number of flashbacks remind us of the hero's dubious past, such as his escape from a madhouse, to which he was consigned in the aftermath of an unsuccessful suicide attempt.¹⁰⁰ Eduard's criminal habits also make themselves felt when he sets on fire the flat of a hooligan who harassed his girlfriend, and thus takes his revenge. Apart from a limited number of similar excesses, *Molodoi negodiai* by and large is a story about the making of a poet. Eduard, who has left his job in the foundry of the 'Hammer and Sickle' plant and become a bookpedlar, meets Vladimir Motrich, an unofficial, but popular local poet of Croatian origin, and feels so impressed that he vows to

⁹⁹Miloslavskii, 1982, p.52.

¹⁰⁰This suicide attempt may not be just a product of Limonov's imagination. In a non-fictional publication he states: 'At the age of eighteen, I cut open my veins reading Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*' (Matich, 1984, p.230). In a different location he says, though: 'I never tried to commit suicide in my life. What is described in my books are merely the stories of my youth. I have never had a desire to die' (Limonov, 1993f, p.1).

become a poet himself, just like his new acquaintance. On a rainy night in a Khar'kov bell tower Eduard also addresses his prayers both to God and to the Devil, asking them to help him to be always an unusual person and a hero. With this three-fold aim in view, Eduard is persistently enlightened by his friend Tolik Melekhov, a student of the Philological Faculty at Khar'kov University, from whom he learns the names of Vasilii Rozanov, Andrei Belyi, Khlebnikov, Khodasevich and Sigmund Freud. In search of a proper habitat, Limonov enters the circle grouped around the bookseller Anna Moiseevna Rubinshtein, who would like to play the role of Madame Recamier for the Khar'kov artistic Bohemia. Anna Moiseevna eventually becomes Eduard's common law wife, being responsible not only for his improvement as a poet, but also for his mastering of the sartorial profession, which helps them both to survive. It is she who calls Eduard 'the young scoundrel'. The other people surrounding Eduard include, in particular, his close friend, the avant-garde artist and writer Vagrish Bakhchanian, persecuted by the KGB,¹⁰¹ and Iurii Miloslavskii, portrayed here as a snooty leader of the local pro-Zionist literary youth who rediscovered their Jewishness after the success of the Six Days' War (the future Russian-language Israeli poet Aleksandr Vernik is among them).¹⁰²

Writers and artists would usually meet in the 'Avtomat' snack bar and in the Shevchenko park, or in Anna Moiseevna's 'salon' at 19, Teveleva Square. They would drink coffee and port and gabble.¹⁰³ From time to time they would also write

¹⁰¹On Bakhchanian and his uneasy friendship with Limonov see Kozlovskii, 1997a.

¹⁰²Limonov disapproves of Miloslavskii's 1967 position. He insists that 'talent does not have the right to squeeze itself into the turret of a national tank as yet another nameless hulk' (Limonov, 1992a, pp.147-48). Maybe the present-day Limonov should be reminded of these words, given his current nationalistic escapades.

¹⁰³The life of the Khar'kov Bohemia is by no means cloudless. The unexpected suicide of the poet and translator Arkadii Besedin unpleasantly reminds all concerned parties that some poets have to

and paint. (Limonov describes one of the first exhibitions of unofficial contemporary Soviet Left Art, which took place in May, 1965, in Khar'kov, in the inner yard of one of the houses on Sumskaia street, with the participation of Bakhchanian, Irina Savinova, Mikhail Basov, Iurii Kuchukov, etc.). As for Eduard, he works harder than many others, forcing himself to write poems every day during the spring and summer of 1965, until a unique manner of his own is developed. As soon as this happens, Eduard's idol Motrich is overthrown. The other Khar'kov poets are also surpassed. As if to crown Eduard for his victory, Bakhchanian invents for him a very unusual pseudonym, Limonov (a derivation from the Russian word for 'lemon'), which sticks to the poet. Thus Limonov acquires his literary name, and the formation of the writer is symbolically regarded as accomplished. Since Limonov now writes better poetry than anybody else in Khar'kov (how could it be otherwise?), and as his output has become too sophisticated to be fully understood by the provincial community, Moscow beckons him irresistibly, promising broader opportunities and proper recognition.¹⁰⁴

The verification of Limonov's account of events demonstrates that he is genuinely trying to be accurate. Many names and facts concerning the literary Khar'kov of the 1960s and mentioned by Limonov can be checked against the memoirs of Iurii Miloslavskii, Aleksandr Vernik and Aleksandr Ocheretianskii which were written independently and

pay the ultimate price for living on the emotional edge. For Limonov this suicide also signifies the disintegration of his intimate poetic circle and the deadlock of his existence in Khar'kov (see Limonov, 1992a, pp.157-58).

¹⁰⁴Iurii Miloslavskii's letter to Konstantin Kuz'minskii of 30 November, 1982, (currently preserved at the Historisches Archiv, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, University of Bremen, in the collection of D.A.Tarasenkov) presents us with quite a different picture of Limonov's stature in Khar'kov in the mid-1960s. Miloslavskii states that Limonov's presence on the Khar'kov unofficial literary scene was virtually imperceptible.

published in the same year as *Molodoi negodiai* in a volume of *The Blue Lagoon Anthology of Modern Russian Poetry*. The original works of Bakhchanian, Basov, Kuchukov, Miloslavskii, Motrich, Savinova, Vernik and many others are also reproduced there.¹⁰⁵ Of course, for objective reasons, Limonov's picture is not, and cannot be, complete. If Limonov in *Molodoi negodiai* barely touches on such an important phenomenon in Khar'kov's artistic life of that period as the literary workshop of the poet Boris Chichibabin, a Stalin prisoner with the reputation of being the 'Khar'kovian Solzhenitsyn', this is only understandable. Limonov was never close to Chichibabin (whereas both Miloslavskii and Vernik attended Chichibabin's workshop and owe a great deal to their mentor) and hardly knows what to say on the subject. However, there are certain things which Limonov omits deliberately, and not because they were forgotten by or unknown to him, or would overload the reader with non-essential information, but because they would undermine his already established literary image.

Before the publication of *Eto ia - Edichka*, when only a few people thought of its author as an eternal rebel and non-conformist, Limonov's poems in the magazine *Kovcheg* were accompanied by the following detail in his biographical entry: 'Studied at Khar'kov University'.¹⁰⁶ Notwithstanding this, one cannot find a word about Limonov's time as a student in *Molodoi negodiai*, although it would have provided the marker for his spiritual progress from the inferno of his adolescence to the paradise of his youth. Furthermore, in more than one of his interviews after *Eto ia - Edichka* Limonov declares that he did not graduate even from a secondary school.¹⁰⁷ If this is true, Limonov could not have studied in university, because in order to be accepted by any

¹⁰⁵See Kuzminsky and Kovalev, 1986, vol. 3A, pp.23-266.

¹⁰⁶[N.s.], 'Kto est' kto', *Kovcheg*, no. 1, 1978, p.95.

¹⁰⁷See Mirchev, 1989, p.83; Khlystun and Shvets, 1990. On several occasions, however, Limonov stated that he did complete his secondary education (see Orekhanova, 1992; Limonov, 1993r, p.45).

Soviet higher educational institution one needed a certificate testifying to one's completed secondary education. Unless such a certificate was forged, we are facing two contradictory statements here. Common sense prompts us to prefer the former version to the latter, because the latter was presented to the interviewers in 1983 and in 1990, when both *Podrostok Savenko* and *Molodoi negodiai* had already come into being in this or that form, and therefore the writer needed to fortify the picture of his namesake as a self-made man who had not received much proper formal education.¹⁰⁸

Likewise, Limonov's very first marriage, which had apparently preceded his alliance with Anna Rubinshtein,¹⁰⁹ was omitted from the book, probably because the writer wished to conceal something of which he would have been genuinely ashamed, had it become universally known. (We are confined to pure guesswork in this case, because virtually nothing has been said on the issue by the usually outspoken Limonov in any of his published works. It is possible that certain circumstances of Limonov's relationship with his first spouse were retold in flashbacks in a later novel.)¹¹⁰

In 1990 Limonov was asked: 'You have the reputation of being a trouble-maker. Do you confirm it, or have you gained it accidentally, not by your own volition?'. The writer answered: 'I have acquired [my reputation] purely by chance

¹⁰⁸Cf. the legendary image of Maksim Gor'kii in his autobiographical book *Moi universitety* (1922). Incidentally, Gor'kii also claimed that he attempted suicide when he was young.

¹⁰⁹Cf. Edichka's phrase 'I have been married three times' (Limonov, 1993a, p.35), coined when his marriage with Elena Shchapova fell apart. However, in one of his journalistic works Limonov still calls Anna his first wife (see Limonov, 1993j). Limonov's letter to Vladimir Maksimov of 2 November, 1977, confirms that the 'Jewish woman', as Limonov refers to Anna, was his second wife (Historisches Archiv, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, University of Bremen, the Maksimov collection).

¹¹⁰See Limonov, 1994b, pp.15, 263-64.

and did not realize that for some time. Now I am aware of it, and it is difficult to say whether I foster it or not.

Circumstances [...] quite often force me to conform to it'.¹¹¹ We dare to suggest that the above-mentioned contradiction concerning Limonov's formal education emerged as a result of such circumstances.

1.1.6. The Moscow period.

Limonov's novel *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia*, written in 1990 and published in full in 1992,¹¹² and several short stories reflect the next stage of Eduard's adventures, namely, his stay in Moscow at the end of the 1960s. When checked against Limonov's own documentary memoirs of the Moscow period of his life, 'Moskovskaia bogema' [The Moscow Bohemia], which were published in 1980, these fictional texts become easier to understand, but also disclose various alterations made by Limonov in his 'true' stories (apparently, Limonov's memoirs were commissioned by Konstantin Kuz'minskii for his monumental project *The Blue Lagoon Anthology of Modern Russian Poetry*, which immortalized unofficial culture in the USSR by the meticulous collection of its artefacts and the intelligent commentaries on them; one should assume that this time Limonov did not want to mislead anybody and tried to fulfil the commission with the appropriate precision).¹¹³ Thus, on the one hand, without the

¹¹¹Limonov and Erofeev, 1990, p.19.

¹¹²This work includes the excerpts from Limonov's novel *Moskva maiskaia* (Moscow in May), devoted to Edichka's first year in Moscow. Limonov considered this novel a failure and decided not to publish it (see Mogutin, 1994, p.159). Pictures of Moscow in the mid-1960s alternate in *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia* with pictures of Moscow in the late 1980s - early 1990s. The second, most recent, stratum of time in the novel will be analysed separately later in this chapter.

¹¹³Unless he wanted this 'documentary' autobiography to be the 'best' source for future historians. In that case it should look particularly dubious. It is not without reason that Limonov's short story 'Obyknoennye shpionki' (Ordinary Female Spies) suggests that the

information provided in 'Moskovskaia bogema' it would not be easy to recognize in the fictional artist Petro Kozak (*Inostranets v smutnoe vremia*) his prototype, the artist Petr Belenok. Petro Kozak comes from a village in the Kiev region, he keeps a clay sculpture of the Russian Civil War hero Vasilii Chapaev in his bathroom and translates French poetry. Petr Belenok comes from the Western Ukraine (the village in the Kiev region provides him only with lard); in his bathroom he keeps a sculpture of the dystrophic Nikolai Ostrovskii, a celebrated Soviet writer; and Belenok's translations of French poets are made not from the originals, but from someone else's Polish word-by-word renditions. Still, the general resemblance of the two portraits is undoubted.¹¹⁴

On the other hand, an anecdote about the unofficial artist Igor' Voroshilov is cut by half in *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia*, as opposed to 'Moskovskaia bogema'. According to the memoirs, the poor drunkard Voroshilov is going to visit his parents, who reside in Alapaevsk, in the Urals. He needs some new clothes to convince them that he is doing well. Limonov makes a pair of corduroy trousers for him and insists that prior to his departure Voroshilov takes a bath at Limonov's home (they use a metal wash-basin instead of a proper bath). Three days later Limonov meets Voroshilov in a pub. Voroshilov is drunk and filthy. He had not gone to his parents, after all. However, in the novel the story ends before the meeting in the pub, perhaps because Limonov wants to rectify the reputation of his, now deceased, friend, and/or because he wishes to emphasize that not only do other people take care of Limonov, but Limonov takes care of others too.¹¹⁵

'Moskovskaia bogema' was originally commissioned by the CIA, not Kuz'minskii (see Limonov, 1995b, pp.217-40).

¹¹⁴See Limonov, 1980a, pp.341-42; and Limonov, 1992b, pp.127-28. Dr John Dunn (Department of Slavonic Languages and Literatures, University of Glasgow) recalls that in 1974 in Moscow he briefly met Limonov through Belenok (Limonov's home telephone number at that time was 138-53-17).

¹¹⁵See Limonov, 1980a, p.338; and Limonov, 1992b, p.232.

The atmosphere of a miserable but exciting existence led by the unofficial Moscow artists and writers is recreated in the short story 'Etiudy' [Sketches]. In these circles it was generally accepted that an artist should not have either money or property. The artist and poet Mikhail Grobman (now an Israeli citizen) taught that one should live on one rouble a day, which meant on the verge of starvation. Such a *modus vivendi* produced 'an idiosyncratic aesthetics of unkindness and poverty'¹¹⁶ in the works of those involved. It also helped to unleash their imagination. 'The world we imagined', says Limonov, 'was much more interesting and frenzied than the real world, and its dangers seemed real to us, because we wanted them to exist'.¹¹⁷

In Moscow Limonov's chief character also meets some poets and artists who have already achieved fame and enjoy their considerable well-being. The short story 'Fragment' [A Fragment] contains snapshots of Aleksandr Galich,¹¹⁸ Il'ia Kabakov, Ernst Neizvestnyi, Andrei Voznesenskii and other representatives of officially (or semi-officially) recognized Soviet art. Most of them are treated by Limonov's namesake as members of the artistic establishment, that is, with suspicion and contempt, perhaps unjustly. Among the few exceptions is Limonov's friend Julo Sooster, an Estonian surrealist painter, who dies early from a heart attack caused by an alcohol overdose. This is yet another of Eduard's encounters with death, and he cannot hold back his tears, for now he understands that one should be prepared to die at any moment, and behave accordingly.¹¹⁹

An episode from Limonov's stoic-heroic existence at this time is retold in the short story 'Kogda poety byli molodymi' [When

¹¹⁶Limonov, 1994c, p.71.

¹¹⁷Limonov, 1994c, p.72.

¹¹⁸Accompanied by a caustic description of Galich's friend Elena Bonner.

¹¹⁹See Limonov, 1987, pp.134-54.

the Poets Were Young]. Limonov's *alter ego* suffers from scurvy, or maybe from some sort of severe gum infection. Instead of going to a doctor, he fights the disease by rinsing his mouth with a manganese-and-salt solution, drinking alcohol and eating garlic. He gets rid of his high body temperature (39,2 C) by putting on two shirts, a sweater and a jacket and making himself soak with perspiration when undertaking a fifteen-kilometre-long walk. All you need to survive is an iron will - this is what appears to be the message of the story.¹²⁰ Thanks to this kind of will, Limonov, when in Moscow, writes poems for ten hours a day and becomes (primarily in his own eyes) one of the most skillful and original Russian poets of his generation.

Inostranets v smutnoe vremia records Limonov's other heroic deeds of the period. Limonov enters the poetic workshop conducted by the famous poet Arsenii Tarkovskii, and instigates a rebellion against the *maître*. Two-hour-long weekly meetings, exclusively devoted to the analysis of the poetry of one particular, each time different, person, do not satisfy the participants. However, it takes the newcomer Limonov to challenge Tarkovskii by suggesting that the pace of the workshop is too slow and that the meetings should last longer. Tarkovskii ignores this suggestion. The young poets have to take the reins of government into their own hands. They start reading their poetry in turn, two poems each, to get to know each other. When Limonov's turn comes, his colleagues are so struck by his verses that they keep asking for more and more.¹²¹

Apart from his victory over the other writers, Limonov conquers the heart of a married woman he loves - by cutting his veins in her presence, out of jealousy. This woman, Elena Shchapova, will become Limonov's next wife and the *femme-fatale* heroine of *Eto ia - Edichka*. In her recent book *Nichego krome khoroshego* (Nothing but Good, 1995) Shchapova offers

¹²⁰See Limonov, 1991, pp.301-19.

¹²¹See Limonov, 1992b, pp.173-80, 189-96.

a slightly different recollection of this suicide attempt by Limonov, who is here called Ochkasov (a derivation of the Russian word for 'spectacles'; Limonov is extremely short-sighted). She insists that when it happened there was nobody in her flat but Ochkasov and herself (Shchapova's fictional male double, the narrator Daniel, does not count),¹²² whereas Limonov mentions the presence of a 'future popular actor' who was apparently invited by the hostess to spend a night with her.¹²³ What Limonov considers a 'romantic scene' with a few pathological details,¹²⁴ Shchapova sees as an act of madness ('Is it not a swinish trick to cut one's veins in another person's flat?', her autobiographical heroine, Anastas'ia, wonders).¹²⁵ Strangely enough, 'pleading' insane proves to be a smart move at the end of the day, because the girl of Limonov's dream finally abandons her well-to-do husband for the indigent poet (although she will regret this fairly soon).

From various sources it is known that Limonov and Shchapova lived happily together in Moscow. Eduard continued to earn money as a tailor.¹²⁶ He was also selling typewritten collections of his poetry for several roubles a copy (according to one source, there were eight such collections sold in 8 000 copies altogether).¹²⁷ His attempts to publish his poems in *Literaturnaia gazeta* (using

¹²²See Shchapova [De Carli], 1995a, pp.73, 111.

¹²³Limonov, 1992b, p.113.

¹²⁴See Limonov, 1992b, p.114.

¹²⁵Shchapova [De Carli], 1995a, p.76.

¹²⁶Thus, in her letter to me of 25 November, 1996, the photojournalist Marianna Volkov writes that Limonov made a pair of jeans for the poet Anatolii Naiman, former secretary of Anna Akhmatova, in exchange for his agreement to read Limonov's poems, and a pair of brown corduroy trousers for the literary critic Vasilii Abgarovich Katanian, Lilia Brik's husband. Andrei Sergeev, a Russian Booker Prize winner, recalls that Limonov made a pair of trousers for the wife of the poet Boris Slutskii (see Sergeev, 1997, p.389).

¹²⁷See Volin, 1975.

Bakhchanian's connections: the artist worked there),¹²⁸ *Iunost'* and *Smena* (on the recommendation of the influential Boris Slutskii) were not successful. The couple met the Venezuelan ambassador, who patronized Soviet counterculture and invited dissidents to his parties. Limonov and Shchapova were approached by the KGB and invited to become its informants.¹²⁹ Both declined. Unfortunately, Limonov did not have a Moscow residence permit (the notorious *propiska*) and kept his Samizdat materials at home. Then again, his ways of making ends meet conflicted with Communist laws. After his refusal to cooperate with the KGB, he faced a choice: either to emigrate, or to go to prison. This is how, in 1974, Shchapova and Limonov found themselves in Vienna.¹³⁰

In a fanciful piece entitled 'My - natsional'nyi geroi' [We are A National Hero, 1974] and written before his departure, Limonov tried to anticipate how he would be received in the West:

The Russian popular poet and national hero, Eduard Limonov, and his wife, the female poet and a national woman, Elena Shchapova, have arrived in Paris today at the personal invitation of the President of the French Republic. At 18.30, Paris time, at the Paris municipality, a reception took place to honour the Russian national hero, Eduard Limonov, and his wife, Elena, who personifies the national type of Russian woman. Prominent diplomats, industrialists, pop stars and distinguished contemporary French writers attended. Smiles and champagne formed the style of this celebration! On behalf of the French nation the mayor of

¹²⁸For an English translation of a 1971 humoresque by Bakhchanian originally published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* see Vishevsky, 1993, p.163.

¹²⁹See, for example, Limonov, 1998a.

¹³⁰See Matich, 1984, pp.225, 228; Matich, 1986, p.527; [Shchapova De Carli] , 1995, p.71.

Paris handed French passports and 'Honorary citizen of France' certificates to the Russian national hero and his wife.¹³¹

Needless to say that in reality the path of Limonov the emigrant was not strewn with rose petals. Curiously, he did indeed become a French citizen (what prophetic foresight!), but only some fifteen years later and after a bitter struggle (the French government was reluctant to grant him citizenship). France was not even the first country in which Limonov tried to settle down. In February 1975 the couple arrived in New York.

1.1.7. Limonov's American years.

At first Limonov had a stroke of luck. He was employed as a proof-reader by the Russian émigré daily *Novoe russkoe slovo* (approximately from March 1975 to January 1976, only). In this newspaper he occasionally published some of his journalistic works.¹³² His article 'Razocharovanie' [Disillusionment], published by *Novoe russkoe slovo* on 21 November, 1979, as a basis for discussion, touched on the problem of those Russian emigrants in America who failed to

¹³¹Limonov, 1977a, p.57.

¹³²Limonov's time in *Novoe russkoe slovo* is described in his short story 'Kon'iak "Napoleon"' [The Napoleon Cognac], see Limonov, 1993b, pp.239-69. The newspaper here is named as *Russkoe delo*, and its editor-in-chief, Andrei Sedykh (Iakov Tsvibak), is called Moisei Iakovlevich Borodatykh. Thanks to the unsigned picture story 'Oдин den' v zhizni "Novogo russkogo slova"' (A Day in the Life of *Novoe russkoe slovo*), published in *Novoe russkoe slovo* of 13 April, 1975, we can hypothetically identify several minor characters featured in 'Kon'iak "Napoleon"'. A.S.Gerenrot, V.Ia.Vainberg and I.G.Panovko have been respectively caricatured as the chief news editor Solomon Zakharovich Plotskii, the director of the printing-house Evg. Vanshtein and the type-setter Kruzhko. The deputy editor-in-chief, Iu.S.Srechinskii, appears in Limonov's short story under his real name.

settle down in their new country and blamed anti-Soviet propaganda for suppressing news of everyday difficulties in Western society.¹³³ Limonov apparently considered himself one of the disillusioned. Thus, he signed a collective letter, 'Ot gruppy literatorov iz N'iu-Iorka' ['From a group of writers in New York'; the group also included Shchapova, Bakhchanian, Irina Savinova, Iurii Mamleev, Genrikh Khudiakov and Viktor Tupitsyn], which appeared in *Russkaia mysl'* of 4 September, 1975, and pointed out that some contemporary Russian writers could find no other ways of publishing their works in America except by continuing their Samizdat activities.¹³⁴ Moreover, in an open letter to academician Andrei Sakharov Limonov urged the famous human rights' activist to support not only the people who were refused permission to leave the Soviet Union for good, but also those former Soviet citizens who wanted to go back to the USSR in the aftermath of their

¹³³The debate provoked by 'Razocharovanie' was rather stormy and lasted for two months; see Grossman [Sedykh], 1975 (the real identity of the author has been established thanks to Limonov's letter to V.E.Maksimov of 2 November, 1977, now held in the Historisches Archiv, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, University of Bremen, the Maksimov collection); Aleksandrovich, 1975; Subbotin, 1975; Davydov, 1975; Tetenov, 1975; Gurvich, 1975; Zlotina, 1975; T.M., 1975; Ustimovich, 1975; Kocharian, 1975; Semenova, 1975; Bondarenko, 1975; Kreps, 1975; Tsukerman, 1976; Tsion, 1976; Slavinov, 1976. Limonov summed up the discussion in an article significantly entitled 'Neterpimost' [Intolerance]; see Limonov, 1976.

¹³⁴Limonov's own poetry apparently attracted very little attention in New York. Thus, a recital of Limonov's poems by the author himself took place on 11 October, 1975, at 15.00 in the Rakhmaninov Hall at St.Seraph's Foundation (322 West 108 Street), in front of a very small audience (mostly consisting of Russian émigrés, no doubt). For an advertisement see *Novoe russkoe slovo* of 21 October, 1975, p.4; for a review see Volin, 1975. The entry fee was \$3 per ticket. Another Limonov recital (this time *à deux* with Shchapova) apparently took place in the same venue at 15.00 on 10 January, 1976 (see the chronicle of forthcoming events in *Novoe russkoe slovo* of 7 January, 1976, p.4).

unsuccessful emigration. The letter was also signed by Valentin Prussakov, Limonov's colleague in *Novoe russkoe slovo*, who helped him to compose the letter, and by Bakhchanian.¹³⁵

After *The [London]Times's* rendition of the main content of the letter to Sakharov (American newspapers were not interested in publishing it),¹³⁶ the trio encountered ostracism from many fellow émigrés. It was assumed that Limonov's, Prussakov's and Bakhchanian's action played straight into the hands of the Communist regime. Besides, the Soviet press was not long in recycling 'Razocharovanie' for the edification of Soviet citizens.¹³⁷ As a result, Limonov was fired from *Novoe russkoe slovo*.

According to *The Soho Weekly News*, during his four years in New York he changed jobs thirteen times, working as a waiter, a housepainter, a furniture remover, a bricklayer, a carpenter and, of course, a tailor. 'He prefers to keep silent about his other jobs', noted the newspaper.¹³⁸ Limonov's anti-

¹³⁵For the full text see Prussakov, 1983, pp.84-88. (Prussakov is the prototype of the character Alik (Aleksandr) L'vovskii who appears in *Eto ia - Edichka* and in the short stories 'Kon'iak "Napoleon"', 'My priveli iz razvedki dvukh plennykh' [On Reconnaissance We Took Two Captives], 'Ekh, barin tol'ko v troechke promchalsia...' [Oh, the Landowner Only Sped Past in a Troika] and 'Mussolini i drugie fashisty' [Mussolini and Other Fascists]. See Limonov, 1993b, pp.366-82; Limonov, 1995b, pp. 241-54, 333-59.) At the end of 1977 Limonov and Prussakov wrote at least one more open letter in similar vein, along the lines that 'even in America, which is supposed to be fighting for human rights all over the globe, it is dangerous to express publicly one's independent opinion' (for a rendition see Prussakov, 1991, p.225). This time the letter was addressed to President Carter. President Carter did not reply.

¹³⁶See Strafford, 1975.

¹³⁷See Dzhalongiia and Chekhonin, 1976, p.17.

¹³⁸Volkov, 1979, p.22. Self-originated information about Limonov as a 'handy-man' has been reinforced by Mar'ia Rozanova, the editor of

establishment pathos was growing accordingly. He worshipped Chairman Mao and Colonel Quaddafi, attended meetings of the American Trotskyites and managed to draw the FBI's attention to his immodest person.¹³⁹

These facts form the background to Limonov's first novel about his American experiences, *Eto ia - Edichka*, which was finished by December 1976.¹⁴⁰ They all withstand cross-examination, as well as information about Limonov's and Prussakov's demonstration against *The New York Times* for systematic rejection of their materials.¹⁴¹ Even the existence of Limonov's as yet unpublished piece *Peredacha n'iu-iorskogo radio* [The New York Radio Broadcast, 1976], which recounts an imaginary revolution and public executions in New York, led by the 'General Leader' (*general'nyi vozhd'*) Limonov,¹⁴² and which is mentioned in *Eto ia - Edichka* more than once,¹⁴³ has been confirmed by our recent archival

the magazine *Sintaksis*. In one of her interviews she awards high marks to the performance of Limonov the cleaner and Limonov the stitcher (see Bondarenko, 1994, p.6).

¹³⁹Limonov was interrogated by the FBI at the end of January or at the beginning of February, 1977. See his letters to Nikolai Bokov of 2 April, 1977 (Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection), and to Vladimir Maksimov of 2 November, 1977 (Historisches Archiv, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, University of Bremen, the Maksimov collection), as well as Limonov, 1998a.

¹⁴⁰See Limonov, 1993a, pp.12, 70, 91.

¹⁴¹See Limonov, 1993a, pp.98, 102, 199 *et al*; Strafford, 1976. On 27 May, 1976, the two writers spent four hours outside the entrance to *The New York Times* building, distributing leaflets in which the main reasons for their protest were listed - to no effect. (A copy of the leaflet is reproduced in its entirety, with all its mistakes and misprints, in Prussakov, 1983, p.107). An FBI agent came to chase the demonstrators away.

¹⁴²In particular, Limonov's troops ceremonially burn down the *New York Times* building.

¹⁴³See, for instance, Limonov, 1993a, pp.71, 96.

finds.¹⁴⁴ Most Russian emigrants in *Eto ia - Edichka* are engaged as 'extras', and in the novel their surnames, as well as their misfortunes, appear to be only slightly changed: Katrov, a former editor on Soviet TV, is turned into Bagrov; the former GULag prisoner Komogor becomes Kosogor;¹⁴⁵ the painter Zbarskii is called Starskii.¹⁴⁶

In the light of what has been said above, one might assume that Edichka's homosexual adventures, described in *Eto ia - Edichka* with such gusto, were also based on real experience.¹⁴⁷ (The writer ostensibly fell into this way of life after Shchapova, exhausted by the misery of their family's beggarly existence, abandoned him.)¹⁴⁸ However, Karen Ryan-

¹⁴⁴A typewritten copy of this work has survived in the Leeds Russian Archive, in the *Kovcheg* collection. Its exact title reads *K polozheniiu v N'iu-Iorke: Dnevnaia peredacha n'iu-iorskogo radio (otryvki)* [On the Situation in New York: Extracts from a Daytime Broadcast of the New York Radio].

¹⁴⁵For Limonov's real-life interview with Leonid Aleksandrovich Komogor see Limonov, 1975f. For Komogor's own publications (mostly journalism and semi-fictional sketches [*ocherki*]) see, for example, Komogor, 1975; Komogor, 1975a; Komogor, 1976.

¹⁴⁶For the sources of information see Strafford, 1976; Prussakov, 1983, pp.84, 99-102; Dudinskii, 1995, p.31.

¹⁴⁷However, certain Russian émigrés residing in New York, in contexts completely unconnected with Limonov, make one believe that the famous sexual encounter between Edichka and a black hobo (see Limonov, 1993a, pp.79-81) is very possibly a mere figment of Limonov's imagination. None other than Brodskii, asked by the musicologist Solomon Volkov whether any homosexual had ever proposed to him in New York, replied: 'Not even once. Except for a very drunk black man who started to talk to me to that effect, more because of his inebriated eloquence than because of his passionate feelings, I think.' (Volkova and Volkov, 1990, p.50.)

¹⁴⁸Shchapova gives her reasons for the divorce in her book *Eto ia - Elena* (It's Me, Elena, 1984): 'She [Elena] fled from him [Eduard] because [...] suddenly she just could not see him any more, and that's all. All his inner self represented her past. But her past had been

Hayes branded *Eto ia - Edichka* 'pseudo-autobiographical' not for nothing.¹⁴⁹ A closer look enables us to establish the literary origin of Edichka's homosexuality (it does not necessarily mean, of course, that the heterosexual preferences

destroyed by nostalgia for the future, and the very place of this past had vanished. [...] He will accuse her of 'betrayal (thus summer and winter accuse the evergreen plant). She will blame him for lack of wisdom' (Shchapova De Carli, 1984, no pagination). The motivations for writing *Eto ia - Elena* are given clearly at the beginning of the book: 'I am writing this story because I hate you [Eduard]. You were on my nerves to such a degree that I fell in love with you, out of malicious anger. Oh my God, what I endured because of you' (ibid., no pagination). From the book we learn something which is evidently intended to ruin Limonov's reputation: he was sick on Shchapova's white fluffy carpet in Moscow and threatened her with a knife at a party in New York, when he was drunk. We also learn that Shchapova is lesbian, although I personally would not give such a declaration any more credit than any of Limonov's statements about his homosexuality. As far as the artistic merits of Shchapova's book are concerned, the best way to characterize them is probably to quote from a review of *Eto ia - Elena*: 'Reading it is not a must. I would recommend rereading Limonov[*'s Eto ia - Edichka*] instead' (N.N., 1985, p.266). For a recent parody of *Eto ia - Elena* in verse see Val'shonok, 1995, pp.215-16.

¹⁴⁹Ryan-Hayes, 1995, p.101. The scholar points out that 'the versions of some events from his "past life" which Limonov provides in *It's Me, Eddie* [*Eto ia - Edichka*] differ substantially from versions adumbrated in his other ostensibly autobiographical works [...]. Probably the most notable example is Edichka's account of his first sexual experience. In *It's Me, Eddie*, he recalls being seduced by a prostitute in Yalta, whereas in *Memoirs of a Russian Punk* [*Podrostok Savenko*], he consummates his childish romance with Svetka at the conclusion of the book' (ibid., pp.119-20). To this we can add the following. In his short story "'Deshevka nikogda ne stanet prachkoi'" (A Prostitute Will Never Become a Laundress) and in *Molodoi negodiai* Limonov gives two opposite reasons why his autobiographical character quit his job in the 'Hammer and Sickle' factory (see Limonov, 1992a, pp.24-29; Limonov, 1995b, pp.35-57).

of Limonov had never been challenged earlier, although one is haunted by the feeling that the scenes of sodomy in *Eto ia - Edichka* hardly betray first-hand knowledge). The primary motivation for adopting the values of a sexual minority, perhaps, could be seen in the fact that an affectionate form of Limonov's first name, Edik, commonly rhymes with 'pedik', a diminutive of a Russian word for homosexual, 'pederast'. Compare, for example, the following extract from a clichéed, and thereby representative, piece by an obscure minor writer:

Those with smarmed-down hair jump up and stretch
their palms: Vova, Petia, Garik, Edik...
- *Edik - pedik* [Edik is a poof].
- He is remarkable as a poet, - says Marina, - and he is
constantly engaged in a search for new rhymes.¹⁵⁰

Konstantin Kuz'minskii also rhymes the two words in his poem 'Khar'kov', dedicated to Limonov and Bakhchanian:

Билетами торгует Эдик
А рядом вьется тихий педик¹⁵¹

An expert opinion by Limonov's fourth wife, Nataliia Medvedeva, also should not be ignored. In her novel *Moia bor'ba* [Mein Kampf, 1994] the heroine Mashka (Medvedeva herself) thus comments on the alleged homosexuality of the hero, who is called the Writer (alias Limonov):

Is the Writer really a sodomite, or is this all [intended] only to shock [the public]? [...] Mashka, then a beginning author, had still been able to understand, with the help of her nerves and intuition, that if the Writer writes denunciatory, insulting and denigrating things about

¹⁵⁰Kushev, 1974, p.58.

¹⁵¹K.Kuz'minskii, 'Khar'kov', in Kuzminsky and Kovalev, 1986, vol.3A, p.21.

himself, this is not because he stands for the truth, but because he has made his aesthetic choice.¹⁵²

Logically, there could not be a better explanation for Limonov's 'coming out'. He detests capitalist society for the hypocrisy of its moral values and denigrates them by saying 'I am an outcast even sexually, because I do not want to have anything in common with your enslaving ethics' (one should not forget that homosexuality was a hot issue in the 1970s). In 1992 Limonov publicly denied that he had ever been homosexual: 'I have been married three times, I am married right now, and all the time, and look at my women, they are all beautiful women. That is, I am quite the opposite [of being homosexual], I would say. If I wrote a novel with homosexual scenes, it does not necessarily mean that I am homosexual myself.'¹⁵³ In 1993 he confessed to a Western journalist that 'the gay sex in his novel [*Eto ia - Edichka*] was [...] merely a form of protest'.¹⁵⁴ In 1995 Limonov told a Russian journalist: 'They tried to pin homosexuality on me, but they failed. It's so silly. People get confused because of my books'.¹⁵⁵ In 1996 he said to another Russian journalist: 'I am not homosexual'.¹⁵⁶ When asked, why then the scene of homosexual love-making in *Eto ia - Edichka* leaves an impression that it was written by

¹⁵²Medvedeva, 1994, p.120. Cf.: 'His Bohemian style of life is decorous, his mutiny is well-organized' (Galei, 1985, p.115). Shchapova gives one more 'reason' for Limonov's 'queerness'. In *Eto ia - Elena* the heroine asks the chief male character (the *alter ego* of Limonov): 'It was Genka Shmakov [a literary critic and specialist on Mikhail Kuzmin], wasn't it, who told you that you had been homosexual, but you just didn't know about it? Shmakov says this to all males.' (Shchapova De Carli, 1984, no pagination.)

¹⁵³Leont'eva, 1992.

¹⁵⁴Tien, 1993, p.34.

¹⁵⁵Levina, 1995.

¹⁵⁶Trukhachev, 1996. See also Limonov, 1996a.

an expert, Limonov answers: 'It only proves that I am a good writer'.¹⁵⁷

Limonov's alleged homosexuality seems to be only one of the fantasies of a loser who longs to get his revenge on the hostile world, blaming its structure, not himself, for all the misfortunes he endures. Such fantasies constitute half of Limonov's next American book, *Dnevnik neudachnika, ili Sekretnaia tetrad'*. Written in the form of a notebook, rather than a diary, it creates an image of a loser in transition, from being a pariah to becoming a 'useful' member of society. The other half of the book consists of the dreams of a hard worker who would like to climb up the social ladder as far as possible.¹⁵⁸ (The loser and the hard worker are one and the same person, called Eduard Limonov, of course.) On the one hand Limonov imagines his *alter ego* being a dread and implacable executive of the mythic League of Destruction, fancies the lot of a *guerrilla* and swears to be faithful to the idea of permanent revolution. On the other hand Limonov readily betrays his imaginary fellow rebels in a non-existent Latin-American-like country 'for the fifteen-year-old daughter of the [imaginary] President Alberti [...], for the sake of her little fanny and her always pinched earlobes, for the sake of the hedgehogs in her father's garden, for those

¹⁵⁷Trukhachev, 1996. However, in his short story 'Syn ubiitsy' (The Son of a Killer; see Limonov, 1995c, pp.191-95) Limonov mentions that his fictional namesake made love to the émigré ballet dancer Leshka Krants ('I went to bed with Leshka. Because of my hooliganism', Limonov, 1995c, p.192). According to Marianna Volkov's letter to me of 25 November, 1996, the real name of Leshka Krants was Sasha Mints, originally from the Kirov Ballet in Leningrad (he died of AIDS in New York at the end of the 1980s).

¹⁵⁸It goes without saying that not only reveries and mirages fill the diary's entries. Reality also makes itself known from time to time. For example, Limonov notes that his hero installs and repairs X-ray apparatuses (see Limonov, 1992c, p.226). The same information can be found in Limonov's letter to the writer Nikolai Bokov of 23 May, [1978] (see Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection).

hedgehogs and snails on the fence'.¹⁵⁹ It is very characteristic that an extract from the 'diary', entitled 'The reformed one', directly links the intensity of the homosexual aspirations of Limonov's hero to his social status:

Those times, when I fucked male strangers in the back streets (out of loneliness, though) and collected my dole money, those days have gone. Now I am working class, a rightful member of American society, a production unit; I am even trying to pay taxes. And I stopped having homosexual relationships a long time ago.¹⁶⁰

Vladimir Bondarenko ponders whether the fictional author of the diary is akin to the real author of *Dnevnik neudachnika*: 'The loser who kept his diary has gone [...]. However close the writer was to his hero at the time, today [the loser] is definitely just a literary character, whatever subject he touches on'.¹⁶¹ There is at least one fact in support of this insight, which proves that regardless of how far Limonov made his hero go in his ravings, the writer himself never lost touch with reality. In the first edition of *Dnevnik neudachnika* the loser says: 'Mum, ah Mum. I despise you. And Dad. It is as if both of you belong to a different race, not just to a different tribe'.¹⁶² This passage was removed from the 1992 Moscow edition, apparently because Limonov did not need to provoke people any more for the sake of provocation, with the purpose of making himself better known. What his hero could easily afford in an émigré book with a limited circulation would have undoubtedly hurt the feelings of Limonov's ageing parents ten years later, if it had been published in Russia with a print run of 50 000 copies.

The sufferings of a society slave, who is equally tempted by the desire to become a master and by the will to destroy this

¹⁵⁹See Limonov, 1992c, pp.53, 57, 64, 65, 199.

¹⁶⁰Limonov, 1992c, p.176.

¹⁶¹Bondarenko, 1992, p.24.

¹⁶²Limonov, 1982, p.81.

unjust and indifferent world, are examined more thoroughly in the next part of Limonov's American chronicles, *Istoriia ego slugi* (His Butler's Story, 1993; the initial version of the title was *V briukhe zveria*, In the Belly of the Beast¹⁶³). In April, 1977, Limonov's fictional protagonist meets Jenny Jackson, an American girl, who is fifteen years younger than himself. Limonov the hero has such a poor knowledge of English that he mistakes her for the hostess of a big house in a fashionable area of New York City, whereas she only works there as a housekeeper. Limonov becomes her lover with the aim of marrying her. When the misunderstanding is cleared up, he does not leave Jenny, although it is obvious that a moonlighting unemployed (formerly Russian) poet and a maid born in the state of Virginia make an odd couple.

Jenny works for Stephen Grey, the owner of a multi-million car business. Through her Limonov gets a part-time cleaning job in Stephen Grey's house, and finally, in early 1979, after the cleaner and the maid split (she went on holiday to California, fell in love with a printer, became pregnant and left her job in New York), he replaces her as the full-time housekeeper.

Limonov remains a 'servant of the world bourgeoisie'¹⁶⁴ for about two years. The relationship between him and his master cannot be called ideal. It is neither the salary (\$9 000 per year) nor the hardships of domestic work which dissatisfy Limonov the butler. His sensitive and ambitious ego cannot stand the very idea of having a boss. Stephen Grey knows that Limonov is an author, and treats his servant with unusual respect (the millionaire does not humiliate the writer, as is customary for him with yet another of his employees, his secretary Linda). Limonov pays him back with disdain. He sarcastically dubs his boss the 'Great Gatsby', after Francis

¹⁶³See Limonov's letters to the poet Aleksei Tsvetkov of 29 June, 1981, and 22 July, 1981 (Historisches Archiv, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, University of Bremen, A.P.Tsvetkov's collection).

¹⁶⁴Limonov, 1993a, p.438.

Scott Fitzgerald's hero, and mocks his bad temper, small-mindedness, the way he runs his business (wasting a great deal of time and energy), and his inability to face day-to-day kitchen-sink problems. At the same time Limonov would not mind belonging to the same class as 'Gatsby' and his friends, but he realises that his background holds him back.¹⁶⁵

Limonov's I-narrator comments on the episode when Stephen Grey, his guest, the Russian celebrity Efimenkov (an inoffensive caricature of Evgenii Evtushenko), and Limonov have a drink together at three o'clock in the morning:

[Efimenkov and Grey] completely understood each other and needed each other, whereas I sat there and gloomily thought that I would like to join them, but, alas, I couldn't. I am thirty-five, and I've been earning my bread with physical labour since I was seventeen, so their pseudo working-class slogans won't fool me.¹⁶⁶

Limonov is obsessed with success, which, he hopes, will make him a peer among peers, but it does not come. For the butler who tries to make his way to the top writers' league and faces one rejection of his manuscript after another, sex is the only vengeful weapon (one should not treat seriously such forms of Eduard's protest as wearing a T-shirt with an East Side subway lines advertisement on it, when serving at a bosses' dinner). As his social position has been more or less stabilized, the book is free of homosexual pretensions. This time Limonov's autobiographical character focuses on being abusive to women. He plods through them relentlessly, quoting their pathetic farewell letters in his bitter tale of unquenched pride. One of Limonov's cherished objectives is to possess, albeit briefly, a woman of higher social rank. At a teenage party in the house of Eduard's boss, full of the carefree children of wealthy parents, the butler's dream finally comes true. A young beauty, a friend of the

¹⁶⁵Cf.: 'I wanted to be like 'Gatsby', and I did not want to' (Limonov, 1993a, p.492).

¹⁶⁶Limonov, 1993a, p.320.

millionaire's son Harry, catches Limonov's eye and boldly takes him to the basement, where the couple ostensibly have the sexual intercourse of the century. Immediately after the act the girl disappears without a trace. Limonov will never see her again, and the constant agony of his soul, torn between conformism and non-conformism, is driven to look for another way of achieving relief and satisfaction.

At last, Limonov's class hatred takes its toll, and he confronts the dilemma whether or not to kill the UN Secretary General, whose party he observes through the telegraphic sights of an automatic rifle, stuck to the rear window of Stephen Grey's house. Thanks to a lucky phone call, the housekeeper does not pull the trigger (after all, he muses, political murders do not solve people's problems). The idea of assassination was prompted by a publisher who suggested to the butler that at the end of the book *Eto ia - Edichka* its hero should resort to political violence.¹⁶⁷ We are not certain whether the assassination plan had indeed existed, but such a publisher undoubtedly had. The following lines from Limonov's letter to Bokov of 30 September, [1979], testify to this: 'A liberal American publisher has made me an offer to print the book, but he suggests that at the end the hero should either commit a political assassination or kidnap a public figure. As for me, I think that he is an idiot, never mind his big name and liberal merits'.¹⁶⁸ From other letters by Limonov to the same addressee (for example, of 2 July, 1978, and of 12 February, 1979) we learn that the writer worked as a housekeeper for the businessman P.Sprague, who lived at 6, Sutton Square, New York City, New York, 10022, and whose garden was overlooked by the houses of Kurt Waldheim and Aristotle Onassis.¹⁶⁹ These facts, however, do not shed any light on the probability of Limonov's close encounters with the gorgeous female teenager. Let us once again fall back on Nataliia Medvedeva's expertise. She says about Limonov: 'Having

¹⁶⁷See Limonov, 1993a, pp.564, 568-70.

¹⁶⁸Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection.

¹⁶⁹See Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection.

described so many cunts, he did not know anything about their structure'.¹⁷⁰ This phrase makes one seriously doubt if Limonov has really had as much sex as he claims.

Limonov's relatively safe and secure life in the millionaire's house came to an end when the abridged version of *Eto ia - Edichka* was finally published by the Parisian Russian émigré magazine *Kovcheg* (no.3, 1979). One of the editors of *Kovcheg*, the writer Nikolai Bokov, who became Limonov's literary agent in Western Europe, sold the rights for the French edition of *Eto ia - Edichka* to the publisher Jean-Jacques Pauvert, a specialist on the Marquis de Sade, for 6,325.77 frs. Bokov received 30% of the royalties.¹⁷¹

When Pauvert's publishing house suddenly went bankrupt in spring, 1980, Limonov flew to Paris in order to save his book. He met Pauvert, the two men liked each other, and Pauvert promised to publish *Eto ia - Edichka* as soon as he became an associate publisher in any other publishing house. In the summer Pauvert agreed on a merger with Jean-Pierre Ramsay, and in November, 1980, the French version of the novel came out. As Limonov's literary affairs in France, in comparison with the USA, seemed to be booming (in his letter to Aleksei Tsvetkov of 29 June, 1981, Limonov mentions that his royalties for *Eto ia - Edichka* amounted to almost \$15,000¹⁷²), he eventually decided to stay in France for good. The Parisian life of Eduard the struggling writer is described in the novel *Ukroshchenie tигра v Parizhe* (The Taming of a Tiger in Paris, 1994), which was written in 1986 and in which

¹⁷⁰Medvedeva, 1994, p.232.

¹⁷¹See the Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection, for Limonov's authorization for Bokov of 16 May, 1979, in Russian and in French; his contract with Bokov as Limonov's representative in Western Europe of 28 July, 1979; Limonov's contract with the publishing house Simoën (J.-J.Pauvert was the associate of J.-C.Simoën) of 25 May, 1979, and a copy of the cheque.

¹⁷²See the Historisches Archiv, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, University of Bremen (A.P.Tsvetkov's collection).

Ich-Erzählung for the first time takes turns with *Er-Erzählung*.

1.1.8. Limonov in Paris.

'Tiger' is the nickname of the foul-mouthed Russian divorcée Natasha (Limonov's real-life wife, Nataliia Medvedeva), whose appearance is described as similar to that of 'Brazilian transvestites'.¹⁷³ In the early 1980s she meets Eduard in Los Angeles, to which she had emigrated earlier with her first husband. Natasha and Eduard fall in love, and Eduard invites her to follow him to Paris. Natasha accepts. Once in the French capital, she tries to get a modelling job and then becomes a singer in a Russian restaurant. Natasha is disorderly, Eduard is highly organized. Usually she comes home from work very late at night, drunk and abusive. Eduard prefers to get out of bed early in the morning to work on his prose. He is forty, she is twenty four. When they do not make love, they fight.

One of the numerous fights is caused by the sight of the naked and drunk Natasha, whose body was painted red and gold by the avant-garde painter Krupnyi (Biggy). Eduard permitted Natasha to take part in this unconventional artistic performance, but his open-mindedness was stretched to its limits when he found out that his girlfriend not only served Krupnyi as a canvas, but also dared to help herself to hot refreshments in the course of the creative process and missed her night shift at the restaurant. Limonov makes a scandal, hits Natasha and kicks Krupnyi out of his flat.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³Limonov, 1994b, p.178.

¹⁷⁴See Limonov, 1994b, pp.229-33. This episode is based on a true story. The photographs of Nataliia Medvedeva in Eve's costume, covered with paint, which was provided by the artist Vladimir Kotliarov, alias Tolsty (Fatso), can be found in the almanac *Muleta B*, ed. Tolsty, Paris: Vivrisme, 1985, pp.256, 261. See also Konstantin Kuz'minskii's poem 'Na rospis' vtoroi Natali khudozhnikom Tolstym' (ibid., pp.261-65).

Among the other methods of Eduard the tiger-tamer are the following: if he and Natasha are at a party and he thinks that it is time to leave, and she does not want to leave, he leaves alone; he does not sleep with her for several days if she comes home seriously drunk; and he slaps her in the face as a remedy against her strong language (this purist, who made his name in Russian literature by being among the first to use the tabooed four-letter words, forbids his girlfriend to curse, because 'she should not forget that she is a woman!')¹⁷⁵.

Eduard also reads Natasha's intimate diaries to find out whether she is cheating on him, and as she knows about her boyfriend's habits, she has to keep two diaries: the allegedly private (for Eduard's attention) and the genuinely private (for herself).¹⁷⁶ Given all this, one cannot comprehend why it is that the hero of *Ukroshchenie tigra v Parizhe* thinks that he is more civilized than his lady.

Eventually the situation ends in stalemate:

All of a sudden, it became clear that neither the writer could tame the tiger and turn him into a domestic animal, nor the tiger could seduce the tamer by his tiger-like way of life. Both sides were too strong to win. This is why their life together (in its third year already!) turned into a tormenting series of less and less reasonable quarrels, arguments and fights. The arguments were pointless, because they could not change anything. Those involved stuck to their own opinions.¹⁷⁷

At this point Eduard and Natasha decide that enough is enough. Thus in 1986 Limonov had predicted his split with

¹⁷⁵Limonov, 1994b, p.133. One might consider that if homosexuality is old hat for the Western reader these days, why not try the shocking power of sexism?

¹⁷⁶See Limonov, 1994b, pp.6, 251-52.

¹⁷⁷Limonov, 1994b, p.279.

Medvedeva, which in reality happened only at the end of 1995.¹⁷⁸

In her novel *Moia bor'ba* Medvedeva offers her own version of her first years together with Limonov. The provocative title of the book is intended to remind the reader of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. However, Medvedeva's struggle has nothing to do with the Nazis. This is the struggle for her man, Monsieur Limonov, who is pictured here under the feminine code name Puma (this is apparently in revenge for the masculine nickname 'Tiger' given to Medvedeva in *Ukroshchenie tigra v Parizhe*). Medvedeva's autobiographical character - a singer in a Russian restaurant in Paris - is called Mashka. The epigraph to the novel reads: 'The struggle for a man always turns into a struggle with the man'. According to Medvedeva, Puma, or the Writer, or Li, is very self-centered, strict, detached and demanding. He does not quite understand his girlfriend Mashka's constant need for courtship and sympathy. Puma not only lives like a soldier in his barracks, he expects Mashka to stick to the same life-style too. Besides, he is practising double standards: what is allowed to him is not permitted to Mashka. Driven by her passion for attention, Mashka leaves the Writer and starts an affair with a Frenchman. Moreover, Mashka sleeps with the Writer's ex-wife Anele (an anagram of the name 'Elena'), because she begrudges the Writer's attachment to Anele, and not without cause.¹⁷⁹ This incident seems to be for real. One can come across more or less covert accounts of it in Limonov's and Shchapova's prose.¹⁸⁰ In her interviews Medvedeva acknowledges that this was a true event.¹⁸¹ Whatever the

¹⁷⁸See Levina, 1995; and the unsigned note 'Limonov razoshelsia s Medvedevoi... Bespovorotno' in *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 27 October - 2 November, 1995, p.7.

¹⁷⁹See Medvedeva, 1994, pp.112, 226.

¹⁸⁰See Limonov, 1994b, pp.262, 264; Shchapova [De Carli], 1995a, pp.104-09.

¹⁸¹See Medvedeva and Efimova, 1994, p.12; Medvedeva and Maliugin, 1996, p.6.

real-life consequences of it were, the Writer in *Moia bor'ba* appears to be unimpressed by his women's one-night stand. (At this stage, in accordance with Eduard's position in society, his homosexual extravaganzas are dramatically reduced simply to making fools out of the ageing homosexuals whom he occasionally meets at social events.)¹⁸² He becomes jealous of the Frenchman, though, changes some of his nastiest - in Mashka's eyes - behavioural patterns and asks the happy Mashka to return. The shrew is finally tamed.¹⁸³

1.1.9. Moscow revisited.

The confrontation between two strong, more or less male and female, characters is also the leading theme of Limonov's latest autobiographical novel *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia*, part of which has been studied above. The main hero revisits Russia, his home country, after a long absence, in the times of *perestroika*, which are termed here 'the Time of Troubles' (Limonov is drawing a parallel with an episode in the history of early seventeenth-century Russia, when the unfortunate rule of Tsar Boris Godunov (1598-1605) led to starvation, riots and bloodshed). The protagonist, a Russian émigré and French subject, an author called Indiana Ivanovich, is invited to Russia by a powerful French-Russian joint venture, which is mysteriously referred to as the *Organization*, to take part in the promotional campaign for the bulletin *Zapreshcheno k pechati*, issued by the *Organization* (a literary almanac, owned by the *Organization*, has earlier published a short story by

¹⁸²See Limonov, 1994b, p.106.

¹⁸³To complete the snapshot of the family of authors prone to self-exposure, Medvedeva recently published a fictionalized account of how she cheated on Limonov with Mikhail Trofimenkov, a young critic from Leningrad/St.Petersburg, shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the piece entitled 'A u nikh byla strast'...' (Oh, They Loved Each Other with Passion, 1991) Limonov is called 'the Writer' and Trofimenkov 'the Critic', or 'Mashka' (see Medvedeva, 1997, pp.7-114). For the disclosure of Mr Trofimenkov's identity we are grateful to Mr Jukka Mallinen, Limonov's translator into Finnish.

Indiana, which signified his return to his origins). He also has a personal interest in this trip: his girlfriend, a Russian émigrée whom he calls Ms Hyde for her evil character (as in the story 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' by Robert Louis Stevenson), has gone to Russia before him and disappeared. Indiana hopes to find her and patch up their stormy relationship. The roots of this conflict are ever the same: the author pays more attention to his typewriter than to his woman, or so the woman thinks. Indiana also plans to visit his parents, whom he has not seen since the day of his emigration, in Khar'kov. In his travels, searching for the lost Ms Hyde, Indiana sees enough to judge the current situation in Russia on the basis of first-hand experience.

Among the most memorable scenes in *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia* are Indiana's encounter with a Chechen *mafioso*, who nearly kills him in order to get his French passport; his visit to an influential 'thick' literary journal, whose office is located in a block of flats reeking of urine; and the funeral of academician Sakharov, whom Indiana does not fail to call 'Father Frankenstein', not only for fathering the hydrogen bomb, but also for instigating *perestroika*. Piecing his impressions together, Limonov portrays Russia as a drab and dejected country, destroying its own past with manic frenzy. Limonov's explanation of the ongoing struggle for power suggests people's ambitions as the principal driving force. The conflict between the Communist bosses and the so-called democrats is described in the book as one between the privileged aristocracy (the Communists) and the underprivileged bourgeoisie (the democrats). The clashes between the democrats and the so-called Red-and-Brown patriots are defined as 'a rebellion of teachers, directors of studies, ordinary engineers, majors and lieutenant-colonels, minor poets and writers [the latter group] against the 'progressive people': academicians, directors of factories and major poets and writers'.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴Limonov, 1992b, p.242.

In the course of tracking down Ms Hyde, Indiana becomes aware of the unfathomable number of her infidelities. The writer finds out that one of Ms Hyde's lovers is a Russian criminal. At one point he even watches her copulating with her own brother. It is hardly surprising that in Indiana's mind the image of Ms Hyde is superimposed on the symbolic image of his Motherland. His diagnosis of the unbridled conduct he observes is fear:

The woman... Fear and masochism forced her into the hands of strangers. [...] One had to admit that she had a fresh, well-preserved instinct of self-preservation. She has appropriated what she was most of all scared of in her former Motherland. These people. The jackals. [...] No, not nymphomania, but *fear* was the main motivation for her behaviour. Out of fear she was acting meanly and spreading her legs. In order to feel absolutely secure, when filled with the membrum.

Motherland... The tough fathers, the Chekists, had become older, burnt out by vodka and gout, their jackboots and shoulder-belts had shrunk, and the whole nation, shepherded by no one, had gone wild and was rushing about on the snow-covered streets and fields. *Who are we?! What are we?! Where is our father?!* - cries every eye. We do not understand ourselves, we do not understand the world... They are all *scared*. The half-witted Motherland rushes about, and out of fear she acts meanly and gives herself to the pseudo-fathers...¹⁸⁵

The content of *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia* is close enough to real life for us to recognize in the 'thick' literary journal the magazine *Znamia*, which in 1989 published a censored version of Limonov's *U nas byla velikaia epokha*; in the enigmatic *Organization* - the MADPR, *Mezhdunarodnaia assotsiatsiia detektivnogo i politicheskogo romana* (International

¹⁸⁵Limonov, 1992b, p.251.

Association of the Detective and Political Novel); in its bulletin *Zapreshcheno k pechati* - the newspaper *Sovershenno sekretno*; in its unnamed almanac - the almanac *Detektiv i politika*, in which some of Limonov's short stories appeared;¹⁸⁶ and in the figure of the front man of the *Organization* - Iulian Semenov, the author of a popular series about the intelligence officer Isaev.

And yet Limonov's main character in *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia*, Indiana Ivanovich, is bigger than Limonov himself. It is not by chance that in this novel for the first time Limonov did not give his autobiographical hero the same name as before, although he passed on to him, among other things, the writer's own parents, his glorious past in Khar'kov and Moscow, and his profession. The leading character here is named after Indiana Jones, a professor with the skills of a secret agent, the hero of some famous films by Stephen Spielberg. A man of culture, who feels as comfortable with a typewriter as with a machine gun, to a certain degree encapsulates Limonov's personal view of himself as a hero of modern times, which, in turn, affects Limonov's general idea of what the Hero is.

1.2. LIMONOV'S CONCEPT OF HERO.

In a conversation with Iaroslav Mogutin Limonov says: "I am a supporter of heroism. Roughly at the end of the 1970s I adopted the 'heroic vision' of the world, and since then it has been the basis of my *Weltanschauung*'.¹⁸⁷ Memory lets Limonov down here. The concept of the Hero had started to emerge from Limonov's works at least by the end of the 1960s. The poem 'V proshlyi prazdnik rovno v ponedel'nik' (On the last holiday, right on Monday) in the manuscript collection of Limonov's poems *Tretii sbornik* (The Third Anthology, 1969) provides the reader with the pivotal

¹⁸⁶See, for example, *Detektiv i politika*, 4, 1989, pp.115-44.

¹⁸⁷Mogutin, 1994, p.171.

opposition of the bright Hero and the grey masses,¹⁸⁸ accompanied by the belief that Limonov's lyrical hero *is* the Hero. In the final stanza of this poem talent (*dar*) is named as a criterion by which the Hero should be singled out from the crowd, and the would-be death of the Hero is treated as his most impressive achievement:¹⁸⁹

...Беспощадно вышел призрак папы
И сурово произнес
«Думал ты один - а мы растяпы?!
Ну наш род вознес?!»

«Нет не удалось тебе я вижу
Становись в наш строй.
Похвалялся ты бесстыжий -
Мы - рабы. А ты - герой!»

Возразить не знаю что, шепчу лишь:
- Я герой! Герой!
Погоди-ка папа что ты тулишь
Меня в общий строй

Обладаю даром обладаю
Пропади отец!
Я умру и всех вас напугаю
Наконец!¹⁹⁰

The image of the Hero finds its further development in the already mentioned piece 'My - natsional'nyi geroi'. The additional features of the concept include dynamism (making changes for the sake of changes), the unification of the poetic and the social in one's fate, the praiseworthy desire to become famous and, above all, the enviable aptitude for sexual

¹⁸⁸Cf.: 'I most definitely prefer the "heroic" man to the "digesting" man' (Limonov, 1994, p.12).

¹⁸⁹Cf. Limonov's recent statement: 'Death is the Hero's profession' (Limonov, 1993, p.204).

¹⁹⁰Limonov, 1979, pp.47-48.

intercourse. Limonov the National Hero claims: 'When I am making love, I symbolize the gigantic eroticism of my nation'.¹⁹¹

Limonov's heroic vision of the world was strengthened by his émigré experiences. Vladimir Maramzin offers the following explanation of the nature of the link between Limonov's emigration and Limonov's 'heroic' standpoint:

We émigrés, as no one else, would like continually to demonstrate to the Motherland that all those expelled by the authorities are the nation's best people. The authorities might take pity on us and summon us back. For the writer it is very difficult to free his mind from the atmosphere of this universal sublimation. One is tempted to picture heroes, not living people with faults.¹⁹²

Maybe this is why Limonov's main character, Edichka, insists so passionately: 'My profession is a hero. I have always thought of myself as a hero and have never tried to hide it'.¹⁹³ Moreover, the creator of Edichka considers his novel *Eto ia - Edichka* to be an example of heroism. In his 1988 interview to Aleksandr Mirchev he says:

I think many people realized that it was a new book of a new literature. But they were baffled by the obscene language, sexual scenes and all that heavy stuff which fell onto the head of the Russian reader. All Russian adults knew very well that *such things* existed, but

¹⁹¹Limonov, 1977a, p.58.

¹⁹²Maramzin, 1978, p.69. Limonov indirectly confirms this observation when he says that his heroic attitude to life helped him to see through the worst years of emigration. (see Limonov, 1993, pp.103-07).

¹⁹³Limonov, 1993a, p.131.

[they could not imagine it] in a book... I turned out to be the boldest one, that is.¹⁹⁴

There were also purely artistic reasons for Limonov's addiction to the heroic.¹⁹⁵ In his 1983 interview with Aleksandr Mirchev he declares that literary characters reveal themselves best in scenes of war, in heroic and terrorist actions, namely, when personal courage (or the lack of it) manifests itself. The sexual episodes are also included here.¹⁹⁶ In another interview Limonov professes: 'I am none too pleased with the grotesque and the caricatures which dominate in contemporary Soviet and anti-Soviet literature. [...] I think that it is the figure of the lyrical, tragic hero which makes Russian literature really interesting'.¹⁹⁷

Limonov juxtaposes his notion of hero to the typical heroes in the works of many other contemporary Russian writers. In his opinion, their favourite positive character is a traitor, whom they glamourize. Limonov says, for example:

The hero of the majority of the songs by Vysotskii and Galich is, as a matter of fact, a caricature of the hero. He reports himself [to the authorities], he does not believe in his own tragic nature, but, on the contrary, he is sure that he is a caricature, a boor and a lout. He is an eternal provincial from the outskirts of the world (Europe is the centre of his empire), he always admits that he is provincial, and rushes to caricature (to report) his people and his country [in order] to emphasize the difference between him and them, to distance himself from them. He betrays in order to not belong to them. In order to say: 'I realize that they are poor, rude, provincial, and since I realize this, I am not like them'.

¹⁹⁴Mirchev, 1989, p.103.

¹⁹⁵Cf. 'I was attracted to leaders, heroes and dynamic people' (Limonov, 1994d, p.57).

¹⁹⁶See Mirchev, 1989, p.92.

¹⁹⁷Gidoni, 1980, pp.155-56.

Because the Russian traitor suffers from an inferiority complex.¹⁹⁸

However, as has already been demonstrated more than once, Limonov's autobiographical hero himself is not exactly a paragon of virtue.¹⁹⁹ His heroism too often has nothing to do with ethics,²⁰⁰ i.e., as Limonov would put it, moral values approved by society, in which hypocrisy reigns. Edichka ignores the taboos of such a society when, driven by circumstances, he swears in public and makes inspiring speeches in support of sexual perversion. The hero of Limonov's non-autobiographical fiction goes even further in his challenge to the moral standards of society. Analysing one of the few experimental novels by Limonov which are not based on the intimate life of Edichka (and, therefore, are not very successful) - the novel *Palach* - Iaroslav Mogutin notes that the author's principle of focusing the narration on his namesake is abandoned here not without reason: "'He" can do what no "I" in Russian literature could ever do. He can be a hero, the Hero, while remaining the Executioner. Or, to be more precise, he can be the Executioner while remaining the Hero'.²⁰¹

In 1986 Limonov wrote another novel, *Smert' sovremennykh geroev* (The Death of Contemporary Heroes, 1992), which

¹⁹⁸Limonov, 1992d, pp.119-20. The same belittling characteristics apply to the main hero of the so-called democratic press in the times of *perestroika*, who, according to Limonov, is also a traitor (ibid., p.171).

¹⁹⁹Limonov believes that being a hero is not necessarily the same as fighting for the right cause. For example, he sincerely brands the special militia forces which guarded the access to Manezh Square in the very centre of Moscow during the violent protest march on 23 February, 1992, 'their heroes', i.e., those supporting Limonov's political opponents (see Limonov, 1993, p.62).

²⁰⁰The critic Evgenii Ponomarev labelled Limonov's heroes 'anti-cultural scum' (Ponomarev, 1996, passim).

²⁰¹Mogutin, 1993, pp.310-11.

stands out from the Edichka cycle. It tells the story of three reluctant adventurers on holiday in Venice: the half-English, half-Scottish Edinburgh-born drug-trafficker Fiona Evans, the Colombian ex-shoe-salesman Victor and the American editor of an English-language literary magazine in Paris John Gallant.²⁰² In a conversation with Iaroslav Mogutin, Limonov says about these characters: 'Three losers with banal biographies are heroes in inverted commas. They do not know who they are, why they live, who sleeps with whom; nothing is known, even who killed two of them. They are our contemporaries in a total mess, which is of little interest. When I finished the book, I thought: "God, I do need a Hero!"'.²⁰³

John Gallant, the only survivor of the bloodshed in Venice, apparently raises his voice in favour of similar persuasions. According to Limonov, Gallant 'was firmly convinced that absorbing, heroic characters do not live in the civilized countries. That the heroic characters have become extinct in Europe and its 'colonies' - Northern America, Australia, Russia and the others. That the hero is hostile to the modern white civilization of the average man. That the hero can be found only on the outskirts of Asia, Africa and America'.²⁰⁴

²⁰²It appears that the only autobiographical line in this novel is to be found in the description of John Gallant's creative method. When Fiona and Victor, John's casual friends, are murdered by a drug-related assassin almost before his eyes, he tries to give way to his emotions in an essay, but after a while realizes that he is working on an autobiographical novel (see Limonov, 1993b, p.140). Apparently Limonov himself applies the same method. Thus, in the 1991 preface to *Eto ia - Edichka* and *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia* he confesses that the latter novel 'stems from my sketch "Vozvrashchenie v SSSR" [Back in the USSR], written for the French edition of the magazine *Rolling Stone*, March 1990' (Limonov, 1992b, p.4).

²⁰³Mogutin, 1994, p.164.

²⁰⁴Limonov, 1993b, p.29. This aspect of Limonov's heroological studies is closely connected to his concept of modern barbarism, with which the present work deals in its next chapter.

Still, there is something in all three characters which makes them different from average people. Fiona Evans says to John:

We are all outsiders, the *marginiaux*, don't you understand? I rejected the upper-class morals with all their ceremonies and conventionalities; you repudiated the morals of the family of a *petit-proprietaire*; for the sake of an unpredictable future you declined the predictable future of an owner of garages and petrol stations; Victor fled from his family, although he does not quite understand what he has to do with himself...²⁰⁵

Nevertheless, being an individualist does not automatically guarantee a character a place in the category of heroes. Organic unity with the masses sometimes helps, in spite of our expectations (in his journalistic works Limonov usually anathematizes the inactive Philistines who make up the masses and 'treat heroism with disgust').²⁰⁶ Thus, Limonov says about the rallies of the so-called Red-and-Brown patriotic forces in Moscow in the summer of 1992, in which he took part: 'Heroic is the enthusiasm, the heroism of the crowd'.²⁰⁷

Notwithstanding this, no heroic actions, such as participation in demonstrations and military assaults, can on their own resolve the matter of the making of a hero. A person in constant pursuit of heroic deeds might simply look ridiculous.²⁰⁸ Moreover, in Limonov's view, coping with

²⁰⁵Limonov, 1993b, p.65.

²⁰⁶Limonov, 1994e, p.4.

²⁰⁷Limonov, 1994d, p.66.

²⁰⁸Such is the character of Lieutenant Agibenin in *U nas byla velikaia epokha*: 'Beyond all doubt he was a heroic type who had always been hastily searching for heroism and finding himself in preposterous situations because of his haste and resoluteness' (Limonov, 1994, p.71).

ordinary life might often be more difficult than facing mortal danger. Eduard the housekeeper confesses:

As the months and years come and go, it is genuine heroism to stand one's ground in the tasteless syrup of the daily routine, which has no smell. In contrast to received opinion, to rush forward when they shout 'Hurrah' and to stand up to attack under bullets is easier than that, I am sorry. That [sort of] feat needs a brief exertion of the will. I am sure that I can stand against the brick wall before a firing squad, smiling, my hands in my pockets, a cigar in my lips. I am serious, I can do this, I will have enough strength for a smile, for the cigar, for my hands in the pockets, for keeping my eyes open. It seems to me that I will hardly have enough strength for the ghastly everyday routine. I will break loose and start doing silly things.²⁰⁹

In this context even possessing an artistic gift (the quality which made Limonov so proud of himself at an early stage of his career) is not enough for one to become someone really special. This is why, at present, Limonov is making a serious endeavour to overcome the limitations of his profession by entering the field of politics. He says: 'I am trying to break free from the fate of the writer. The writer as a character in History is pathetic, even if he is a great writer'.²¹⁰ A short list of Limonov's personal idols shows that for him life had become larger than literature a long time ago. He admires men of action like Che Guevara and Muammar Quaddafi,²¹¹ as

²⁰⁹Limonov, 1993a, p.556. A role model for exemplary struggle with the 'ghastly everyday routine' is outlined in Limonov's short story 'Smert' rabochego' (The Death of a Worker; see Limonov, 1995b, pp.58-76) which describes the last months in the life of a metal worker (Edichka's neighbour in Moscow) who is dying of cancer. The title of the story clearly refers to the book *Death of a Hero* (1929) by Richard Aldington.

²¹⁰Mogutin, 1994, p.171.

²¹¹See Limonov, 1994a, p.11; Mirchev, 1989, p.97.

well as the Russian extreme nationalists Viktor Anpilov and Aleksandr Barkashov,²¹² whereas the writer Solzhenitsyn is termed by him 'a heroic anti-hero'.²¹³ It is not for nothing that certain critics call Limonov 'a literary man of action'.²¹⁴

On the other hand, it is curious that, according to Limonov's account, his early poems owed a great deal to anti-heroic aesthetics à la Vasilii Rozanov, and he felt attached to such aesthetics even at the beginning of the 1990s.²¹⁵ In his letter to Bokov of 10 April, 1978, Limonov calls the main character in his book *Dnevnik neudachnika, ili Sekretnaia tetrad'* an 'anti-hero'.²¹⁶ In *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia* Limonov says about his collection of short stories 'Obyknoennye intsidenty' (Ordinary Incidents): 'The heroes, or, to be precise, the non-heroes of these stories, are habitually mad people of the Western world, the castrated and tamed inhabitants of New York, Vienna, Paris and California'.²¹⁷ Inna Prussakova even generalizes, perhaps too hastily, that 'in the centre [of Limonov's artistic universe] are the heroes who are opposed to everything heroic, on principle'.²¹⁸

In other words, neither morality, nor immoralism, neither gregariousness, nor individualism, neither the ordinary, nor the extraordinary - none of these notions assists us in accurately defining Limonov's idiosyncratic concept of heroism, which he defines rather obscurely as 'human spiritual energy'.²¹⁹ To cut a long story short, when Limonov says 'the Hero' he implies 'Limonov', seeing himself as an

²¹²See Limonov, 1994f, p.3.

²¹³Limonov, 1992d, p.114. See also Limonov, 1994g, p.3.

²¹⁴Tien, 1993, p.34.

²¹⁵See Limonov and Erofeev, 1990, p.18.

²¹⁶See Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection.

²¹⁷Limonov, 1992b, p.183.

²¹⁸Prussakova, 1995, p.200.

²¹⁹Limonov, 1993a, p.539. It is not by coincidence that Limonov calls Iurii Gagarin, the first man in space, a 'pseudo-hero', because 'he did not possess any spiritual qualities' (Limonov, 1977a, p.39).

almost ideal epitome of his own postulates. In one of his interviews he presents us with yet another self-portrait of the hero:

I am an active man. [...] But there are only a few people like me. I realize that the majority always needs a normal stable life, without ruptures and nervous breakdowns. People need to lead a measured existence, to inherit property; they need certainty, guarantees, comfort... I am of a different breed. My world is still full of beasts, beauties, collisions, eruptions...²²⁰

Has Limonov succeeded in making people believe that he is a real Hero? Here are two mutually incompatible answers to this question. Nataliia Medvedeva says: 'As a woman, I wanted to have a hero, and Limonov has been matching up to my expectations for twelve years already'.²²¹ Elena Shchapova de Carli disagrees: 'He has invented one half of his life, and in it he wants to play a role which he cannot cope with'.²²² Aleksandr Dugin, until recently one of Limonov's closest colleagues in the National Bolshevik Party, supports Medvedeva's point of view:

Limonov is a tough man, and he is a man of his word. He said: 'I will go to the front' - and he fought in Serbia and took part in an attack. He said: 'I support the patriots' - and he was in the front row at the barricades, under the truncheons, and in Ostankino - under the bullets. He said: 'I will torture the traitors of the Motherland' - and he will... One should not drive him to do it.²²³

It appears that Medvedeva and Dugin are closer to the truth than Shchapova. Suffice it to mention that one of Limonov's

²²⁰Limonov, 1994a, p.11.

²²¹Medvedeva and Efimova, 1994, p.12.

²²²Shchapova [De Carli], 1995a, p.92.

²²³Dugin, 1995, p.6.

aspirations was to found a political party²²⁴ - and he did this approximately ten years after this unusual ambition had been publicized.²²⁵ However, the choice of the posture of the Hero itself looks highly questionable. Apart from the opinion of Bertold Brecht (who believed that unhappy was a country which needed heroes), one might refer to a recent authoritative judgment given by Iurii Lotman in a letter to Boris Egorov in the summer of 1992: 'On the whole, it seems to me that the history of mankind has become less interesting, and this is a very good sign. The more boring it is, the less heroic it is, the less blood [will be spilt]. We have seen enough of blood, and our grandchildren will be better off being bored'.²²⁶

However, if we adopt a cultural, not moral or historical, approach to Limonov's stance, we will see that Limonov, who constantly moves the boundaries between life and art in any way he likes, simply could not embrace anything but the mask of hero. When characterizing the psychological and cultural type of hero, Ernest Becker pointed out that the 'heroic' type of person creates a second world, a world of humanly created meaning, a new reality that he can live, dramatize, nourish himself in, and that for the hero illusion means creative play at its highest level.²²⁷ The content of this illusion is a heroic legend, and this is what Limonov has triggered off and then allowed to develop on its own. For the aim of the hero is to overcome death, if not literally, then by means of a legend (Limonov's attitude to death is discussed in detail in Chapter 3).

²²⁴Limonov, 1993a, p.458.

²²⁵The French version of Limonov's third book of prose, *Istoriia ego slugi*, appeared in 1983.

²²⁶Egorov, 1994, p.167.

²²⁷See Becker, 1973, pp.171-75.

The best confirmation of the fruitfulness of Limonov's heroic legend about himself²²⁸ is that of late it has been spreading and evolving entirely by itself. Thus, the image of Limonov as a literary man of action, who means and does exactly what he says, has recently received strong independent support in an 'Eastern' by Aleksandr Chernitskii, 'My mozhem vse' (We Can Do Anything, 1994).²²⁹ This mediocre satire is about an imaginary covert military operation, 'Tuziku pora na tsep'' (Time to Chain the Dog), allegedly masterminded by Vladimir Zhirinovskii. The aim of the operation is to destroy a police station in Latvia in retaliation for the systematic requisition of products from illegal Belorussian vendors carried out by the Latvian police. The squad of Zhirinovskii's 'commandos' chosen for the raid includes the writer Erik Veniaminovich (i.e., Limonov), the TV journalist A.N. (i.e., Aleksandr Nevzorov, an ultra-right nationalist and anchor man of the famous St.Petersburg news programme '600 Seconds'), Chernitskii himself and two 'groupies', Tanechka and Anek. The operation, which costs the lives of a number of Latvian policemen, goes successfully, and the triumphant terrorist unit is decorated with 'shadow' awards. The whole story is devised as a warning and aims to demonstrate just how far certain journalists and politicians are prepared to go in their actions. It is interesting that Limonov and his team are not only aware of Chernitskii's piece, but have already called it 'a friendly caricature'!²³⁰ If this is friendly, what would Limonov term 'unfriendly'? The mind boggles.²³¹

²²⁸He says that he is the only émigré writer who has become idolized (by the Russians, apparently?) - see Bol'shakov, 1992.

²²⁹See *Novyi mir*, 1994, 10, pp.12-59. There was an earlier attempt by Aleksandr Kabakov to picture Limonov as the Writer in a satirical fantasy 'Vid na ploshchad' [Overlooking the Square] published in *Moskovskie novosti* (no.7, 1993).

²³⁰Gryzunovy, 1995, p.3.

²³¹Judging by newspaper information, Limonov's public image is undergoing similar treatment in recent French fiction (see Kokh, 1996).

Another proof of the viability of Limonov's legendary image²³² is that it has become the object of rumours, anecdotes and even Russian folklore songs.²³³ A passage in Limonov's unpublished piece *Peredacha n'iu-iorskogo radio* on burning down the building of *The New York Times*, which declined Limonov's articles, led to rumours that he genuinely tried to set fire to the offices of the American Russian-language newspaper *Novoe russkoe slovo*, from which he was fired.²³⁴ In his letter to Limonov of 26 April, 1977, Nikolai Bokov informed him:

People are joking that now everyone will publish your works, as you have got into the habit of visiting editors with a manuscript in one hand and with a jerrycan [of inflammatory liquid] in the other. You are also the hero of various rumours. Among them are [the following]: you allegedly beat up officials from the Russian Refugees' Aid Bureau and appropriated the money which was given to you by [the musician] Rostropovich for Shemiakin's [almanac] *Apollon*.²³⁵

²³²Limonov has acquired such status that sometimes even his absence at public gatherings is considered to be worthy of note. Cf., for example, the following words from the poem '18-20 sentiabria 1989 goda' by Lev Losev, devoted to a conference of Slavists organized by the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (University of London): «А здесь ли Э.Лимонов?» / «Увы, Лимонов прибыть не мог» (Losev, 1996, p.20).

²³³Some critics have already noted that Limonov's manner displays certain characteristics of folklore (in particular, the hyperbolization of actuality). Thus, Vladimir Bondarenko says about the narration in *Eto ia - Edichka* and *Podrostok Savenko*: 'The author himself is in doubt whether the events that are occurring are real. The author himself aspires to the folklore version' (Bondarenko, 1992, p.24).

²³⁴See the article 'Variatsii na temu o podzhoge' in *Novoe russkoe slovo* of 11 January, 1977, by the editor of *Novoe russkoe slovo*, Andrei Sedykh, and K.Kuz'minskii's letter to Sedykh in Kuzminsky and Kovalev, 1986, vol. 3A, pp.168-69.

²³⁵Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection.

In his letter to Bokov of 2 April, 1977, Limonov said: 'As you can guess yourself, I did not set the newspaper['s office] on fire'.²³⁶

Limonov is also featured in the anecdote 'Sonet Shekspira' [Shakespeare's Sonnet, 1986], published in the Paris Russian-language newspaper *Vechernii zvon*:

In a sleeper Limonov and Turgenev were in the top bunk, and Dzhugashvili and Ordzhonikidze were in the bottom one. Turgenev wanted to spit. He bent over, spat and hit Ordzhonikidze on the face. Ordzhonikidze's friend Dzhugashvili was surprised. He asked: *Kto nakharkiv?* (Who gobbled [at you]?). Limonov stuck his neck out [and said]: *Ia na Khar'kiv* (I am going to Khar'kov), because he was born there. Then Dzhugashvili hit his gob with all his might.²³⁷

Limonov has even become the hero of a sympathetic *chastushka* (Russian short folk song, reflecting events of a domestic and political nature), composed by the former variety manager Pavel Leonidov:

Эстетичка и этичка
В соитии вне спален -
Знаток «офсайтов» Эдичка
И преотличный парень.²³⁸

One might say that these texts are not genuine folklore articles, because they were written by our contemporaries, who signed their names, whereas the authors of folklore genres are not only anonymous, but unknown.²³⁹ However, in

²³⁶Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection.

²³⁷Dranker and Plev, 1986, p.1.

²³⁸Leonidov, 1981, p.157.

²³⁹Being aware of this fact, Limonov 'helps' to strengthen the folklore infrastructure which surrounds his name by launching the

this case the choice itself of the folklore genres of anecdote and *chastushka*, deliberately made by L.Dranker, L.Polev and P.Leonidov, demonstrates the level of popularity which the legend of Limonov enjoys.²⁴⁰ It is known that in Russia Limonov has turned into a role model, especially for the young. For instance, Dimka, a young hero in a short story by Sergei Kaledin, 'learned how to make jeans. He read *Eto ia - Edichka* by Limonov. Limonov writes there that he used to make extremely fashionable trousers for the Moscovites. So Dimka has become really good at it. However, he did not make much money, because now you can buy jeans at any kiosk'.²⁴¹

Unfortunately for Limonov, the bitter truth is that his legend also has its dark side, which too often backfires and eclipses the bright one. Thus, the statement that Limonov has been

anonymous song 'Bat'ka Limon' (probably written by Limonov himself), in which 'father' Limonov is glorified by the implicit comparison with the other *bat'kos*, i.e., the leaders of the military opposition both to the Reds and to the Whites at the time of the Russian Civil War (see *Limonka*, 19, 1995, p.4). The song is intended to become a hymn for the masses.

²⁴⁰Limonov says: 'I am not afraid of mockery. Mockery is a good sign. The highest form of mockery is the anecdote. Find me a politician who would not like to become the subject of anecdotes' (Limonov, 1993i, p.1).

²⁴¹Kaledin, 1995, p.103. Limonov's idiosyncratic charisma casts an unexpectedly irresistible spell on various groups of Russian youth. By courtesy of Dr Ekaterina Rogachevskaja, I have in my possession a typescript of several unpublished poems by an immature student, Ol'ga Kuznetsova, dated April-May 1994 and dedicated to Limonov. In one of these poems Limonov is likened to an angel playing the flute. In the eyes of a different group of Russian youngsters, however, Limonov represents an eminent public figure who should be subjected to attacks for the sake of sheer self-assertion (in other words, Limonov's own favourite tactic is being used against him). A.Brener's insulting poem 'Preduprezhdenie Leidermanu' (A Warning to Leiderman), published in the Moscow magazine *Radek* (1997, no.1, p.37), may serve as an example.

living on royalties since he quit his job at the millionaire's house in New York has become an inextricable part of Limonov's myth about Limonov, regardless of whether or not this statement is true. The very same Sergei Kaledin, who knows Limonov personally,²⁴² was stunned when he watched Limonov in Paris:

Limonov says about himself that he is a professional writer and lives on royalties. This is rubbish. At the very best this is what is called existence, not life. [...] He is deceiving the Moscow girls [when he says] that he lives on literary royalties! He could not even invite me to his home when we met in Paris. We sat in a cafe for some time and then he said: 'Damn it, I'd like to invite you to my place, but...'. I suspect there was hardly anything to invite [me] to.²⁴³

Other gaps between the image and the reality can be even more damaging for Limonov than this 'seamy side' of his noble posture as a literary man with independent means. He who has spent so much time cultivating the self-image of a rebellious rogue became furious when the Russian media readily accepted it and started to ridicule Limonov, thus threatening his political reputation. Pending the December 1995 elections to the Russian Parliament, Limonov addressed his potential electorate with the following statement:

Over the past few years the media have been libelling me so much that they created an image of me which is the complete opposite of the truth. I am being

²⁴²Kaledin compiled the literary almanac *Piatyi ugol* (Moscow: Knizhnaia palata, 1991), in which an abridged version of *U nas byla velikaia epokha* was printed (pp.137-241).

²⁴³Kaledin, 1995a, p.23. This guesswork has recently been confirmed by Nataliia Medvedeva in her recollections about her life with Limonov in Paris. In particular, she states that Limonov gave up smoking because he did not have enough money for cigarettes (see Medvedeva, 1996, p.17).

portrayed as some light-headed Edichka, whereas I have written several serious and public-spirited books, such as *Ischeznovenie varvarov*, *Distsiplinarnyi sanatorii*, *Ubiistvo chasovogo*, *Limonov protiv Zhirinovskogo*. [...] I am being misrepresented as a brawler, whereas I am impeccably polite and on formal terms even with my intimate friends. The media say that I live in France, whereas I have been staying in Moscow for the last few years. [...] They say that I am rich, that politics is my 'whim', whereas I do not have a flat of my own and have to rent [one] here and there. Any Moscow Philistine is better off than me. [...] I am being introduced as a writer who has gone into politics, which is allegedly none of my business, whereas I have a unique experience of living in two Western countries, the USA and France, where I participated in opposition movements. [...] History will not forgive the ill-natured media for lying about me. History will reward me according to my deserts.²⁴⁴

The most graphic example of how the real Limonov was victimized by Limonov the fictional character occurred in November, 1995, when the Moscow Regional Electoral Committee refused to register Limonov (who was going to stand in the elections as an independent candidate) as Limonov in the ballot papers, because the surname in his passport reads Savenko. This would have reduced Limonov's chances of being elected, because his real surname is not generally known. Limonov protested, but his protests did not do him any good, and he was not elected, anyway.²⁴⁵

Thus, after completing a full circle we are back to square one in our (often futile) attempts to distinguish between Savenko and Limonov (or between Limonov and Limonov, to emphasize once again the difficulty of pinpointing the true

²⁴⁴L[imonov], 1995, p.4. For an attempt to discredit Limonov the politician as a supposed bisexual see Tuinov, 1995, p.5.

²⁴⁵See [Limonov], 1995a, p.1; Mitrofanov, 1995, p.2; Gokhman, 1995, p.2.

nature of a man who is playing with multiple personalities).²⁴⁶ The only thing we can establish for certain at the end of this long investigation is that Limonov the writer and Limonov the character are not the same thing. The real Limonov invents for himself a complimentary, heroic autobiography (loosely based on 'real' facts), because this is his way to force the publisher to accept his manuscripts and the reader to buy his books. They might ask: why choose Limonov in the ocean of fiction flooding the market? And Limonov's answer, possibly, would be: because I am a phenomenon, a personality, a man with a biography, whereas most other competitors are only good writers. As Vladimir Bondarenko puts it, 'now it is difficult to understand who has become more popular, Edichka the hero or Edichka the author'.²⁴⁷

Although we tried hard to discover where the fine line between Limonov's *Dichtung* and *Wahrheit* lies, it is not always possible to do so, because of the inconsistency of the data and the lack of empirical evidence. As if to sum up the results of our efforts, the outspoken exhibitionist Limonov says about his fiction, all of a sudden: 'What is [auto]biographical in it, and what is not, will forever remain my private affair, which I do not have to disclose to you all'.²⁴⁸

The search for Limonov's literary sources and influences appears to be much more rewarding than solving the mystery

²⁴⁶On the question as to what holds Limonov's multilateral personality together, let us once again draw the reader's attention to the extract from Limonov's conversation with Viktor Erofeev quoted on page 27 of the present work (Limonov and Erofeev, 1990, p.19).

²⁴⁷Bondarenko, 1992, p.23.

²⁴⁸Quoted from Mogutin, 1994, p.162. Cf. also Limonov's statement made elsewhere: 'Almost all my work is autobiographical. I don't think, however, that this matters to the reader: it would hardly be possible for him to check [what is true and what is not]' (Khlystun and Shvets, 1990).

of his true inner self. Let us now turn to this very promising subject-matter.

Chapter 2

LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES:

Eduard Limonov and Ataman Krasnov

Люблю опасные связи...

Сладки опасные связи...

Эдуард Лимонов, «Жена бандита»

2.1. LIMONOV'S LITERARY ROOTS.

'The newly-born writer, as you know, has to be categorized'.²⁴⁹ No wonder, then, that the success of Eduard Limonov's unabashedly provocative novel *Eto ia - Edichka* forced critics to try to fit his controversial literary manner into a certain artistic tradition. The long list of Limonov's would-be non-Russian predecessors was embellished with the names of the Abbé Prevost,²⁵⁰ the Marquis de Sade,²⁵¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau,²⁵² Céline, Flaubert, Ralph Ellison,²⁵³ Goethe, Stendhal, Balzac, Jack London, Martin du Gard,²⁵⁴ Edgar Allan

²⁴⁹Limonov, 1993b, p.190.

²⁵⁰See Mokrousov, 1991, p.5.

²⁵¹See Efimov, 1978, p.121. In 1993, a piece of fiction called 'Klod-Fransua, ili Iskushenie dobrodeteli' (Claude-François, or the Temptation of Virtue) was published in Moscow as a Russian translation of an unfinished novel ascribed to de Sade. Upon examination, 'Klod-Fransua' proved to be a pastiche drawing heavily on certain scenes in *Eto ia - Edichka*. This can be treated as recent evidence of the affinity between Limonov and the Marquis. The real author of the pastiche was the critic and poet Aleksandr Shchuplov. His hoax was exposed in Davies and Rogachevskii, 1997.

²⁵²See Zinik, 1984.

²⁵³See Matich, 1986, pp.527-28, 536.

²⁵⁴See Vail' and Genis, 1987, pp.122, 126-27.

Poe,²⁵⁵ Henry James,²⁵⁶ George Bataille,²⁵⁷ William S.Burroughs, James Baldwin, Jean Genet, Marek Hlasko, Jerzy Kosinski,²⁵⁸ Pierre-Paolo Pazolini,²⁵⁹ Pauline Réage (the pseudonym of the author of the *Story of O*), Philip Roth, Tama Janovitz,²⁶⁰ Anthony Burgess, Woody Allen,²⁶¹ J.D.Salinger,²⁶² Henry Miller²⁶³ and Norman Mailer.²⁶⁴ Limonov himself modestly added to this list Oscar Wilde, Yukio Mishima, Lautréamont, Nietzsche, Remarque, James Joyce, Knut Hamsun, Heinrich Böll, Charles Bukowski, Truman Capote, Jack Kerouac and Ernest Hemingway.²⁶⁵

As far as Russian literature is concerned, Limonov has persistently denied any dependence on this cultural background.²⁶⁶ Some critics have agreed.²⁶⁷ The majority, however, rightly perceived these statements as challenging and tried their best to place Limonov among Lomonosov,²⁶⁸

²⁵⁵See Zholkovskii, 1990, pp.157-58.

²⁵⁶See Zholkovskii, 1995, pp.80-82.

²⁵⁷See Ogibenin, 1992, pp.210-11.

²⁵⁸See Geller, 1980, p.85.

²⁵⁹See Mogutin, 1994, pp.170-71.

²⁶⁰See Porter, 1991, pp. 66, 71.

²⁶¹See Porter, 1994, pp.176-77.

²⁶²See Gidoni, 1980, p.159.

²⁶³See Kornilova, 1980, p.91.

²⁶⁴See Ryan-Hayes, 1988.

²⁶⁵See Matich, 1984, pp.226, 228; Mirchev, 1989, pp.101-02; Limonov and Erofeev, 1990, p.18; Aleksandrova, 1992; Leont'eva, 1992; Vladimov, 1993; Glad, 1993, pp.260-61.

²⁶⁶He makes an exception only for Gogol', Bakunin, Konstantin Leont'ev, Rozanov, Khlebnikov, Platonov and Nabokov. See Matich, 1984, p.229; Limonov, 1985, pp.35-38; Mirchev, 1989, pp. 91,101; Khlystun and Shvets, 1990; Limonov and Erofeev, 1990, p.18; Leont'eva, 1992; Glad, 1993, p.261.

²⁶⁷See, for instance, Voronel', 1979, p.187.

²⁶⁸See Brodskii, 1978, p.153.

Trediakovskii,²⁶⁹ Barkov,²⁷⁰ Derzhavin,²⁷¹ Pushkin and his uncle,²⁷² Dostoevskii,²⁷³ Sergei Aksakov, Lev Tolstoi,²⁷⁴ Gor'kii,²⁷⁵ Chekhov,²⁷⁶ Gleb Uspenskii, Skitalets,²⁷⁷ Nekrasov, Blok, Zoshchenko,²⁷⁸ Igor' Severianin,²⁷⁹ Fedor Sologub,²⁸⁰ Mikhail Kuzmin,²⁸¹ Mandel'shtam and the Acmeists,²⁸² Maiakovskii and the Futurists,²⁸³ Kharms and the OBERIU,²⁸⁴ Anastasiia Verbitskaia, Vaginov, Erenburg, Malyshkin, Romanov, Aleksandr Zinov'ev,²⁸⁵ Olesha,²⁸⁶ Anton

²⁶⁹See Titunik, 1984.

²⁷⁰See Gidoni, 1979, p.236; Bondarenko, 1992, p.8.

²⁷¹See Zholkovskii, 1989, pp.344-46.

²⁷²See Shukman, 1983, p.2; Zholkovskii, 1990, p.158; Kustarev, 1983, p.204.

²⁷³ See, for example, Matich, 1986, pp.533-35; Ryan-Hayes, 1988, pp.445-46; Porter, 1991, p.65; Simmons, 1993, p.183.

²⁷⁴See Lautrédou, 1987; Ryan-Hayes, 1993, p.8.

²⁷⁵See Matich, 1986, p.535; Lautrédou, 1987; Vail' and A.Genis, 1987, pp.122, 125; Carden, 1990, p.228; Bondarenko, 1992, p.3; Bogomolov, 1992.

²⁷⁶See Vail' and Genis, 1984c, p.29.

²⁷⁷See Zinik, 1984.

²⁷⁸See Kustarev, 1983, p.204.

²⁷⁹See Piatnitskii, 1975.

²⁸⁰See Lekukh, 1992.

²⁸¹See the unpublished review of Limonov's collection of poetry *Russkoe* (1979) by Igor' Burikhin (Historisches Archiv, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, University of Bremen, V.R.Maramzin's collection).

²⁸²See Zholkovskii, 1991, p.16; Porter, 1991, p.64.

²⁸³See, for instance, Matich, 1986, pp.526, 528, 535; Zholkovskii and Shcheglov, 1986, p.278; Carden, 1984, p.226; Dreizin, 1988, p.66; Simmons, 1993, pp.184-85.

²⁸⁴See Brodskii, 1978, p.153; Carden, 1984, p.226; Matich, 1984, p.225.

²⁸⁵See Geller, 1980, pp.85-87; Epshtein, 1994, p.176.

²⁸⁶See Ashkenazi, 1979, p.197.

Makarenko,²⁸⁷ Vasilii Aksenov, Gladilin,²⁸⁸ Shukshin,²⁸⁹ Esenin²⁹⁰ and Pasternak,²⁹¹ more or less all at the same time.

Naturally, the diversity of a literary assembly like this arouses doubts. Thus, Alla Binder insists that any quest for literary sources is senseless in itself because a book clogged up by ideological labels and notable names simply ceases to exist.²⁹²

2.2. SIMILARITIES AND DISSIMILARITIES IN EDUARD LIMONOV'S AND ATAMAN KRASNOV'S LIVES AND WORKS.

Although common sense prompts us to abandon any further search for other literary borrowings by Limonov, an extra item would hardly make their surplus weight exceed the critical mass. I am venturing to introduce, then, yet another credible model for Limonov's writings, namely, the journalist, novelist and Cossack Ataman, General Petr Nikolaevich Krasnov. Krasnov's life itself could well have attracted the attention of Limonov, who has always had a special penchant for heroic figures²⁹³ and has sympathized with the Cossacks.²⁹⁴ The son of a Lieutenant-General and Cossack

²⁸⁷See Vail' and A.Genis, 1987, p.127.

²⁸⁸See Gidoni, 1980, p.159.

²⁸⁹Bondarenko, 1992, p.5.

²⁹⁰See Porter, 1994, pp.180-81; Bondarenko, 1992, p.3.

²⁹¹See Shukman, 1983, pp.5-6.

²⁹²See Binder, 1979, p.192.

²⁹³Cf. 'Makhno always stirred his [the journalist Limonov's] imagination, and those small details like the alleged *bat'ko*'s anti-Semitism would hardly have changed his opinion' (Limonov, 1993b, p.244).

²⁹⁴It is not by chance that the Cossack folk song 'Pei i nadeisia, chto Rus' bezopasna' (Drink and Hope That Russia Is Safe) became a kind of an anthem, symbolizing for Limonov the strength and reliability of the Russian state, not excluding the Soviet period of its history (see Limonov, 1992d, pp.63-64). He also speaks approvingly of the Cossacks' reckless gallantry in his journalistic commentaries from

historian, Nikolai Ivanovich Krasnov (1833-1900),²⁹⁵ Petr Krasnov was born on 10 (22) September 1869 in St.Petersburg. He graduated from the Aleksandr Cadet Corps in 1887 and after that went through all the subsequent stages of military service from Sergeant Major of the Pavel Military School to full General, the commander of the Third Don Cossack division, of the Second Cossack Composite division, of the First Kuban Cossack division and of other units. Before the October Revolution Krasnov was a member of the Russian military mission to the court of the Ethiopian negus Menelek in 1897²⁹⁶ and took part in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05 and in World War I, during which he was promoted from Colonel to General. Together with Kerenskii he directed the unsuccessful campaign of autumn 1917 (undertaken to regain control of Petrograd just after the Bolsheviks' *coup d'état*). Later he was elected as the Don Ataman by the Cossack *krug* (parliament). Planning and supervising the anti-Red struggle on the Don, he remained at this post from 17 (30) May, 1918, until 1 (14) February, 1919, when he resigned in the wake of internal intrigues, to some extent inspired by General Denikin, his ally.²⁹⁷ After the collapse of the White movement Krasnov emigrated to Germany, where he lived from 1920 to 1923

Pridnestrov'e (see Limonov, 1993, pp.114, 123-24), and with warm affection of their generous hospitality in the account of Zhirinovskii's and Limonov's visit to the Krasnodar region in the summer of 1992 (see Limonov, 1994d, pp.112-13).

²⁹⁵N.I.Krasnov's major works include *Zemlia voiska Donskogo* (The land of the Don Army, 1863), *Voennoe obozrenie zemli voiska Donskogo* (A Military Review of the Land of the Don Army, 1870), *Kazaki v nachale XIX stoletia* (The Cossacks at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century, 1896), and numerous articles and essays for *Russkaia starina*, *Voennyi sbornik*, *Russkaia rech'*, *Donskie oblastnye vedomosti* and other periodicals. See *Istoriia Dona: Ukazatel' literatury v dvukh chastiakh. Chast' pervaiia. Dorevoliutsionnaia literatura*, [Rostov-na-Donu], 1968.

²⁹⁶See Krasnov, 1899.

²⁹⁷See Krasnov, 1922, pp.190-321; Denikine, 1930, pp.149-52, 238, 241-42; Iasskoe soveshchanie, 1992, pp.259-60, 271, 284.

and from 1937 until the beginning of Hitler's Eastern campaign. From the middle twenties to the middle thirties the General lived in France as an advisor on Cossack affairs to Grand Duke Nicholas. Hoping to restore the former way of life in the Cossack lands with the help of German troops, Krasnov eagerly responded, despite his age, to the offer of the German authorities to become the Head of the Cossack central administration on German-controlled territories. In 1944 he assisted the Germans in the creation of a Cossack 'state' in exile (at Tolmezzo, in the Italian Alps). At the end of World War II the Cossack Corps surrendered to the British armed forces. Following the Ialta agreement between the USA, Great Britain and the USSR, which provided for the return of displaced persons of former or present Russian/Soviet citizenship captured in the Western theatre of operations, General Krasnov, together with other Cossacks, was extradited to the USSR.²⁹⁸ He was hanged for treason on 17 January, 1947, at the age of seventy-seven.

Some details of Krasnov's biography, as well as some features of his personality, are strikingly similar to those of Limonov. Krasnov was a prolific writer (twenty-one novels and a huge number of essays and short stories) who became known in the West in translations (his epic *Ot dvuglavogo orla k krasnomu znameni*, (From the Two-headed Eagle to the Red Banner, 1918-30), for instance, appeared in fifteen languages). As a journalist (he worked for the *Russkii invalid* newspaper and the *Voennyi sbornik* magazine) he submitted reports on the Boxer uprising in China (1901) and on the Russo-Japanese war. As a political activist, he formed a strong anti-Bolshevik Cossack group in Germany in the early 1920s and become one of the leaders of the *Bratstvo Russkoi Pravdy*, a terrorist organization operating against the USSR with its centre in Germany.²⁹⁹ His strong-willed character

²⁹⁸ See Newland, 1991, pp.171-72; Krasnov-mladshii, 1959, pp.84-86.

²⁹⁹ See Cherniaev, 1993, p.356. The outstandingly valuable material relating to the *Bratstvo russkoi pravdy* society is kept at the Library of SSEES, University of London (letters to A.V.Amfiteatrov from

resembles some distinctive features of Limonov as reflected in Limonov's autobiographical image.³⁰⁰ Krasnov married a singer and died childless.³⁰¹

The two writers' political views are also to a certain degree compatible. Both were passionate patriots.³⁰² Both favoured a type of authoritarian democracy (where a single ruler responds to the expectations of the common people), although Krasnov remained deeply affected by the concept of monarchism,³⁰³ whereas Limonov rather sympathizes with revolutionary chaos.³⁰⁴ Limonov calls himself a '*natsional-*

S.A.Sokolov-Krechetov and from a conspirator called 'Iziumets', Manuscripts, shelfmark C 1/7).

³⁰⁰Cf. Limonov, 1991. On the intentionally invisible border between Limonov-the-author and Edichka-the-hero see Chapter 1 of the present work.

³⁰¹For more details on Krasnov see *Voennaia entsiklopediia*, vol.XIII, St.Petersburg, 1913, p.257; *Kazachii slovar'-spravochnik*, vol.II, San-Anselmo, 1968, pp.73-81; *Russkie pisateli, 1800-1917, Biograficheskii slovar'*, vol.3, Moscow, 1994, pp.133-35; Ushakov, 1993, pp.108-113 (the last work, however, suffers from serious scholarly inadequacies). As for Limonov, he has recently come up with the statement that he has 'roughly two' illegitimate children (see Trukhachev, 1996; see also Markina, 1998).

³⁰²Cf. Limonov's various declarations: 'I am a Soviet patriot, like the authors of "Borodino" and *Voina i mir*, who were Russian patriots. I am the same kind of "imperialist" as Pushkin' (Limonov, 1992d, p.177); 'I always worked for Russia and I will work for it until the last moment of my life' (Limonov, 1994f, p.3). Limonov's repetitive and seemingly contradictory declarations that he has 'nothing to do with Russians at all' (Glad, 1993, p.120) chiefly refer to the ramshackle Russia of the Communist decadence between 1953 and 1988. These statements could also be predetermined by Limonov's position as an exiled writer, whose works were recognized primarily through translations into foreign languages.

³⁰³See Krasnov, 1923.

³⁰⁴See Limonov, 1992c, *passim*.

*Bol'shevik*³⁰⁵. Krasnov was dubbed a '*Bol'shevik sprava*'.³⁰⁶ Both writers combine, somewhat extravagantly, a populist tendency³⁰⁷ with sheer contempt for what Limonov terms '*chudishche* People'.³⁰⁸

Both authors belong to the league of top-notch adventurers with a romantic and heroic attitude towards human life.³⁰⁹ They praised the soldierly feat of valour³¹⁰ and accepted the

³⁰⁵See Limonov, 1994f, p.3.

³⁰⁶See Krasnov, 1922, p.261.

³⁰⁷Cf. the countless references to the people's point of view made by Krasnov in his writings on the Civil War in Russia and Limonov's anti-establishment pathos, notable already in *Eto ia - Edichka*.

³⁰⁸See Limonov, 1993, pp.212-20. Cf. 'A collective would destroy, not create. [...] Raphael's Madonna was created by Raphael, not by a Committee of Artists' (Krasnov, 1922, p.197).

³⁰⁹Compare 'General S.L.Markov was killed and died beautifully, like a true hero [...]. Another hero and knight of the Volunteer Army, Drozdovskii, was wounded in the leg and died from a blood infection' (Krasnov, 1922, p.257) with '...a hero does not die in his bed, he dies in the park, being drunk [...]. And if he did not die beside a street door, if he did not freeze to death in the Shevchenko park, if he did not fall through the ice into the Lopan' river, I ignore such circumstances' (letter from Limonov to K.Kuz'minskii, in Kuz'minskii and Kovalev, 1986, vol.3A, p.30).

³¹⁰Suffice it to mention only 'Venok na mogilu neizvestnogo soldata Imperatorskoi Rossiiskoi armii' by Krasnov (*Russkaia letopis'*, 6, 1924, pp.13-60). As for Limonov, he admits, though with a slight self-directed humour, that it is a military barracks that embodies his ideal (see Beliak, 1994, p.8). He shows himself off in a Soviet Army soldier's uniform on the cover of *Ischeznovenie varvarov*. His defiantly apologetic novel about post-war Stalinist Russia *U nas byla velikaia epokha* (see Limonov, 1994), permeated with childish admiration for the military, is also very characteristic. Even the relationships with women are no exception. Limonov says that in them he has always followed the pattern of 'a soldier and a whore' (see Trukhachev, 1995).

ruthless violence of war.³¹¹ Both of them are extremely suspicious about those Western governments which claim to be Russia's allies and friends. This is how Krasnov described Russian/British relations from the Crimean campaign in 1853-56 up to the Russian Civil War:

...things labelled 'Made in Russia' [...] started to penetrate to places where 'Made in England' was put before. Russia became dangerous to the English purse. And its purse means everything to England... [...] England became a natural enemy of Russia. [...] One should speak openly and clearly about the active preparation of the Russian revolution by the British ambassador Buchanan.³¹²

Limonov is no less categorical:

The West is not a friend of ours... [...] ...are the USA and Europe interested in lifting the USSR up to their level? We were already convinced that they could not have done this without economic detriment to themselves. [...] ...it is instability in the USSR, and desirably an overwhelming one, that the West was aiming at over the Cold War years. It would be naive to assume that the goal of the West has been changed merely because 'new thinking' now dominates in the USSR. Facts prove that, no, the goal has not been changed.³¹³

Krasnov's misgivings about the dubious role of Western 'inimical friends' did not prevent him from collaborating with

³¹¹See, for instance, 'Kogda Bog ostavil...' by Krasnov (*Istoriik i sovremennik*, 4, 1923, pp.172-77) and the following passage by Limonov: 'I have grown accustomed to barracks during this year. I have grown accustomed to the clear, free air of war. When in Paris, I am struck by the emasculated banality of peaceful life. It is tasteless, like distilled water' (Limonov, 1993, p.159).

³¹²Krasnov, 1921, pp.187-88.

³¹³Limonov, 1992d, pp.136, 160-61.

the Nazis during World War II. For this Limonov could have treated Krasnov like a traitor, if he had not partly identified himself with the Fascists in his notorious short story 'Mussolini i drugie fashisty'.³¹⁴ It is no surprise that Krasnov and Limonov seem to be moderate anti-Semites, that is, those who never instigate pogroms.³¹⁵

³¹⁴See Limonov, 1995b, pp.333-59. Early vestiges of Limonov's partiality to Fascism and Nazism can be discerned in his poem 'Gering daet press-konferentsiiu v dushnom mae' [Göring gives a press conference in stifling May] (Limonov, 1980b). However, Limonov cleverly avoids any direct manifestation of his proximity to Fascism, retaining some room for political manoeuvre: 'I ask myself: am I a Fascist? And I answer: NO, neither in the strictly terminological sense ('Fascist' - a member of the Fascist party ran by Mussolini, 1919-45), nor in everyday usage; I am not a 'brutal rapist' - these are the lines along which Fascists are defined in dictionaries' (Limonov, 1994f, p.3). As for Krasnov's literary reflections on this delicate subject, Professor Kleist, one of the 'positive' characters in his novel *Za chertopolokhom* (Beyond the Thistle, 1922), which will be discussed later, is a member of the *Deutsche National-Partei*, which had a swastika as its emblem. It is noteworthy that several pieces by Krasnov appeared in the *Russkii kolokol* magazine (Berlin, 1927-30), the editor and publisher of which, Professor I.A.II'in, was for a time quite an ardent propagandist of Russian Fascism, to judge by his article 'O russkom fashizme' (*Russkii kolokol*, 3, 1928, pp.54-64).

³¹⁵Limonov asks himself: 'Am I an anti-Semite?', and he answers: 'I have never been, but I am becoming one' (Limonov, 1994f, p.3); for further light on this subject it is worth comparing Limonov's short stories 'Pervoe interv'iu' (First Interview), *Panorama*, 553, 1991, pp.22-3, 'Iubilei diadi Izi' (Uncle Izzy's Anniversary), *Nash sovremennik*, 3, 1992, pp.126-36, and his own footnote to his poem 'Liudi, nogi, magaziny' (People, Legs, Shops), *Kontinent*, 25, 1980, p.154). Almost immediately he steps back, though, denying his would-be anti-Semitism in an interview with Dmitrii Bykov (see Limonov, 1994a, p.11). Krasnov expressed his views on this matter more openly (see his correspondence with Father Ioann (Shakhovskoi) in the late 1930s - early 1940s, at the height of the German persecution of the Jews, in

Perhaps the most valuable bench-mark for a valid comparison between two artists is the distinctive concurrence of their artistic manner, which in this case is extremely encouraging. The common ground between our two authors is formed not only by the combination of *Ich-Erzählung* in some parts of Krasnov's and Limonov's autobiographical narrations with *Er-Erzählung* in other parts of them ('Na vnutrennem fronte' versus 'Vsevelikoe Voisko Donskoe' and *Eto ia, Edichka, Dnevnik neudachnika, Istoriia ego slugi* versus *U nas byla velikaia epokha, Podrostok Savenko, Molodoi negodiai, Inostranets v smutnoe vremia, et al* in Krasnov's reminiscences and in Limonov's fictional memoirs respectively). It is marked not only by barbarisms scattered all over those texts which are somehow related to life in the West.³¹⁶ It is supported not only by similar literary allusions - to Lev Tolstoi, for a start.³¹⁷ It is Krasnov's aesthetic credo

Strannik, 1988), though often through the words of his characters. Here is an example. One of the characters in *Za chertopolokhom* speaks of a novel written by another character: 'I do not share the author's view completely. He blames Jews for the downfall of Christian culture all too indiscriminately, although one cannot help agreeing that Jews have played an important role in the destruction of what was created by Christians' (Krasnov, 1922a, pp.376-77; cf. *ibid.*, p.92; see also pp.72, 162-63). Krasnov's negative attitude towards pogroms is expressed, for instance, in his article 'Armiia', *Russkii kolokol*, 3, 1928, p.10.

³¹⁶For example, *Wandern, Ausflug, Nachtlocal, Vaterland*, and so on in *Za chertopolokhom*; on Limonov's anglicisms see Levin, 1984, pp.266-68; Dreizin, 1988, pp.55-67.

³¹⁷On Lev Tolstoi as a key figure in Krasnov's literary background see Popov, 1934. It is worth noting an episode from *Za chertopolokhom* which recalls the opening of Tolstoi's *Khadzi-Murat*: 'An old thistle like this sometimes stands on a winter field. It has become dry, faded, warped, wrinkles run along its stem, its flowers have become grey and dry, and yet so straight and proudly it stretches its calyx towards the sky. And it is impossible either to break or bend it' (Krasnov, 1922a, p.218). As for Limonov, he fairly frequently uses Tolstoi's favourite

itself as expounded to his younger relative Nikolai Nikolaevich Krasnov-mladshii (1918-1959) that appears to be shared to quite an extent by Limonov the writer.

In his book *Nezabyvaemoe* (The Unforgettable, 1959) Krasnov-mladshii recalls his last encounter with 'Grandfather', as the Ataman is called here (although he was not the *bona fide* grandfather of the narrator), in the Lubianka prison baths in 1945. 'Grandfather' instructs his younger fellow prisoner, who had been arrested together with the other Cossacks who had served in the German army:

Describe everything you'll go through, what you'll see and hear, everyone whom you'll meet. Describe it as it is. Do not embellish the bad. Do not lay it on thick. Do not curse the good. Don't lie! Tell only the truth, even when it hurts somebody. Bitter truth is always better

devices of 'unmasking' (V.I.Lenin) and 'defamiliarization' (V.B.Shklovskii); take as an example the description of the guests at the Mendelsons' party in Limonov's *Palach*: "'A parade of monsters!'", decided Oscar in fear and, as if his sight had been recovered, he saw greedy, widely opened mouths, red for women, withered for men, where monsters were pouring the light-yellow champagne and thicker whiskey. Somebody even greedily crackled the ice-cubes. Saliva and alcohol glittered on the corners of the mouths. Looks and facial expressions, that is, the ways by which the wrinkled skin of faces was composed, were bestial and breathed with lust. Hands and necks, emerging from under the clothes, exhibited knots of veins and were ill-coloured. People's ill-health was visible even through the tan. Men's faces against the background of white shirts, tightened with the funeral bow-ties, were shot with graveyard blue. Cheeks and chins, shaved only a couple of hours ago, were already being split apart by hairs and covering over with bristle before one's eyes... Women's eyes, surrounded by capricious circles of wrinkles, by pieces of weary powdered skin, were either protruding far away from the eye sockets, or, on the contrary, were sinking down deeply into their caves... The throng looked like ironed-out cannibals, gathered for the feast' (Limonov, 1993c, p.47).

than sweet lies. [...] Don't fancy yourself a writer, philosopher, thinker. Don't draw any conclusions out of what is not clear to you. Let others do that. Don't run after the sharpness of a phrase, the beauty of words. Not everyone has a talent for this. Just be Nikolai Krasnov, and not an artist and a writer. Simplicity and sincerity will be your best advisors.³¹⁸

There is hardly anything in the above statement which might have embarrassed Limonov-the-dirty-realism-supporter, who prefers the 'documentary' *Moi pokazaniia* (My Testimony) by Anatolii Marchenko to Solzhenitsyn's *V krughe pervom* (First Circle).³¹⁹ However, more surprising is the fact that the contemporaries of both Krasnov and Limonov have discovered the same contradiction between the writers' intentions (or pretensions) and their practice. General Denikin wrote on Krasnov's reports from the Russo-Japanese theatre of war:

Krasnov's articles showed talent but they distorted facts. Every time he sacrificed the real truth to departmental interests and fantasy, Krasnov would interrupt his reading for a moment, and say, 'Here, if you please, gentlemen, is poetic licence, for a more dramatic effect'... The element of poetic licence to the detriment of truth ran throughout Krasnov's entire life.³²⁰

Professor Zholkovskii's conclusion concerns the short story by Limonov entitled 'Krasavitsa, vdokhnovliavshaia poeta' (The Beauty Who Inspired the Poet, 1990), but it could be applied to Limonov's creative activity in its entirety:

³¹⁸Krasnov-mladshii, 1959, pp.82-3.

³¹⁹Gidoni, 1980, p.155.

³²⁰Denikin, 1975, pp.102-03. (The translation has been slightly amended - A.R.)

The above structural analyses of this short story could puzzle a reader sure in his belief that Limonov could only describe simply 'what had happened'. [...] However, not everything 'had happened' exactly in the way it was told, and not everything that 'had happened' was included in the story.³²¹

Even so, there is no doubt that Krasnov and Limonov also have their differences. First of all, a common approach to the material does not necessarily mean affinity in style. Then, under no circumstances would Krasnov accept Limonov's contempt for Christianity³²² and Limonov's view of the Civil War as a struggle between Red patriots and White patriots.³²³ Nonetheless, this serious divergence does not outweigh what both belletrists agree on, either in life or in art. What is especially convincing here is that Limonov's pamphlet 'Ischeznovenie varvarov' was created under the apparent and strong influence of Krasnov's novel *Za chertopolokhom*.

2.3. 'ISCHEZNOVENIE VARVAROV' BY LIMONOV AND *ZA CHERTOPOLOKHOM* BY KRASNOV.

'Ischeznovenie varvarov' (The Disappearance of the Barbarians, 1984) was first published in the French periodical *Zoulou*.³²⁴ In it the author tries to imagine what would happen to the world if all the Russians suddenly disappeared from earth without a trace. Krasnov's futuristic novel, published in Berlin in 1922, is based on the assumption that

³²¹Zholkovskii, 1990, pp.158-59.

³²²See Limonov, 1994a, p.11.

³²³See Limonov, 1993, p.96.

³²⁴We have not been able to see either this publication or the Parisian almanac *Muleta* Ъ, in which Limonov's piece appeared for the first time in Russian. In 1988 'Ischeznovenie varvarov' was re-told, in great detail and not without excitement, by the Soviet propaganda newspaper *Golos rodiny* (see Kozlov, 1988) and then re-published in the first issue of the Moscow newspaper *Sovershenno sekretno* in June, 1989 (pp.20-21).

Russia remains unvisited virtually by anybody for nearly half a century, being hidden behind impregnable thickets of thistles (the rest of the world in the meantime published maps where, as Krasnov puts it, 'there is a huge black blob instead of the Russian Empire and an inscription with ominous red letters: "the plague!"').³²⁵ Krasnov is mainly preoccupied with the events and changes Russia underwent during this imaginary period of its history rather than with the political and economic processes that affected Western society as a result of Russia's self-removal (which became the almost exclusive focus of interest for Limonov). Krasnov takes an 'inside' look at Russian internal affairs, whereas Limonov mainly concentrates on an 'outside' view of the Western reaction to the mysterious disappearance of the Russians. However, the starting point for both authors is identical:

³²⁵Krasnov, 1922a, p.8.

In 19** a Frenchman called Potin reached the longitude Pskov-Kiev on a special aeroplane. He noticed a continuous green sea, interspersed with black spots of soil burned under the sun. There was no sign of life (p.27).

On the early morning of 29 September 19** an Air France 001 plane, after flying accurately over the required number of kilometres from Paris to Moscow slit through the dense clouds and began to descend in order to land at Sheremet'ev airport, but neither the airport nor the capital of the USSR were in their usual places. Through the heavy rain pouring on the territory of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the pilots could discern only the white firmament, reminiscent of freshly-dried plaster (p.17).³²⁷

According to both Krasnov and Limonov, a world without Russia is a world in disarray. Incurable unemployment, destructive clashes between competing political parties, the incompetence of the authorities and upheavals in Third World countries are presented in both works as proof of the inability

³²⁶From now on the pages of the quotations taken from both texts are shown in the essay in brackets according to the Berlin 1922 edition of *Za chertopolokhom* ('Ol'ga D'iakova i Co' publishing house) and to the Moscow 1992 edition of *Ischeznovenie varvarov* ('Glagol' publishing house).

³²⁷It is remarkable that neither of the writers mentions the exact year. What stopped them from indicating the precise date, as George Orwell and many others Utopian and anti-Utopian authors did? This detail could be regarded as a piece of circumstantial evidence of Limonov's awareness of the novel by Krasnov.

of the leading Western democracies, which Krasnov with great originality calls 'gniloi Zapad' (the rotten West), to solve problems of any kind, and as a reason for distracting the attention of the population from domestic troubles by creating a myth of enigmatic and dangerous aliens.

This is, according to Krasnov, an ordinary day in late twentieth-century Britain:

England. London. Eight thousand dead bodies and twenty one thousand wounded (eleven thousand - seriously) were picked up after yesterday's brawl between the Sinn Féin supporters and the Red Lion groups, the representatives of the English People's Party. The Opera Theatre, where a show for children was in progress, was blown up under the supervision of Roid-Morzh, the leader of the Labour Party. About six thousand children of the local bourgeoisie died. The miners' strike continues (p.182).

The disproportion between the abnormally exaggerated figures of victims and the routine experience of everyday life which those figures are meant to represent produces a comic effect, although in poor taste. In his turn, Limonov, hardly more subtle, illustrates the disorder in British society through the improbable three-week delay in the broadcast announcement of the Russian 'withdrawal'. No less hyperbolic in terms of violence, Limonov's description also raises the question of moral disorientation in what constitutes the notion of 'an important event' in public opinion, as the disappearance of a whole country is the equal here of the running nose of Lech Wałęsa and of the equestrian mishap of Prince Charles:

And only after checking the facts out, after careful weighing of pro and contra, after getting special written permission from madame Prime Minister, the BBC announced the super-disappearance on the 20th of

October. 'The news is read by Eugene Long. Headlines first: the leader of the independent trade-union 'Solidarnoszcz' Lech Wałęsa is ill. He has a runny nose... The unexpected disappearance of the Soviet Union... Prince Charles fell off a horse (p.24).

First, it is worth noting that both writers mention in these extracts (indirectly, but in an easy-to-guess manner) two British Prime Ministers, Lloyd George and Mrs Thatcher. Moreover, it is not by chance that Limonov chooses the device of 'mock news' here. In this episode he simply follows Krasnov, who claims that the information about England was extracted from the *Pskovskie oblastnye vedomosti* newspaper. The modern media source (BBC) in the text by Limonov replaces the traditional one from the novel by Krasnov and the angle of the presentation turns 180 degrees (it is not Russia that comments on Britain, but vice versa). Still, the main idea remains the same. By the way, advanced media technology is already present on the pages of *Za chertopolokhom* in the shape of the *svetodar* (remotely resembling TV) and *dal'noskaz*, which is something like radio. Limonov only takes advantage of knowing what was really invented by mankind, not what was expected to be invented.

Some of Krasnov's motifs are transformed by Limonov for more serious reasons than just the technical progress of the twentieth century. An example is the scene of the solemn entrance of the Tsar and the Patriarch of the future Russia in Krasnov's book:

The Tsar was wearing a dark green caftan in the German style with a wide blue ribbon across his shoulder and high leather wellington boots; the Patriarch - a black monk's mantle with a diamond cross and a white hood (p.251).

For Limonov with his cautious assessment of the monarchy and the Orthodox church as the possible foundations of

tomorrow's Russia,³²⁸ the very appearance of the royal garments of Peter the Great's epoch, piously transferred to the modern age, would seem irresistibly funny. This subject is particularly sensitive for Limonov, as he formerly earned his living making clothes.³²⁹ Consistent in his denunciation of the West, Limonov rearranges the theme into the motif of those at the helm who dressed up quite unsuitably (the most famous example of which is the tale by Hans Christian Andersen, *The Emperor's New Clothes*), and aims it at President Reagan and Mrs Thatcher:

...The President of the United States, on this occasion dressed in a red-and-blue Superman suit and escorted by Bionic Woman and Spiderman... madame Prime Minister of England, dressed in an S-and-M three-piece black leather outfit... (p.25)

On the other hand, Krasnov and Limonov unanimously caricature the dubious role of Jewish intellectuals in the West. Both authors find the alleged Jewish leadership in Russian émigré and French national thought ridiculous:

³²⁸See Limonov's invectives against Solzhenitsyn in Limonov, 1986, pp.2-3; Limonov, 1994g, p.3; and Limonov, 1994h, p.23.

³²⁹Limonov even devoted several pages, full of feeling, to the specific role of dress in our society (see Limonov, 1993, pp.302-04). To Krasnov clothing also means something special. He colourfully describes the fashions of Utopian Russia (Krasnov, 1922a, pp.197, 251) and earnestly discusses the benefits of Russian attire in contrast to European dress (ibid., p.247).

*Za chertopolokhom**Ischeznovenie varvarov*

...a plump *Jew*, the Chairman of the Union of *Russian* writers in Germany... [the emphasis is mine - A.R.] (p.45)

On photos this new philosopher [André Glucksmann - A.R.] would always stand on the right side of the late Sartre and on the left side of the late Raymond Aron. (Not to be confused with yet another new philosopher, Bernard Lévy, who is placed on photos on the left side of the late Sartre and on the right side of the late Aron) (p.23).

Such a coincidence, however, belongs to the category of predictable kinship, i.e., the closeness which is predestined either by the émigré status of the writers or by the situation when the whole state is *in absentia*. Hence, some of the points listed below can be occasionally spotted somewhere else, not only in Krasnov's and Limonov's works. Still, it is hardly possible that one could find a third text which contains all these minor details in a similar context. So, it would not be unwise to add to the category in question, as a mark of genetic succession from Krasnov to Limonov, the abundance of Western (mostly North American, German and French) in-details; the sneering depiction of the fictional Russian émigré *salon* of Viktoriia Dvorokonskaia in Berlin (*Za chertopolokhom*, pp.30-40) and of the real Russian dissidents from Bukovskii to General Grigorenko ('*Ischeznovenie varvarov*', p.23); the reaction of the frontier guards of the adjacent countries who saw Russia vanishing, and of their governments (is it not strange that the unnecessary tautological use of the word *granitsa*, 'border', and its derivatives can be observed in both texts?):

*Za chertopolokhom**Ischeznovenie varvarov*

Bordering states had to move their towns and villages away from the border. [...] Polish troops rebelled against their government and, still under arms, left for home [...] because of the dreadful scenes they saw (p.27)

Mass madness seized the border guards of the East European countries bordering on the Soviet Union. Platoons, companies, even entire battalions were plunging into senseless frenzy and aggression, when they saw how the sappy meadow grass and a birch grove, spreading towards the border from their side, stopped suddenly and on the Soviet side... changed into white matter of unknown origin. This matter was stretching deep into Soviet territory, as far as the eye and the Zeiss binoculars of the border guards could reach. East European governments, shocked by the events, managed somehow to hush the affair up, after the immediate replacement of the military on the border with the [...] white plaster desert (p.19).

To this should be added the westward-bound rumours about the long-covert existence (Krasnov) and about the unexpected disappearance (Limonov) of Russia, which proved to be reliable in both cases (*Za chertopolokhom*, p.51; 'Ischeznovenie varvarov', p.20); the handful of Westerners, in both works following the same route (via Poland) with the aim of rediscovering the Russian paradise lost; and the readiness (Krasnov) and the need (Limonov) to welcome the

discovered / missed enemy of yesterday, without whom something very essential is lacking:

Za chertopolokhom

Ischeznovenie varvarov

Germany was in the middle of active preparations to receive Russia, and in the evening in the Potsdam Sans Souci park the children who broke away from their minders sang:

Deutschland, Russland über alles, über alles in der Welt (p.296).

'Give us back the Soviet Union!' [...] shouted the demonstrators. [...] '...Find the bloody fucking Russians!' demanded [...] the President of the United States [...]. 'If there aren't any Russians any more, maybe it's worth inventing them?' asked *Libération* (pp.24-5, 29-30).

Although the idea of deserted Russian territories which turned out to be a paragon of prosperity was in the air at least since the time of Khrushchev,³³⁰ there is a motif in both

³³⁰See, e.g., 'At this time the West European intelligentsia discovered for itself with excitement a new field of activity in the East. Yves Montand and Jean Vilar and Charles Aznavour appeared one after the other on Moscow and Leningrad stages. Politicians, journalists, writers, businessmen, sportsmen followed them... The fearful crimson Russian desert turned out to be a hospitable and fertile field' (Aksenov, 1991, p.275). Similarly, the poetical metaphor of poisonous weeds seems to be quite common in the political context of the 1920s. A poem by Aleksei Gessen could serve as an example:

Разрослись, разгулялись на воле
 Лебеда, да релей, да бурьян...
 Вышел сеятель в чистое поле,
 Взял лукошко заморских семян. [...]

Не дождался тот сеятель всхода -
 Буйны травы, бесплодны пески...
 Лишь чрез долгие, долгие годы
 Из земли показались ростки.

pieces which seems to be purely original, viz, a demand for a special breed of Russians who can participate in the process of the resurrection of the country:

Za chertopolokhom

Ischeznovenie varvarov

[Ataman Anichkov, heading the ...special agents are already revival of Russia,] learned how searching high and low for to convey his thoughts at a biologically pure Russian distance, and in an obscure émigrés to recruit them for the dungeon a one-hundred-and- troublesome role of the would- twenty-year-old monk be progenitors of the revived revealed to him the Book of the Russian nation... (p.30) Future and the list of honest men, pleasing to God. By means of hypnosis Anichkov summoned these people from all over the world (p.117).

Отравили ль их горькие травы,
Напоил ли их ядом песок -
Только полон коварной отравы
Сладковатый и липкий их сок.

Он сулит небывалые муки
Тем, кто выпьет его невзначай,
Но не деда собрали, а внуки
С ядовитых полей урожай... [. . .]

Русь! Народ Твой глумится и пляшет,
После жатвы лихой охмелев...
Кто-то нивы твои перепашет
Под иной, благодетельный сев...

(Gessen, 1924, pp.1, 2, 26; the poem was written between June 1921 and January-February 1923.)

Yet as a rule, and as in part was demonstrated above, Limonov is repeating Krasnov's moves not literally, but as if reflecting them in a mirror.³³¹ The image of a mirror is yet another link in a chain connecting the two authors together. Being a kind of trademark for Limonov's writings with its almost obligatory narcissistic associations,³³² the mirror structure is no less significant in Krasnov's novel, because the Utopian genre often involves the 'from-the-opposite' logic in the description of an ideal society: what is no good here and now must be changed for good - somewhere, sometime.³³³

Trying to discern the future of Russia from the present, both writers resort to the art of miracle-working and prophecy (to which a mirror is also not an entirely alien accessory), although what exactly they predict is two diametrically opposite events. At the beginning of the twenties, when Russia lies in ruins, Krasnov foresees its resurrection in all its previous glory and even more, so that other peoples and countries seek for Russian help and advice and thrive after getting them.³³⁴ As for Limonov, at the point of what seems to be the peak of Communist strength he predicts the total disintegration of the Soviet empire. What Krasnov reckons to be the natural phenomenon of Russian political expansion,³³⁵

³³¹He does the same to Pasternak's *Doktor Zhivago*, to Nabokov's *Dar*, and to the Norman Mailer novel *An American Dream*. See Shukman, 1983, pp.5-6; Ryan-Hayes, 1988, pp.438-59.

³³²See Smirnov, 1983.

³³³The Utopian aspect of *Za chertopolokhom* is thoroughly examined in Waegemans, 1990. On the Utopian thinking of Russians in general see, for instance, Kleberg and Stites, 1984; Stites, 1989; Baehr, 1991; Clowes, 1993; and Paperno and Grossman, 1994.

³³⁴'The Russian example seems sobering to many. The pro-monarchic movement gets stronger in France, Italy sends all its socialists to Eritrea in Africa, and God knows what's going on there [...] ...ration cards were cancelled last week, and now, thanks to Russian flour and poultry, Berlin is flooded with food' (Krasnov, 1922a, pp.376-77).

³³⁵In one of the episodes of *Za chertopolokhom* there is a map in the voivode Shuiskii's office, on which 'there was a fresh-made

Limonov overturns as the voluntary 'exit' of one sixth of the Earth. Limonov's forecast has already proved to be correct - at least partly, at least for the time being. Whether or not the dreams of Krasnov come true remains to be seen.

As a more experienced prophet, Limonov is well aware of the fact that the less detailed the prediction, the more acceptable it may be.³³⁶ Probably because of this he prefers not to reflect every single trifle of Krasnov's futuristic vision in his artistic 'mirror', but to put the majority of them onto the other side of the looking glass, so to speak (namely, to omit them).³³⁷ In his turn, Krasnov would also completely ignore certain elements of Limonov's outlook, such as avant-gardism (to which Limonov paid due deference while he was an underground poet)³³⁸ or his homosexual bravado (it does not matter whether genuine or phoney).

inscription on the Gobi desert: the Dalai Lama province' (Krasnov, 1922a, p.222); cf. also 'Poland fell into Russian arms like a ripe fruit [...] Russia restored itself to its 1914 borders, extended by important acquisitions in Central Asia' (ibid., p.375).

³³⁶This might also be a reason why the positive programme of Limonov the politician is so vague.

³³⁷It might even be the genre of Utopia itself that has squandered all its credit, in Limonov's opinion. Note his hesitating tone in the following sentences: '...or was it the idea of organizing the human masses by human intellect that turned out to be a false idea? Did the combination of Utopian tales with the medieval skeleton of the state have its effect?' (Limonov, 1993, p.287). Limonov's ironic response to Krasnov, who attributed the presence of the Russian Utopia to the second half of the twentieth century and ascribed its Utopian roots to the 1917 Revolution and the Civil War, could also be tracked down in the following passage: 'We are, yes, living in the UTOPIA. Hip-hip-hurray! But this splendid Utopia has had a criminal past' (ibid., p.351).

³³⁸The Head of the St.Petersburg School of Fine Arts, a certain Samobor, condemns the Imagists, the Cubists and the Futurists as ugly and lunatic art movements (Krasnov, 1922a, pp.325-26; see also ibid., pp.149-50, 339, 380).

In 'Ischeznovenie varvarov' this bravado is reduced to the size of an epigraph deriving from the poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians' (1904) by C.P.Cavafy (1863-1933), the celebrated Greek author internationally famous for his openly autoerotic and homosexual verses:

And some of our men just in from the border say
there are no barbarians any longer.
Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians?
They were, those people, a kind of solution.³³⁹

The meaning of these lines is not limited, of course, to being a sign of the homophilia of the poets referred to. It introduces questions which have engaged Limonov for a long time: what is the true content of the concepts of 'civilization' and 'barbarity', and what is their mutual relationship?

2.4. CIVILIZATION AND BARBARITY À LA LIMONOV.

Summarizing the commonly accepted view of these two notions, Limonov finds very superficial and insufficient their juxtaposition as denoting a society with a high level of cultural and social organization, and something rather amorphous, rude and wild. In the eyes of a priggish Western individual,³⁴⁰ the best representative of the civilized world is the West itself (i.e. Western Europe and the USA, despite all their differences). In this case, Russia (or the former USSR), which is still fighting for the right to be regarded as a European state, is a good example of a big scary barbarian. A

³³⁹The quotation is taken from the book Cavafy, 1984 (p.15), and differs from the one Limonov uses in Limonov, 1992d (p.17). Either Limonov relies on another translation, unknown to me, or his memory lets him down.

³⁴⁰Limonov characterizes him thus: 'The world [...] for him is Barbaria, where (he sees it on TV) wicked dictators rule the poverty-ridden masses and where only tragic events could happen: riots, death sentences and murders' (Limonov, 1993, p.253).

half-Russian, half-Ukrainian by origin³⁴¹ and a Westerner by the two-fifths of his life spent in the USA and France, Limonov willingly plays with such an opposition, but sees its danger at the same time. His autobiographical character tries on the clothes both of a barbarian and of a civilized person. Savenko the adolescent, encountering a Russian girl from France, says, 'How do you do, mademoiselle!'. She answers: 'How do you do, barbarian!'.³⁴² Limonov in the short story 'Obyknovennaia draka' (An Ordinary Fight) says: 'I am sick and tired of being civilized, of pretending to be submissive, emasculated...'.³⁴³

The last statement might lead the reader to the conclusion, first, that civilization is not always a wonderful thing, and second, that the border between civilization and barbarity is very fragile indeed.³⁴⁴ Limonov describes how he sees typical Western middlebrows:

[they] condescendingly despise blood-thirsty 'outdated' barbarians, forgetting simple-mindedly that no slaughter by the non-civilized 'underdeveloped' world has so far exceeded the European Guinness Book of Records achievement - 49 million, killed in 1939-45;³⁴⁵

of an episode experienced in France, he writes:

Once, in a discotheque in Nice, someone learned that I was Russian and called me a pig. Graciously, I forgave

³⁴¹Cf. the Cossack (that is, not entirely Russian) ethnic background of Krasnov.

³⁴²Limonov, 1994, p.214.

³⁴³Limonov, 1993b, p.227.

³⁴⁴Cf. the reflections of one of Limonov's fictional characters: 'What a monotonous barbarity our civilization is, as a matter of fact!'

(Limonov, 1993b, p.106). Cf. also the oxymoronic nickname invented by Eduard the housekeeper for his boss the multimillionaire: *varvarskii baron* (Limonov, 1993a, p.301).

³⁴⁵Limonov, 1993, p.231.

this untypical representative of the French people his barbarity;³⁴⁶

of post-Communist Moscow, full of Western goods of poor quality, he says:

Fuck civilization (*Tsivilizatsiia, ebi ee mat*).³⁴⁷

Limonov also objects to the contrasting of civilization and barbarity, because the former can easily be dismantled to the level of the latter, whereas the latter, taken as savagery by error, might turn out to be the former. The death of Western civilization, threatened by the USSR, is what the Americans and Europeans fear in 'Ischeznovenie varvarov':

...and then all of us will end up in the death camps under the red banner. And bearded barbarians will be gobbling up our paté and drinking our French wine in cafés on the Boulevard Saint-Germain and the Champs d'Elysées... and reading our Proust... (pp.23-24)³⁴⁸

³⁴⁶Limonov, 1990, p.51. See Limonov's short story 'Salat Nisuaz' (The Nice Salad) in Limonov, 1995c, pp.225-42.

³⁴⁷Limonov, 1993, p.170.

³⁴⁸Some of the extremists may even welcome the forthcoming collapse. As John Galant, one of the characters in another of Limonov's works, says about his comrade: 'I imagined him to be a healthy contrast to us, a representative of a barbaric tribe with fresh blood. Who comes to oust our tribes, tired and exhausted by vulgar materialism and a food surplus...' (Limonov, 1993b, p.60). John Galant continues: 'I don't even fear death, I can't understand what danger means, because civilization and discipline shielded me up from myself... It is worthwhile razing the civilization we have - the civilization of the intentionally simplified man - to the ground...' (ibid., pp.105-06). Cf. an opinion of Eduard the housekeeper: 'our civilization deserves to be destroyed because it enslaved man, deprived him of himself, deprived him of his free mind' (Limonov, 1993a, p.391).

Limonov's position is ambiguous. Sometimes he shows solidarity with the Western apprehension: 'The Western European countries will have a lot of trouble with the millions of barbarians who will flood their lands, attracted by Western wealth and impetuous boasting...'.³⁴⁹

Sometimes, as in his essay 'Thirteen Studies on Exile', he teaches 'a Western philistine' a lesson in history:

And what about the Soviet threat to the West? I don't believe it exists. The USA and Europe, together, are twice as strong as the USSR. The two world wars were launched by Western democracies, and not by the USSR. No Soviet soldier has ever occupied one inch of U.S. territory, whereas in 1919 the United States sent an 'expeditionary force' into Soviet territory. The USSR has never used nuclear weapons, whereas in 1945 the United States introduced a sinister era by dropping atomic weapons on the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. If we dig deeper into history, we will uncover other invasions of Russia by the West: 1812, 1855, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921, 1941... Any objective observer would have to conclude that it is Russia who should fear the West, and not the contrary.³⁵⁰

Judging by all this, Limonov is more concerned with the destiny of world civilization as a whole than with that of a particular country, and he expects the catastrophe to break out soon: 'it seems that entire peoples will die or end up in barbarity [...] in these years of turmoil'.³⁵¹

He warns, however, that post-Communist Russia is already on the way to disaster: 'We are contemplating the death of

³⁴⁹Limonov, 1993, p.33.

³⁵⁰Limonov, 1990, p.52.

³⁵¹Limonov, 1992a, p.284 (the quotation is taken from the 1990s epilogue to the 1986 novel).

civilization'.³⁵² Defending Russia's originality, its unlikeness to the West, which might be termed 'barbarity' by those who are not as civilized as they probably imagine, Limonov claims: 'Russian civilization is one of the great civilizations of our time',³⁵³ and even more: 'Soviet socialism and [...] Western regimes are branches of the tree of the same civilization'.³⁵⁴

Returning to *Za chertopolokhom*, Krasnov's treatment of the subject is very similar. Professor Karl Theodor Kleist says to himself about Russia: 'This is an ideal state... people live here enjoying Nature and Beauty... The country is wild, yes, but it is so splendid!' (p.248).

Seeking for the formula which would allow Russia to keep its non-Western individuality without detriment to its world-wide reputation, Krasnov and, following him, Limonov borrow heavily from the ideas developed by the Russian intellectual movement called 'Eurasianism', established in the 1920s in emigration.³⁵⁵ One of the central tenets of the Eurasian doctrine claims that Russia belongs neither to Europe nor to Asia, but constitutes something in the middle, the continent of Eurasia. Krasnov articulates this peculiar mixture:

³⁵²Limonov, 1993, p.95. The demise of civilization is not an unfamiliar subject to Krasnov, in whose *Za chertopolokhom* Professor Waegemans reveals some knowledge of Spengler's book *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (in Russian translated as *Zakat Evropy*). See Waegemans, 1990, p.146.

³⁵³Limonov, 1993, p.96.

³⁵⁴Limonov, 1993, p.259. For more on the question of Barbarity versus Civilization from the point of view of Limonov see Limonov, 1993a, p.391; Limonov, 1994b, p.118.

³⁵⁵For more on Eurasianism see: Mirsky, 1927; [H.N.Spalding], 1928; Riazanovsky, 1967; Sobolev, 1991; Sobolev, 1991a; Gumilev, 1991; Kozhinov, 1992; Ignatow, 1992; Ochirova, 1993 (the last work, however, suffers from serious scholarly inadequacies), *et al.* On Eurasianism in *Za chertopolokhom* see Waegemans, 1990, pp.149-50.

The true holy Russia was standing in front of Kleist, with her quiet rivers and quiet life, with her deep thousand-year-old thought, which had gained a special wisdom. It was not Asia, because it was radiant with a vivid mind, a witty word, games of youth, sparkled with inventions of human thought and a huge masterful machinery. It was not Europe, for it froze in religious adoration of God, Nature and Beauty, in quiet contemplation of misty dawns and bloody sunsets, in the moonlit reverie of Eastern philosophers and in the quest for God. It was Eurasia itself - the very centre of two great, ancient worlds, where the inquisitive philosophy of the wise men of Tibet and China and the negative mind of the far West flow together in a strange harmony (p.263).

Limonov's concept of 'Eurasianism' is less expanded and, therefore, less clear. However, 'Russia as a sentinel of the Eurasian terrain' is one of the key images of Limonov's book *Ubiistvo chasovogo*. As his 'Manifest rossiiskogo natsionalizma' (The Manifesto of Russian Nationalism, 1992) demonstrates,³⁵⁶ Limonov the atheist accepts the Eurasian motto more in a geographical and political sense than religiously.³⁵⁷ Krasnov also treats some ideas of the Eurasians with scepticism and reservations.³⁵⁸ What is more important than these negligible (for our immediate purpose) issues and what unites both artists is that they use the Eurasian

³⁵⁶See Limonov, 1992g.

³⁵⁷Orthodox Christianity for most of the Eurasians was a corner-stone, in contrast to other varieties of National Bolshevism (see Agurskii, 1980, p.98). Cf. a fragment from Limonov's poem 'Sebe samomu' (To Myself):

Бога тоже нету,
Лишь интеллигенты
Верят в басню эту,
Да еще студенты (Limonov, 1986a, p.5).

³⁵⁸See Krasnov, 1928, p.8.

terminology and ideology to sustain a simple idea, which, nevertheless, is far from being an axiom for everybody. Russia is a self-reliant and a self-respecting state with its own cultural maturity, a country which nobody should either threaten or be afraid of; which has as much right to teach others how to behave as have other countries to teach her;³⁵⁹ and the loss of Russia would leave an irreparable void in the innermost self of the planet.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁹Limonov ironically suggests, on behalf of a fictional French journalist, a possible reason for the disappearance of Russia: 'Maybe we drove them up the wall with our reprimands, just as an old, puffed-up, grumbling and vice-ridden teacher pesters lively and cute children? And so, they escaped from the sticky classroom, not willing to "behave themselves"?' (Limonov, 1992d, p.30). Cf. the reaction of a St.Petersburg student after the lecture on the situation in Europe by Professor Kleist: 'Yes... That is what you call Europe! Thank God, we're fenced off from it here by thistles' (Krasnov, 1922a, p.206). Once again, we face a mirror-like situation here; only this time the teacher/lecturer uses Europe as a negative example. Cf. also an extract from the conversation between Kleist and a chemist called Dmitrii Ivanovich Berendeev: 'We present ourselves to Europe not like poor relatives, not like pupils and adolescents, but like benefactors and teachers' (ibid., p.209). I am indebted to Mr Dewhirst from the University of Glasgow (Department of Slavonic Languages and Literatures) for pointing out that a book by the Russian chemist Dmitrii Ivanovich Mendeleev (an obvious prototype for Berendeev), entitled *K poznaniu Rossii* [1906] (Munich, [1924]), might rightly be seen as anticipating the Eurasian doctrine.

³⁶⁰This last presumption by both writers arises in accordance with the pattern created by Saltykov-Shchedrin in his tale entitled 'Dikii pomeschchik' (The Wild Landowner) (special attention should be drawn here to the adjective *dikii*, a synonym for *varvarskii*). The story is about a landowner who treated his peasants in such a way that they prayed to God to spare them their burden. God transported all the peasants to another place, whereupon the landowner became wild and barbarous.

Now it is high time to explain why I regard the assumed liaisons between Krasnov and Limonov to be 'dangerous'. First of all, the juxtaposition of the two remains risky, as, to the best of my knowledge and despite the many facts mentioned above, there is no direct evidence of Limonov's acquaintance with any texts by Krasnov. A direct appeal to Limonov would hardly be of any help.³⁶¹ However, we can try to establish the truth by recourse to his autobiographical confessions. In *Podrostok Savenko* Limonov depicts a girl called Asia, a daughter of recent Russian repatriates from France then living in Khar'kov. Among the multilingual library which Asia's family contrived to retain despite their wanderings, there are some Russian books published in emigration. Asia lends these books to Ed for reading.³⁶² Presuming this is not pure invention and bearing in mind that *Za chertopolokhom* happened to be a very popular novel with a print-run far exceeding the usual number of copies of ordinary émigré books, we would consider the chances of Eduard Savenko the adolescent flipping through the pages of at least this Utopian fiction as quite a strong possibility. For Limonov the grown-up living in emigration the chances increase: it is not for nothing that Limonov boasts in his *Ubiistvo chasovogo* that he

³⁶¹Cf. unsuccessful attempts to resolve the analogous difficulties by Olga Matich: Limonov's *Eto ia - Edichka* seems 'to be linked with Venedikt Erofeev's *Moskva-Petushki* [...]. The name Edichka sounds like Venichka, the childish, Christ-like, and Dostoevskian hero of Erofeev's novella. When asked about the similarity in a private conversation, Limonov said that he had never considered the resemblance' (Matich, 1986, p.358; see also Epshtein, 1994, p.176); and by A.Zholkovskii: Limonov, 'when asked who influenced the poem 'Zhena bandita' [The Bandit's Wife], answered challengingly: "The bandit's wife"' (Zholkovskii, 1992, p.18). See Limonov's teasing lines dedicated to Zholkovskii:

...Реши, профессор Алик,
Кто повлиял - Бодлер или Рембо
или Жюль-Верн? (Limonov, 1986b, p.6)

³⁶²Limonov, 1994, p.208.

has read thousands of books in several languages.³⁶³ Even the present writer, who has not read as much - so far - knows who Ataman Krasnov was.

Secondly, in the event that after these speculations the influence of Krasnov on Limonov can now be taken for granted, the quintessence of their links so unequivocally relates to the notion of an impending cataclysm that it is almost impossible to pass it off as merely the result of a purely abstract meditation. (There apparently exists, however, something that might perhaps be termed the general Russian fixation with approaching doom. It would be sufficient, for example, to mention Solzhenitsyn and Amal'rik in the second half of the twentieth century alone.)

Finally, if my hunch about the Krasnov and Limonov creative link is correct, we might expect a last resemblance, dotting all the 'i's, that is, a violent death for Limonov, comparable to that of Krasnov, the heroic type of death which Limonov so obviously admires and aspires to. Though this final touch, if it happens, would probably confirm in a most visual way that the worlds - and not only the poetic worlds - of Krasnov and Limonov are kindred phenomena, I would not wish it on the author of 'Ischeznovenie varvarov', not for the world. We cannot, however, rule out the outrageous possibility of a

³⁶³Limonov, 1993, p.9. Nataliia Baschmakoff, Professor of Russian in the University of Joensuu (Finland), a Finn of Russian descent who lived for a considerable period of time in Great Britain, Finland and France, assured me that practically every Russian émigré family of earlier generations used to own books by Krasnov. As far as *Za chertopolokhom* is concerned, it is mentioned in Ia.A.Bromberg's book *Zapad, Rossiia i Evreistvo* (Prague: Izdanie evraziitsev, 1931, p.6) in connection with the 'illegal' trip of the émigré V.V.Shul'gin to Soviet Russia: the destination of the trip is called 'beyond the "thistle"' (*za 'chertopolokh'*). Neither Krasnov himself nor the title of his book is named specifically, which prompts us to believe that Bromberg was referring to something commonly known.

danger like this. For patterns repeat themselves, in life as well as in literature.

Chapter 3

THE *DOPPELGÄNGER*, OR THE QUEST FOR LOVE:

Eduard Limonov as Vladimir Maiakovskii

После смерти

нам

стоять почти что рядом...

Владимир Маяковский, «Юбилейное»

3.1. GENERAL BACKGROUND.

Unlike the problematic influence of Krasnov, Maiakovskii's impact on Limonov's writings is not to be questioned.³⁶⁴ In fact, this topic alone is so extensive that it might become the subject for a separate Ph.D. thesis or a book. Surprising though it may seem, no one has spoken about it at length, although some passing remarks on this issue have been made in the course of the last few years.

³⁶⁴Some scholars mention it rather briefly, without providing any proof (see, for instance, Zholkovskii and Shcheglov, 1986, p.278). A.Kron, who seems to be the first to put the names of Maiakovskii and Limonov together (in his critique of Limonov's novel *Eto ia - Edichka*), does not develop the comparison, confining himself to the title of and the epigraph to his essay, taken from Maiakovskii's poem 'Nate' (see Kron, 1979). E.Tikhomirova appears to be the only person who denies, for no apparent reason, Limonov's and Maiakovskii's affinity: "the model for [the] poetic conduct [of Limonov's *Eto ia - Edichka*] does not come from the 'great poet Vovka Maiakovskii'" (Tikhomirova, 1994, p.62). Cf., however, the opinion of the critic Benedikt Sarnov: 'Limonov is no Maiakovskii, of course' (Sarnov, 1993, p.43).

Thus, P.Cardén, analysing *Eto ia - Edichka*, points out that one can 'hear in the narrator's voice [...] the frank megalomania of Maiakovskii'.³⁶⁵ Z.Zinik is convinced that the idea of *Eto ia - Edichka* owes its very existence to Maiakovskii's poem *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* (1924):

Mayakovsky, whom Limonov clearly admires, once stressed the stereotype of the morally invincible bolshevik: 'If a weeping bolshevik were exhibited in a museum, gawpers would stare at this rarity from dawn to dusk.' Limonov has decided to exhibit a weeping dissident; and gawpers have not hesitated to come and stare.³⁶⁶

C.Simmons posits that Limonov's autobiographical protagonist inherited (not without reservations, though) Maiakovskii's provocative literary pose, together with his 'poetization of his own vulnerability'.³⁶⁷ O.Matich finds similarities in the types of lyrical hero (including his attitude to the idea of proletarian revolution) in Maiakovskii's long poems *Oblako v shtanakh* (Cloud in Trousers) and *Fleita-pozvonochnik* (The Backbone Flute) and in Limonov's novel *Eto ia - Edichka*, as well as in their plots.³⁶⁸ F.Dreizin asserts that Limonov's frequent use of foreignisms for satirical purposes continues this tradition, of which Maiakovskii was one of the chief advocates.³⁶⁹ In connection with Limonov's novel *Palach*, an account of the career of a professional sexual sadist, Ia.Mogutin (perhaps unjustly) claims that sadistic motifs were introduced into Russian literature for the first time in the 1920s by Maiakovskii (and some other poets).³⁷⁰

³⁶⁵Cardén, 1984, p.226.

³⁶⁶Zinik, 1984.

³⁶⁷See Simmons, 1993, pp.102, 184-85.

³⁶⁸See Matich, 1986, pp.528, 535.

³⁶⁹Dreizin, 1988, pp.55, 57, 66.

³⁷⁰Mogutin, 1993, p.312.

All these observations look fairly predictable, because Maiakovskii's legacy, 'having been brought in by force, like potatoes during the reign of Catherine the Second',³⁷¹ had become part and parcel of the cultural luggage of every Soviet/Russian citizen even before Limonov came into the world. One of Limonov's contemporaries has written:

Maiakovskii is not simply a literary fact, he is a part of our everyday life and, as they say, our biography. As we were not born yesterday, we could say, in Maiakovskii's own words, that we studied his poetry not through Maiakovskii himself. We studied it through the governess in the kindergarden, through the teacher in the classroom, through the leader in the pioneer camp. We studied it through actors' and announcers' voices, through newspaper headlines, through banners in our factory workshop, and through posters in the militia passport office.³⁷²

That sort of publicity might indeed take away the taste for any work of art, regardless of its value. It is not for nothing that in the middle of the 1980s Limonov regards Maiakovskii's poetic influence as 'perennial'³⁷³ (implying that it has lasted too long) and rates the Futurist Velimir Khlebnikov (whom he sees as Maiakovskii's mentor) much higher, because Maiakovskii 'tidied up the powerful Futurism of his teacher, made it Soviet-like and *comme il faut*'.³⁷⁴ Limonov also says that Maiakovskii, in his public readings, when answering questions, used a repertoire of jokes prepared well in advance.³⁷⁵ These statements, however, do not disprove Limonov's reverence for Maiakovskii, because for the young poets in the 1960s, when Limonov moved from provincial Khar'kov to Moscow in search of a proper poetic

³⁷¹Pasternak, 1982, p.458.

³⁷²Karabchievskii, 1985, p.7.

³⁷³Limonov, 1985, p.37.

³⁷⁴Limonov, 1985, p.36.

³⁷⁵See Limonov, 1994d, p.43.

milieu, a recently erected statue of Maiakovskii, located near the Kremlin, symbolized the spirit of the anti-establishment rebellion, in politics as well as in aesthetics. Another of Limonov's contemporaries recalled:

The statue of Maiakovskii was unveiled in the summer of 1958. During the official opening ceremony the official Soviet poets read their poems. After the ceremony those members of the public who wanted to also started to read aloud some poetry. Such an unexpected and non-planned turn of events pleased everybody, and it was decided to have meetings here on a regular basis. [...] People (mainly students) started to meet almost every day. They would read poems by forgotten and repressed poets, sometimes - poetry of their own. Occasionally debates about art and literature would occur. It turned out something like an open-air club, something similar to Hyde Park. The authorities could not tolerate these dangerous initiatives for long and banned the meetings fairly soon. [...] At the beginning of 1965 a new wave of young poets emerged with the intention of regenerating the activities at Maiakovskii Square. They arranged several performances and [public] disputes and again started to distribute their collections of poems via *Samizdat*, etc. They called themselves by the strange word SMOG, standing for '*smelost*', *mysl*', *obraz*, *glubina*', and for '*samoe molodoe obshchestvo geniev*'. [...] Of course, they were not recognized by official Soviet literature, their writings could not be published, their public performances were banned, but, on the other hand, the authorities could not bring themselves to jail such a lot of people at once. These poets had wide connections and, together with the circle formed at the time of the 'First' Maiakovskii Square, they amounted to a significant force.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁶Bukovskii, 1978, pp.127-28, 218-19.

Although it is not quite clear whether Limonov himself was a 'full member' of the SMOG movement,³⁷⁷ he definitely rubbed shoulders with *smogisty*, and some of them (Leonid Gubanov, Vladimir Aleinikov) can be found among his one-time friends. Aleinikov's name is mentioned in the fictional account of the Futurist Aleksei Kruchenykh's (1886-1968) cremation attended by the young Ed Limonov and his circle. The event itself is meant to signify Limonov's line of descent from the Futurists, whom he deferentially calls the representatives of the 'movement which blew Russia up in the old days'.³⁷⁸ This is indicated by a conversation between Limonov and his acquaintance Morozov. During the cremation, Morozov

spoke about Futurism and historical continuity. That the epoch would be over in a quarter of an hour. Ed objected: - The epoch had been over for a long time, since the end of the 1920s and even before Maiakovskii's death. Apart from some fifty Moscow intellectuals, the country does not have the faintest idea that Kruchenykh had been alive for the last 40 years and could be seen in a snack bar on Sretenka Street. Just stop anybody who happens to be about, and he will tell you that the Futurists passed away sometime straight after the [Russian] Civil War.³⁷⁹

In a more straightforward form the fact that Futurism became a source of inspiration for Limonov and his associates was articulated in 1977 in the manifesto of the 'Konkret' group, to which Limonov allegedly belonged:

The 'Konkret' group maintains the tradition of the old Russian *avant-garde*, - not the most wide-spread tradition of Acmeism, but the rarer tradition of

³⁷⁷For more on SMOG see *Grani*, 61, 1966, pp.14-24; Mishin, 1994; Krokhin, 1994; Shokhina, 1995.

³⁷⁸Limonov, 1987, p.150.

³⁷⁹Limonov, 1987, p.147.

Futurism and, in some points, the tradition of the OBERIU movement which followed the Futurists.³⁸⁰

3.2. LIMONOV ON MAIAKOVSKII.

Whenever Limonov mentions Maiakovskii,³⁸¹ he almost always adds the epithet *velikii* (great) to his name³⁸² and tries to establish personal bonds with Maiakovskii's life and legend. Limonov's autobiographical hero acts as if he and Maiakovskii were on friendly terms³⁸³ (he often calls the poet in a friendly way 'Volodia' or, with affection, 'Volodichka', or even slightly - 'Vovka'). He meets two (out of the many³⁸⁴)

³⁸⁰Limonov, 1977, p.44. On the 'Konkret' mystification see Chapter 1 of the present work.

³⁸¹It may be necessary to say a few words here about Maiakovskii's position with respect to the Futurist movement. The gist of the discussion concerning the relationship between Maiakovskii and the Futurists could be reduced to two contradictory standpoints: 1) Maiakovskii's poetics were very largely Futurist (see, e.g., Stapanian, 1986), and 2) Maiakovskii had only a brief and stormy romance with the movement and betrayed it fairly soon (see, e.g., Khodasevich, 1954, p.223; cf.: Limonov 'betrayed [...] the poetics of modernism which nurtured him as a poet', Vail' and Genis, 1987, p.120). The truth seems to be somewhere in between, as usual: Maiakovskii was too exceptional to limit himself entirely to Futurist aesthetics, although it was an integral part of his artistic manner. Here is an example of what is different and what is common: 'the Futurist 'word as such' or 'self-sufficient word' is relevant to Maiakovskii as well as to these poets [Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh], only it takes metrical, not morphological or phonological, form' (Aizlewood, 1989, p.1).

³⁸²See, for example, Limonov, 1993a, pp.66, 321.

³⁸³Maiakovskii's lyrical hero does almost the same to no less a person than Pushkin in the poem 'Iubileinoe' (1924), a line from which has been used as the epigraph to this chapter.

³⁸⁴See Katanian, 1993; Katanian, 1993a. Cf. also Anna Akhmatova's opinion: 'I think Maiakovskii was in love with these three [Lilia Brik,

major muses of Maiakovskii, Lilia Kagan-Brik³⁸⁵ (in Moscow) and Tatiana Iakovleva-Liberman³⁸⁶ (in New York City), and ponders: 'It is strange how fate persistently links Edichka with the sexual legends of another great poet'.³⁸⁷ In the novel *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia* Limonov's young *alter ego* (this time he carries the name 'Indiana', just for a change) introduces himself to the poet Arsenii Tarkovskii: '-Indiana?-asked Tarkovskii again. - Yep... - Sounds like the 'electrotechnician Jean' in Maiakovskii's verses³⁸⁸, - the master burst into laughter'.³⁸⁹ Years later, giving a public reading in Moscow, Indiana emulates Maiakovskii's behaviour on stage: '- Hello, Russians!- he said and stuck his hands in his pockets, as Maiakovskii used to do'.³⁹⁰

The real Limonov does not seem to be willing to disprove the attitude of his autobiographical counterpart. Characterizing his political opponents (whom he loaths), he notes that they 'swear by Mandel'shtam and curse by Maiakovskii'.³⁹¹ He also says in one of his interviews:

...even my prose has been compared several times to Maiakovskii's works by the French [critics], in respect of its spirit.³⁹² I don't think it's accidental. Again, that

Tatiana Iakovleva and Veronika Polonskaia], and with another thirty three' (Chukovskaia, 1980, vol.2, p.271).

³⁸⁵See the description of Lilia Brik in Limonov, 1987, pp.150-51.

³⁸⁶See Iakovson, 1942, pp.57-59; Iakovson, 1956, pp.173-206.

³⁸⁷Limonov, 1993a, p.239.

³⁸⁸See Maiakovskii's poem 'Marusia otravilas' in V.V.Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v trinadtsati tomakh*, Moscow, 1958, vol.8, pp.188-95. All quotations from Maiakovskii's works are taken from this edition, and further references to it are given in the text, citing volume and page numbers only.

³⁸⁹Limonov, 1992b, p.180.

³⁹⁰Limonov, 1992b, p.24.

³⁹¹Limonov, 1993e.

³⁹²According to Limonov's letter to the poet Aleksei Tsvetkov of 17 February, 1981 (see the Historisches Archiv, Forschungsstelle

Siniavskii used to tell me more than once: in some episodes of your *Dnevnik neudachnika* there is something close to Maiakovskii in spirit. [...] That rebellious spirit (no, 'rebellious' is not the right word), that revolutionary spirit (in the philosophical sense of the word) I probably do possess. I like some things by Maiakovskii. I like his *Oblako v shtanakh*. Save that, I like only some bits and pieces, here and there. I like his *Levyi marsh* (The Left March) like mad. I don't care *what* it was written about, but this is a terribly powerful poem. Nobody will ever surpass the line 'Vashe slovo, tovarishch mauzer'. This is a fact. I myself would like to have composed those lines.³⁹³

3.3. LIMONOV'S TEXTUAL BORROWINGS FROM MAIAKOVSKII.

The shrewd remark about the proximity of Limonov's prose and the spirit of Maiakovskii's poetry withstands attempts at verification, as direct borrowings from it in Limonov's fiction are minimal. Maiakovskii's notorious line 'Ia liubliu smotret', kak umiraiut deti' (I, 48) undoubtedly lies behind the following passage in Limonov: 'I like those who are dying [...] She is in bed on the third floor, she is moaning, groaning and reading the children's poet A.A.Milne'.³⁹⁴ Maiakovskii's poem

Osteuropa, University of Bremen, A.P.Tsvetkov's collection), the French critic Alain Bosquet called Limonov 'possibly a scandalist of Maiakovskii's stature'. Limonov comments: 'Aleksii, my friend, this is the highest [praise] that one can receive from a journalist'.

³⁹³Mirchev, 1989, p.87. Later Limonov says it again: 'the lines "Tishe, oratory, vashe slovo, tovarishch Mauzer" by the revolutionary poet Maiakovskii are my favourite' (Limonov, 1994i, p.21). It is symbolic that an exhibition devoted to Limonov's life and work took place in November, 1993, in the Maiakovskii Museum in Moscow. The real Limonov himself was one of the exhibits there (see Shokhina, 1993; Stomakhin, 1993).

³⁹⁴Limonov, 1992c, p.150.

'Khuligan' (VII, 180-83) may have been a literary source for Limonov's novel *Podrostok Savenko*. Another Maiakovskii poem, 'Ko vsemu' (To Everything), looks almost like a digest of another Limonov novel, *Eto ia - Edichka*. The lover of the lyrical hero leaves him for mercenary reasons, as becomes clear from the description of the 'sumptuous habitat' of the lucky rival:

В мягкой постели
он,
фрукты,
вино на ладони ночного столика (I, 104).

The lyrical hero's reaction to what happens is exemplary for *Edichka the desperado* (he seeks the solution of his personal problems in revolutionary circles):

Затравленным зверем над миром выстою [...]
в черных душах убийц и анархистов
зажгусь кровавым видением! (I, 105-06).

So is the confessional tone of the first-person narration:

До края полное сердце
вылью
в исповеди! (I, 106).

The final scream of the lyrical hero to some extent clarifies the meaning of the title *Eto ia - Edichka*, dictated by the unquenchable thirst for the immortalization of every single experience of the artist's dearly beloved self:

Грядущие люди!
Кто вы?
Вот - я,
весь
боль и ушиб.
Вам завещаю я сад фруктовый

моей великой души (I, 106).

In addition, one can see a remote resemblance in Limonov's *Ukroshchenie tigr v Parizhe* to the picture of the night sky in Maiakovskii's 'Pis'mo tovarishchu Kostrovu iz Parizha o sushchnosti liubvi' (in both extracts the image of the comet is accompanied by unusual 'culinary' connotations):

И вот
 с какой-то
 грошовой столовой,
 когда
 докипело это,
 из зева
 до звезд
 взвивается слово
 золоторожденной кометой.
 Распластан
 хвост
 небесам на треть,
 блестит
 и горит оперенье его... (IX, 384-85)

and

The stars, opaque and shaggy, were fuming. [...] Comets were flying right past his face. Their splashes covered a large piece of sky, like the milk spilled from a glass onto the kitchen floor.³⁹⁵

The very title *Ukroshchenie tigr v Parizhe* - a novel about the subduing of an ill-behaved Russian girl who shares her life with the principal character - is probably a topsy-turvy version of Maiakovskii's lines

Такого любить?
 Да этакий ринется!

³⁹⁵Limonov, 1994b, pp.277-78.

Должно, укротительница.
Должно, из зверинца! (IV, 92),

the only difference being that in Maiakovskii's poem it is a woman, not a man, who is the tamer. Then, one of Maiakovskii's neologisms 'massomiasaia' (I, 215) in a slightly modified form ('miasomassaia') is used in the description of Limonov's 'sister in arms' Anna Rubinshtein.³⁹⁶ This is practically all the available evidence on this point. (It might be useful to recall, however, that Maiakovskii intended to move to writing prose fiction.³⁹⁷ Moreover, there is a strong chance that Maiakovskii's novel, had it been written, would have proved to be very instructive for Limonov. Maiakovskii confessed: 'I wrote up my novel in my mind and did not put it down on paper because, while writing it up, I became filled with hatred of the fictitious and started to demand from myself something which is based on facts and surname' (I, 28). Is it not interesting that the first novel by the former poet Limonov, *Eto ia - Edichka*, was devoted to his own experiences as a Russian émigré in New York City and even included, in its first version, the real surnames of the people he met?³⁹⁸)

3.4. SIMILARITIES IN LIMONOV'S AND MAIAKOVSKII'S ARTISTIC PRINCIPLES.

³⁹⁶Limonov, 1992a, p.219.

³⁹⁷He declared: 'I want to and I will switch from verse to prose. I should finish my first novel this year [1925]' (I, 27).

³⁹⁸At the latest stage these names appeared in easily recognizable disguise (e.g. 'Aleshka Slavkov' = the poet Aleksei Tsvetkov, 'Efraim Veselyi' = the writer and film director Efraim Sevela, 'Erast Provozvestnyi' = the artist Ernst Neizvestnyi, etc.). Since then Limonov has been applying the same technique, e.g. 'Efimenkov' (the writer Evgenii Evtushenko) and 'Lodyzhnikov' (the dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov) in other parts of his autobiographical saga.

Notwithstanding the paucity of textual similarities, Maiakovskii's and Limonov's poetry appears to be very close in the way it was written. In his well-known essay 'Kak delat' stikhi' (How Are Verses Made?) Maiakovskii confessed that while working on his poetry he heard a sort of rhythmical rumble (*gul*) first, and only later did the rumble materialize into specific words. He adduced a 'half-baked' stanza of his poem 'Sergeiu Eseninu' as an example:

Вы ушли ра ра ра ра ра в мир иной.
 Может быть, летите ра ра ра ра ра.
 Ни аванса вам, ни бабы, ни пивной.
 Ра ра ра
 ра ра ра ра
 трезвость (XII, 102).³⁹⁹

Limonov exposes the same device in his poem 'Letit volna ot berega drugogo' (A Wave Is Rolling from Another Shore):

Когда-нибудь меня за это и накроют
 Трам-тата-там!
 Когда-нибудь меня за это
 Убьют наверно трам-та-там!⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹Cf.: 'In summer 1919 on the platform of the carriage of the suburban train Maiakovskii mumbles with concentration: 'Ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta, ta-ta, ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta, ta-ta. What is this metre? Hexameter? It is good to start an epos with a hexameter!' That's how the beginning [of the poem 150 000 000] 'Sto piat'desiat millionov - mastera etoi poemy...' appeared' (Iakobson, 1942, p.58).

⁴⁰⁰Limonov, 1977b, p.64. Cf. an extract from Limonov's composition 'My - natsional'nyi geroi': '[Limonov] is becoming drunk and starting to sing 'Iz-za ostrova na strezhen', na prostor khmel'noi volny vyplyva-aiut raspisnye - ...tritatata - tritatata' (ibid., p.60). It is curious that Limonov uses a 'sound-like' association, akin to Maiakovskii's, in his explanation of how he works as a writer: 'It is very important to find the right key (*tonal'nost'*). I was a poet for a long time, and because of that it is very important for me to find the right key' (Limonov, 1994j, p.5).

In both examples the rhythm looks as though it is somewhat more important than the words, and besides, in Limonov only those words remain on display without which it would not be possible to understand the meaning of the poetic message.

What seems to be another important point is that Limonov belongs to the Russian literary tradition of treating poetry as a weapon,⁴⁰¹ a tradition which can be traced back at least to Pushkin and Lermontov and of which Maiakovskii was perhaps the closest to Limonov in time and therefore the most influential representative. Maiakovskii demanded:

Я хочу,
 чтоб к штыку
 приравняли перо (VII, 94)

and proclaimed:

Нынче
 наши перья -
 штык
 да зубья вил (VI, 54);⁴⁰²

Строка -
 патрон.
 Статья -
 обойма (IX, 111).⁴⁰³

Further study of Maiakovskii's and Limonov's verse reveals more of their partial interchangeability in terms of topics and

⁴⁰¹Cf. his words: 'It's no coincidence that I wrote poetry for all those years. It was the only weapon I had with which to fight the world' (Glad, 1993, p.265).

⁴⁰²Cf. Limonov's statement: 'I see my books as bayonets thrust into the belly of Russian literature dozing' (Matich, 1984, p.230).

⁴⁰³For a more elaborated metaphor of poetry turned into an arsenal see Maiakovskii's poem *Vo ves' golos* (X, 282).

aesthetics. Both poets dedicate many poetic lines to New York and Paris.⁴⁰⁴ In their poetry they quite often combine the tone of the ode with the content of a satire (cf. the titles of Maiakovskii's poems 'Gimn vziatke', 'Gimn kritiku', 'Gimn sud'e', etc., with Limonov's 'Oda Sibiri', 'Oda armii'; it is noteworthy that Limonov's manuscript collection of poems for 1969-70 carried the title *Ody i otryvki*). The tradition of Maiakovskii's satire was developed by Limonov in his long poem *GUM* (the abbreviation stands for 'gosudarstvennyi universal'nyi magazin'), where he portrays a gallery of Russian characters with the help of their 'telling' surnames: e.g., the military man Mordailov (from *morda*, mug), the youth Prytkin (from the *prytkii*, lively, sharp, agile) and others:

Тут покупает маленький Коптилкин
Большую лампу для ночей.

И покупает здесь Соплилкин
На кухню новый выключатель.

И покупает тут Хозяйкин
Дверные ручки попрочнее

И покупает тут Инженеркин
Карниз, торшер, и люстры три.⁴⁰⁵

Maiakovskii himself had readily used this device, e.g., 'dvornik Sluzhbin', 'kvartkhoz Ovechko' (VII, 142), etc. It is more important, however, that the whole poem by Limonov continues and develops Maiakovskii's poetical advertisements

⁴⁰⁴See Maiakovskii's poetic cycles *Parizh* (VI, 197-227) and *Stikhi ob Amerike* (VII, 7-95); Limonov's *Parizhskie stikhi* (Limonov, 1982a, pp.110-16) and some parts of the untitled cycle with the dedication 'Elene ot ee byvshego muzha i neizmennogo druga' (appended to Shchapova de Carli, 1984, no pagination).

⁴⁰⁵Limonov, 1979, p.43.

written in 1923 on a commission from GUM to promote its clothes, tobacco, watches and food (V, 274-76).

It is curious that in some other contexts both Maiakovskii and Limonov describe food with the only purpose of making the reader feel sheer disgust. Compare:

Лопались люди,
проевшись насквозь,
и сочилось сквозь трещины сало,
мутной рекой с экипажей стекала
вместе с иссосанной булкой
жевотина старых котлет (I, 191-92)

and

Он засовывает в полость рта
перемалывает десной
что-то вроде бы творога
нечто будто бы творожок.⁴⁰⁶

Because of many characteristic features of their work, both Maiakovskii and Limonov deserve to be called poets of the disgusting and revolting. In the following example the motifs of prostitution, sacred objects and signs of decay on someone's faces are skilfully intertwined by the two rhymesters.

Compare:

Все эти, провалившиеся носами, знают:
я - ваш поэт.
[...] Меня одного сквозь горящие здания
проститутки, как святыню, на руках понесут... (I, 62)

and

Бесстыдные раскрашенные девки
держа зубами ветхими гнилыми

⁴⁰⁶Limonov, 1979, p.7.

а в волосах везде мужское сало -
 летают с белокрылыми мечтами -
 о да!
 да! да!
 представьте! наравне.⁴⁰⁷

Or take the motif of being a proud rapist with no remorse:

...изнасилую
 И в сердце насмешку плюну ей (I, 105)

and

изнасиловал многих в кустах
 весь мочой я пропах⁴⁰⁸

Limonov follows Maiakovskii not only in his inclination to surprise the reader with unconventional statements, but also in making up new words.⁴⁰⁹ Thus, one of Limonov's rare neologisms, *dremaet* (instead of *dremlet*, 3 person singular of the verb *dremat'*, to snooze), was at first glance invented exactly for the same reason that many of Maiakovskii's neologisms were, that is, for rhyming words which in their natural form did not quite match the required metre or sequence of sounds:⁴¹⁰

- Что моргает он - что надо - чего он желает?
 Ничего он не желает - только он дремает⁴¹¹

However, in this particular case this reason for bending the rules of grammar becomes unconvincing, because, unlike Maiakovskii, Limonov normally does not have any problems

⁴⁰⁷Limonov, 1977b, p.64.

⁴⁰⁸Limonov, 1979, p.80.

⁴⁰⁹See Humesky, 1964.

⁴¹⁰Cf.: 'I always put the most characteristic word at the end of the line and find the rhyme for it at any cost' (XII,106).

⁴¹¹Limonov, 1979, p.88.

with writing unrhymed verse⁴¹² (e.g., lines 5-10 of the same poem '-Kto lezhit tam na divane? - Chego on zhelaet?' remain unrhymed).⁴¹³

3.5. THE COMMUNITY OF LIMONOV'S AND MAIAKOVSKII'S CULTURAL CROSS-REFERENCES.

One can find that Maiakovskii and Limonov have many things in common by exploring their literary allusions, both in verse and in prose.⁴¹⁴ Let us take the figure of Lev Tolstoi as an illustration. It is more than simple coincidence that his much celebrated reputation becomes a landmark for these authors' excessive ambitions. In his poem *Voina i mir* (War and Peace) Maiakovskii 're-wrote' Tolstoi's world-famous epic. Pavel Lavut, Maiakovskii's impresario, recalls that once at a public performance Maiakovskii received a note from the public

⁴¹²Cf.: 'Maiakovskii's verse may strike a reader as free of the conventional restraints of meter and rhyme, yet close analysis of his lines reveals a carefully structured and complex poetic artifice concealed but not destroyed by the breakup of the line into the conversational phrase patterns' (B[rown], 1985, p.277). These words apply equally (if not more so) to Limonov's verse (see the analysis of Limonov's poem 'Ia v mysliakh poderzhu drugogo cheloveka' in Zholkovskii, 1994, pp.148-63).

⁴¹³Such minor coincidences in Maiakovskii's and Limonov's poetic practice as using untranslated foreign words in Cyrillic, e.g. Maiakovskii's *Riv-gosh* (from the French *la rive gauche*; IV, 77) and Limonov's *lezarbry* (from the French *les arbres* ; Limonov, 1979, p.137), or the fact that Limonov's line 'V moikh briukakh ogromnyi polovoi organ' (ibid., p.80) was inspired by the title of Maiakovskii's long poem *Oblako v shtanakh* do not need to be discussed further.

⁴¹⁴Dostoevskii and Gor'kii have already been named among those who formed Maiakovskii's and Limonov's artistic background (see Otsup, 1961, p.155; Humesky, 1964, p.4; Corten, 1968; Pasternak, 1982, p.453; Maramzin, 1978, p.69; Matich, 1986, pp.531, 533-37; Ryan-Hayes, 1988, pp.445-46; Limonov, 1990, p.49, etc.).

saying, 'Comrade Maiakovskii, you are a remarkably interesting [person]. It is obvious from your writings that you have an outstanding talent. I am sure that you will be the Tolstoi of our epoch, about whom you said that he had to appear'. Maiakovskii answered: 'I have no objections, apart from wearing the beard'.⁴¹⁵ As for Limonov, in his autobiographical saga he successfully revived the Tolstoyan pattern *Detstvo - Otrochestvo - Iunost' - [Molodost']* (according to Tolstoi's drafts of 1851-52, his autobiographical trilogy at first was designed as a tetralogy, *Chetyre epokhi razvitiia*, with *Molodost'* as a fourth part).⁴¹⁶ All that, however, did not stop either Maiakovskii or Limonov from constantly placing the name of Lev Tolstoi in a pejorative and humiliating context. Employing parallels with the idol of several generations of the Russian intelligentsia, Maiakovskii used to make fun of himself:

Превращусь
не в Толстого, так в толстого (VII, 17)

or of others:

А с неба смотрела какая-то дрянь
величественно, как Лев Толстой (I, 63)

На стене
росла
у Маркса
Под Толстого
борода (IX, 32)⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵Lavut, 1969, p.78.

⁴¹⁶See Tolstoi, 1930, pp.241-45; the French critic Florence Lautrédou seems to be the first to point to Limonov's dependence on Tolstoi, as far as their autobiographical series are concerned (see Lautrédou, 1987).

⁴¹⁷See also Maiakovskii's poems 'Lev Tolstoi i Vania Dyldin' (VII, 192-95) and 'Vegetariantsy' (IX, 308-09).

Limonov, who always wants to be second to none, says in one of his interviews:

Lev Tolstoi would look like a dreadful poseur and pretender today. Many of the ideas of his time are dead, life consists of entirely different conglomerations, so one can find a hundred authors who could write like Tolstoi and sometimes do so, but it is lifeless.⁴¹⁸

He is far more eloquent in his fiction, though. Limonov's autobiographical character says grudgingly:

If Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi was alive, I would have given him a bash on the head with a log for his kitchen-sink moralism and unparalleled sanctimoniousness. For he did not write in his great works about the fair number of peasant girls he fucked on his estate.⁴¹⁹

The disrespectful aggressiveness of this assessment might be in part explicable by the following remark by Limonov about one of his behavioural patterns:

I feel great because my name is a kind of punk name. I adopted it in 1964 when no punk movement existed, [...] and at the end of the 1970s I discovered that it was very fashionable to have a name like that - Sid Vicious, Johnny Rotten...! Eduard Limonov is less frightening, but it's artificial enough. In Russian, it sounds even more artificial than it does in English [as has been pointed out in Chapter 1, it derives from the Russian word for 'lemon']. It indicates acidity.⁴²⁰

As if to support Limonov's self-assessment, the English version of his book *Podrostok Savenko* was called *Memoirs of a Russian Punk*. Oddly enough, punk culture constitutes yet

⁴¹⁸Mirchev, 1989, p.103.

⁴¹⁹Limonov, 1992c, p.168.

⁴²⁰Limonov, 1990a, p.415.

another link between Maiakovskii and Limonov. The film director Slava Tsukerman, who shot a feature about American punks, testifies:

Punks were the only ones who held their breath listening to the records of Maiakovskii's voice. They were interested in the same things; they regarded Maiakovskii as the founder of their movement and first punk. The art of the 1920s was extremely close to them, as well as to me. We had many points of contact in that respect.⁴²¹

3.6. MAIAKOVSKII, LIMONOV AND THE ART OF CINEMA.

Another context demonstrating Limonov's dependence on views expressed by Maiakovskii is that of film. Maiakovskii appreciated cinematography as a technical device which enabled the artist to reflect the versatility and changeability of the modern age. In a speech given early in 1914 he compares present-day conditions to the art of the cinema: 'Everything has become [...] as on a motion picture film'.⁴²² Maiakovskii vigorously participated in the process of film-making as a theoretician and practitioner: he wrote critical

⁴²¹Mirchev, 1989, p.210. It is curious that in his short story 'Pervyi pank' (The First Punk) Limonov describes a musical and poetical show in the famous rock club 'CBGB' in New York which he attended in 1978. The program included Elvis Costello, Allen Ginsberg, Andrei Voznesenskii *et al.* John Ashbery read to the crowd of punks 'Levyi marsh' by Maiakovskii and was received exceptionally well (see Limonov 1995c, pp.206-16).

⁴²²Katanian, 1985, p.87. Cf. some poetic reverberations of the topic:

...Подымаюсь сенскою сенью,
синемаграфской серой тенью (IV, 173).

essays and screenplays, he acted in films and he tried to do some directing.⁴²³

Limonov has not been involved with the film industry directly so far, and cinema certainly does not retain even half the novelty for him that it did for Maiakovskii. Limonov points out that 'cinema has always been an ersatz-entertainment and has rarely been raised to the level of art. [...] Cinema at its best has been sentimental, and that's it'.⁴²⁴ This tallies with Maiakovskii's standpoint, though: 'Cinematography and art are different phenomena' (I, 283); 'The cinema is ill. [...] Cunning entrepreneurs lead it by the hand through the streets. They collect money by touching people's hearts with sob-stories' (XII, 29).

Limonov dislikes the illusory character of the cinema. He says: 'The reality of the cinema is not real. It is a substitute. [...] So many conventionalities have been bared during the less-than-a-hundred-year active history of the cinema that they themselves destroyed the fundamental illusion of the reality of film'.⁴²⁵ In Edichka's eyes the heroine of Limonov's *Eto ia - Edichka* Elena made a terribly dangerous mistake by 'taking

⁴²³See, for example, Henderson, 1973; Polianovskii, 1983. According to E.J.Brown, there are some vestiges of cinematographic influences to be found in Maiakovskii's poems 'Utro', 'Iz ulitsy v ulitsu', *Oblako v shtanakh*, *Fleita-pozvonochnik*, *Voina i mir* (see Brown, 1973, pp.319-20).

⁴²⁴Limonov, 1993, pp.288-89.

⁴²⁵Limonov, 1993, p.322. Cf. the lyrical treatment of the same subject:

Где все эти Good bad girls[...]
 Где мужчины с блестящими проборами [...]
 Где шумная экзотическая толпа [...]
 Что случилось за надписью The End?

 Они - старые и незаметные
 тряся облезлыми головами
 живут на Central Park South[...]

(Limonov, 1982a, pp.111-12).

films seriously. She energetically tried to look like sexy film stars'.⁴²⁶ This coincides with the position of the later Maiakovskii, who generally favoured documentaries and newsreels to the detriment of feature films and, in particular, objected to the fact that in Eizenshtein's film *Oktiabr'* (1927) the part of Lenin was played by the (unprofessional) actor Nikandrov, whereas documentary footage of the real Lenin could have been used instead (see XII, 147).

Although Limonov admits that he is 'thousands of miles away from film-making in the scorching desert of the literary business',⁴²⁷ his critics point to a certain cinematographic

⁴²⁶Limonov, 1993a, p.130.

⁴²⁷Limonov, 1993a, p.369. However, the novel *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia* informs the reader that Limonov was approached by the Odessa studios with an offer to make a film based on *Podrostok Savenko* (named *Self-portrait of the bandit as a young man* here). Limonov allegedly accepted the offer (see Limonov, 1992b, p.45). In May, 1998, the Russian version of the women's magazine *Elle* informed its readers (see p.56) that preparations are underway in Hollywood for a feature film based on *Eto ia - Edichka*, with Momo Mrdakovic as director and starring Milla Jovovic (we are grateful to Dr Margaret Tejerizo (Department of Slavonic Languages and Literatures, University of Glasgow) for bringing this information to our attention; however, in a personal communication Dr Robert Porter suggested that this might be a mystification, because the surname Mrdakovic reminded him of the Czech *mrdat* 'to fuck'). In addition, according to the short story 'Veselyi i moguchii russkii seks' (Russian Sex, Merry and Powerful), after the success of *Eto ia - Edichka* a rookie Russian émigré producer tried to persuade Limonov to write a script for the first Russian pornofilm, whereas Limonov himself would clearly have preferred to be involved in the project as an actor (see Limonov, 1992, pp.432-46). It is curious that Limonov rather unexpectedly associates his would-be casting in the film with the name of none other than Maiakovskii: 'With this pornofilm I can knock them out in one blow, so that these flipping sons of bitches could not whisper about me, as they did about Maiakovskii: 'Well, the poet had a small dick, and, you know, he could not really give his best as a lover'" (ibid., p.442).

aura emanating from his works. An American scholar notes: 'The story of Eddie and Anna [in Limonov's novel *Molodoi negodiai*] is robust, even Bocaccian (one wishes that these characters could find their Fellini to recreate their adventures on film)'.⁴²⁸ The writer himself does not deny that the Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman has influenced his creative activity.⁴²⁹ It is probable that Limonov's novel *Istoriia ego slugi* [His Butler's Story] was partly inspired by Frank Borzage's musical *His Butler's Sister* (1943).⁴³⁰ One can argue that the title of Limonov's collection of short stories 'Amerikanskii kanikuly' [American Holiday] refers to William Wyler's classic comedy *Roman Holiday* (1953).⁴³¹ Captain Zil'berman in *Podrostok Savenko* is compared to Charlie Chaplin. The hero of *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia* is named after Stephen Spielberg's adventurer Dr Indiana Jones. Moreover, in his pipe-dream piece 'My - natsional'nyi geroi' Limonov makes a confession regarding his fantasies about being appointed as 'an actor of world class' and claims that he was offered a role in the (non-existent) picture *My iz Moskvy* (We Are from Moscow) by no less a director than Michelangelo Antonioni!⁴³² As a French author summarizes, '[Limonov] creates a cinematography of his own'.⁴³³

⁴²⁸Carden, 1990, pp.230-31.

⁴²⁹See Zholkovskii, 1992, p.18.

⁴³⁰N.Sharymova's slip of the tongue is revealing in this respect, as she asks the writer Evgenii Evtushenko whether he has seen a new book by Limonov which had recently appeared in French, and calls it 'Sestra ego dvoretskogo' (see Sharymova, 1985)!

⁴³¹The romantic atmosphere of the old Hollywood pictures is re-created by the author with a good pinch of salt in the title story of the collection (see Limonov, 1992, pp.308-10). On Limonov's unsuccessful attempts to publish 'Amerikanskii kanikuly' as a separate book in the 'Sintaksis' publishing house see [Kotliarov], 1986, p.1.

⁴³²Limonov, 1977a, p.58.

⁴³³Zand, 1985, p.116. For other important discussions of the art of cinema and various examples of cinematographic technique applied by Limonov in his books see Limonov, 1993a, pp.492, 496, 502, 506, 508, 513, 521, 522, 525, 527-29, 531; Limonov, 1994b, pp.177, 253-59.

It is not by chance that Limonov peoples his works with 'foreign' cinematographic reminiscences. Maiakovskii was also attracted to the cinema due to its international nature and because it was not as hampered by linguistic barriers, especially in the epoch of silent films, as public readings were (see XII, 125). The great self-promoter stated quite plainly: 'Realizing that cinematography serves millions [of moviegoers], I want to inculcate my poetical abilities into it. [...] I will write two hundred scripts, all by myself' (XII, 359).

It is amazing that the screenplays for three 1918 films in which Maiakovskii took part (*Zakovannaia fil'moi*, *Baryshnia i khuligan* and *Ne dlia deneg rodivshiisia*, see XI, 481-85; cf. also the later version of *Zakovannaia fil'moi* called *Serditse kino*, XI, 67-90) are all in tune with many of Limonov's dominating motifs. The feature *Zakovannaia fil'moi* touches on the theme of the artist's love for an unfaithful movie star and provokes a recollection of Edichka's passionate feelings over the infidelity of his wife and (photo)model Elena in *Eto ia - Edichka*. *Baryshnia i khuligan* pictures a young delinquent from the workers' area of a city, and it is tempting to draw a parallel between the filmscript and Limonov's *Podrostok Savenko*, a disturbing narration about life in the working class outskirts of Khar'kov during the first post-Stalin years. *Ne dlia deneg rodivshiisia* tells the story of a young uneducated worker turned poet who longed for success and recognition, managed to gain it in the world of capital, and met with a bitter disappointment at the end of the day. The same motivation (i.e., grandiose ambition mingled with feelings of love for somebody hardly attainable) drives Limonov's 'other self', which seems to be rather unsophisticated in its early days, from provincial Khar'kov to Moscow and then to New York City and Paris, where our hero finally becomes a respectable but disillusioned writer (it is worth noting the apparent autobiographical subtext attached to the libretto of

Ne dlia deneg rodivshiisia, which in the first instance was meant to be based on Jack London's *Martin Eden*).⁴³⁴

An autobiographical hero appears in Maiakovskii's scripts at least twice: in the *Ideal i odeialo* and *Kak pozhivaete?* (XI, 487, 129-48). The latter opens with a stunning scene when two Maiakovskiis meet in the street and repeat each other's gestures. In the light of the constant reappearance of the self-image in Maiakovskii's and Limonov's works, the scene leads us to the heart of what these men of letters share, namely, the motif of the *Doppelgänger* (the double), which dauntingly stands out from their other favourite themes.

3.7. IMAGES OF DOUBLES IN MAIAKOVSKII'S AND LIMONOV'S ARTISTIC UNIVERSE.

3.7.1. Maiakovskii's doubles.

Anatolii Lunacharskii perspicaciously stated:

Maiakovskii had a double, and that was his misfortune. [...] Maiakovskii sensed him, was afraid of him and did not like him, but the double was importunate. The worst of it all was that the double was also attractive, which scared Maiakovskii more than anything else (because if you had an antipathetic double, it would be relatively easy to brush him aside). It is the attractiveness of the double which proves that he is real, that he incorporates some of your own features: you oust them from your mind, and precisely because you expel them from your consciousness, they condense nearby into another, ghostly person who does not actually follow you, but

⁴³⁴For the comparison between Limonov's *Molodoi negodiai* and London's *Martin Eden* see Vail' and Genis, 1987, p.127.

lives inside you as a subconscious, half-conscious and supplementary individual.⁴³⁵

Lunacharskii's observations can be reinforced by some other similar statements. Boris Pasternak perceived the unsurmountable barrier dividing the early and the later works by Maiakovskii.⁴³⁶ Mark Slonim published an article entitled 'Dva Maiakovskikh' (Two Maiakovskiis).⁴³⁷ Count Sviatopolk-Mirskii reckoned that Maiakovskii had 'two souls'.⁴³⁸ The artist Iurii Annenkov wrote: 'he represented a far too rare example of the split personality. Maiakovskii the poet moved alongside with Maiakovskii the person; they walked side by side almost without coming into contact'.⁴³⁹ Indeed, Maiakovskii himself encouraged his readers to see him as a frame for multiple personalities in the essay 'O raznykh Maiakovskikh' (On Different Maiakovskiis; I, 344-48).

The image of the *Doppelgänger* in Maiakovskii's works is so overwhelming (sometimes it is transformed into another manifestation of the same concept - the image of twins)⁴⁴⁰ that it even appears in hardly imaginable contexts, e.g., in

⁴³⁵Lunacharskii, 1957, pp.402-03.

⁴³⁶See Pasternak, 1982, pp.456-58.

⁴³⁷See Slonim, 1992.

⁴³⁸Iakobson and Sviatopolk-Mirskii, 1975, p.44.

⁴³⁹Annenkov, 1966, p.192. Cf. the following lines by Maiakovskii:

Я как надвое расколся в воле (I, 207)

and

себе навстречу

сам

иду

с подарками подмышками (IV, 159).

Likewise, in his poem 'Ja ne veriu uzhe v etu damu' (I Do Not Believe in this Lady Anymore) Limonov says:

сам с собою сижу с бездонным

(Kuz'minskii, Tsvetkov and Limonov, 1981, p.54).

⁴⁴⁰See Abramian, 1977, pp.60-77.

treating a political party and a human being as something identical:

Партия и Ленин -
близнецы-братья (VI, 267),

mocking those bureaucrats who attend too many business meetings:

...сидят людей половины.
О дьявольщина!
Где же половина другая?
[...] Они на двух заседаниях сразу [...]
Поневоле приходится раздвояться [...] (IV, 8),

ridiculing the idea of building monuments to contemporary writers:

Скульптор
 помнит наш режим
(не лепить чтоб
 два
 лица),
Жаров-Уткин
 слеplен им
Сразу
 в виде близнеца (IX, 146),

or picturing two suns in the sky in the futurological poem *Letaiushchii proletarii* [The Flying Proletarian] (VI, 325).

3.7.2. Limonov's doubles.

The motif of the double is also extremely important for Limonov. To start with, the apparent and pretentious pen-name he assumed has a great deal to do with the massive

double identity (as in the case of Abram Terts/Andrei Siniavskii). Limonov's allegedly autobiographical novels produced a whole trainload of speculation on whether indeed the real Eduard Limonov/Savenko had black male lovers in New York and whether he robbed shops and took part in a gang rape in Khar'kov.⁴⁴¹ Then those critics who were shocked by the eccentricities of *Eto ia - Edichka* and its sequels tended to separate Limonov the poet from Limonov the prose writer (this erroneous approach was splendidly refuted in a brilliant essay by Aleksandr Donde).⁴⁴² Similarly, as the critic Dmitrii Bykov noted,⁴⁴³ those appalled by Limonov's bizarre public activity were ready to praise his fiction but condemn him as a politician,⁴⁴⁴ ignoring the fact that one can hardly oppose various facets of the same individual to each other, because they are always bound together with an inner logic. In his short story 'Salat Nisuz' Limonov's autobiographical character admits that he is often engaged in an internal dialogue with his 'eternal opponent Eduard-2'.⁴⁴⁵ A substantial part of this story is presented as one of such dialogues.

Limonov's short story 'Dvoinik' (The Double), published in the journal *Sintaksis* in 1985, gives us a chance to penetrate into the depths of his obscure behavioural motivations (including their artistic aspect, of course). The character called 'the writer Eduard Limonov' describes his encounter with a paedophilic preacher John in New York City. John turns out to be the writer's double:

⁴⁴¹This problem is examined in detail in Chapter 1. Aleksandr Zholkovskii, for his part, assured the reader that the real Limonov cannot be identified with Limonov the fictional character (see Zholkovskii, 1991, p.17).

⁴⁴²See Kustarev [Donde, A.], 1983.

⁴⁴³See Bykov, 1994.

⁴⁴⁴See, for example, Iarkevich, 1993, p.14.

⁴⁴⁵Limonov, 1995c, p.227.

With tremendous difficulty and effort I found on his face the features of my own. His lips and nose, his hair and the structure of his cheek-bones were the same [...] Finally I realized fully that John's face is not only John's face but also a copy of the writer Eduard Limonov's face. I was stunned by this simple discovery.⁴⁴⁶

John, who read Limonov's book, confesses his sins to the writer and invites him to a hotel - maybe to make love, but this is not directly stated. The writer declines. Apart from that, nothing happens in the story, and the only possible reason for writing it seems to be not the introduction of an unusual human type (after all, homosexual priests can surprise no one these days), but the disclosure of Limonov's basic creative principles.

3.7.3. Maiakovskii's and Limonov's doubles versus the writers' true selves.

It is noteworthy that both Maiakovskii and Limonov emphasize their desire to portray as the main object of their art either their own emotions, ideas and adventures, or those borrowed from other people's experiences but ascribed to Maiakovskii's or Limonov's self - their fictional self, to be precise,⁴⁴⁷ because life and art are never equal. Here are some titles of their books: *Ia* (1913), *Vladimir Maiakovskii: Tragediia* (1914), *Maiakovskii ulybaetsia*, *Maiakovskii smeetsia*, *Maiakovskii izdevaetsia* (1923), *Eto ia - Edichka* (1979), *Podrostok Savenko* (1983). The depiction of the world through the prism of his (or her) own soul is only natural for any writer, but not everyone chooses to name his/her imaginary characters after himself or herself. Moreover, even when the subject of a particular piece by Maiakovskii or Limonov seems to be short of their usual 'selfish' treatment,

⁴⁴⁶Limonov, 1985a, pp.106-07.

⁴⁴⁷Namely, their double.

this is deceptive. Lawrence Leo Stahlberger pointed out that the characters in the tragedy *Vladimir Maiakovskii*, i.e., 'the various cripples, the Man without an Eye and a Foot, the Man without an Ear, and the others were only so many doubles of the Poet'.⁴⁴⁸ Professor Jakobson said about Maiakovskii's poem *150 000 000*: 'Even when in Maiakovskii's poem the role of the hero is played by a group of 150 million people, it [...] acquires the familiar features of the poet's self'.⁴⁴⁹ Likewise, Mikhail Lemkhin noted about Limonov's thriller *Palach*, which was not devoted to the life of Edichka:

The problem is, however, that [...] Limonov [still] looks like his hero, and not only because of some trivialities, customs and predilections [they share]. The resemblance between the author and the character in his book lies in something else, [viz,] in open and absolute immorality.⁴⁵⁰

In other words, Maiakovskii and Limonov make the explicit or covert portrayal of their *alter ego* the corner-stone of their work. Both writers were severely criticized for this and had to try to justify their standpoint. Pavel Lavut recalled some of Maiakovskii's answers to written questions posed at the poet's public readings:

'Comrade Maiakovskii, how to explain that you put your ego at the centre of everything?' - 'It is more noticeable at the centre', smiled Maiakovskii. Then he said more seriously: 'The most important thing you have to remember once and for all is that "I" means "the citizen of the Soviet Union". "I" could also be a convention [i.e., a literary device]. And finally, why do I have to speak, say, on your behalf when I am speaking about myself and for myself?'⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁸Stahlberger, 1964, p.25.

⁴⁴⁹Iakobson and Sviatopolk-Mirskii, 1975, p.11.

⁴⁵⁰Lemkhin, 1987, pp.396-97.

⁴⁵¹Lavut, 1969, p.26.

Cf. also a glimpse of the same polemics in the form of poetry:

сколько ни заменяй «я» - «мы»,
не вылезешь из лирической ямы (IV, 122).

Limonov's attitude towards personal pronouns as something rather relative and conditional is very much the same, as can be demonstrated by juxtaposing the titles of his two 'autobiographical' texts *Eto ia* - *Edichka* and 'My - natsional'nyi geroi' (bold-face is mine. - A.R.). Besides, compare Limonov's response to an interviewer's question, 'Does it not seem boring to you to write about the same character, Edichka?':

The figure of Edichka is, of course, only the pretext for writing about everything else, about the world, about his friends or adversaries in the world, about all that boiling broth named mankind. [...] It seems to me horribly stupid for some reason to use the manner of old novelists by inventing a character for my purposes [...]. I try to imagine some Tarasov in the place of Limonov and I burst into laughter.⁴⁵²

There was also a personal reason why Maiakovskii and Limonov chose the double as one of their central images. Neither writer even finished high school (or gymnasium) and both became what is called 'self-made men'.⁴⁵³ While

⁴⁵²Mirchev, 1989, p.96. An extract from this passage has already been quoted in Chapter 1.

⁴⁵³Some scholars rate Maiakovskii's educational horizons highly. Thus, Irina Podgaetskaia points to his encyclopedism, especially in the sphere of the social sciences (see Podgaetskaia, 1978, p.171). As for Limonov, in an ambitious attempt to intellectualize his work he produced a whole sociological treatise 'Distsiplinarnyi sanatorii' [The Disciplinary Sanatorium] (see Limonov, 1993, pp.179-360). It is curious, however, that from time to time Maiakovskii and Limonov make similar mistakes in using specific professional terminology. For

becoming somebody they inevitably had to look at themselves as if from a certain distance. Hence, the concept of the *Doppelgänger* received an additional boost.

3.7.4. The mythological subtext of the doubles in Maiakovskii and Limonov (The twins cult).

The idea of twins (or doubles) as something very extraordinary and special stems from the depths of time. It appears that the cult of divine twins played an important role in the religions of all ancient peoples,⁴⁵⁴ but 'the most famous pair, the Spartan Dioskouroi [Kastor and Polydeukes], best represent the Indo-European tradition'.⁴⁵⁵ This is the tradition within which Maiakovskii's and Limonov's works should be interpreted, and when these writers speak about 'myth' it is the Indo-European myth *par excellence*.

One of the Futurist manifestos (1913) which says: 'We consider the word as the creator of the myth; when dying the word gives birth to the myth, and the other way round'⁴⁵⁶ was signed, among others, by Maiakovskii. It demonstrates that the notions of myth and art were intertwined in Maiakovskii's consciousness and formed the foundation for his artistic practice from the very start. This fact has not passed unnoticed by critics and scholars, who mentioned it

example, no Russian military man would use the word *dulo* (muzzle) to mean *stvol* (barrel). Maiakovskii demonstrates his incompetence in the following lines:

и дулам браунингов в провал
рухнуло римское право.

Limonov does exactly the same in the phrase 'letting the first cartridge into the muzzle' (Limonov, 1993, p.125), which comes as a surprise, given his sympathy for military service and the army.

⁴⁵⁴See Shternberg, 1936, pp.73-108.

⁴⁵⁵Ward, 1968, p.9.

⁴⁵⁶[From the almanach *Sadok sudei* 2], in Markov, 1967, p.52.

with regard to Maiakovskii's allusions to some specific myths (of Greek origin, for example), as well as his mythological vision in general; and both in connection with the poet's writings and in search of the essence of his achievements as a whole. Stahlberger, for instance, pointed to the dependence of the tragedy *Vladimir Maiakovskii* on Greek tragedy and Dionysian ritual.⁴⁵⁷ N.Otsup summed up Maiakovskii's destiny quite poignantly: 'He failed to turn his fate into a religious myth'.⁴⁵⁸

Limonov also claims that his creative interests lie in the sphere of 'unmasking simplistic myths and replacing them with more sophisticated ones'.⁴⁵⁹ Moreover, it is the mythological context of ancient Greece that he uses to make a particular reference to Maiakovskii's intimate circle: 'Leda's daughters, Helen and Clytemnestra (one caused the Trojan war, the other, together with her lover, calmly kicked the life out of her husband Agamemnon), and Lilia Brik and El'za Triolet are very much alike'.⁴⁶⁰ Limonov is certainly aware of the belief that Leda was also the mother of the so-called Heavenly Twins, Kastor and Polydeukes!

According to Shternberg's analysis of ethnographic data from around the world, 'there was the pretext for a new object of worship in every case of the birth of twins. Every twin [was

⁴⁵⁷Stahlberger, 1964, pp.28-34.

⁴⁵⁸Otsup, 1961, p.170.

⁴⁵⁹Mirchev, 1989, p.96.

⁴⁶⁰Limonov, 1994b, p.247. The following quotation might serve as proof that the myths of ancient Greece bore a topical significance for Maiakovskii:

Думал - [...]

сяду на трон,

изнеженный телом грек (I, 170).

Limonov, for his part, compares his lover Elena to the Trojan Helen and calls himself the son of the nymph Echo in his idyll 'Zolotoi vek' [The Golden Age] (Limonov, 1979, p.118). He also calls the god Pan "my double from ancient Greece" (Limonov, 1980c, p.155).

treated] as a divine creature upon his birth'.⁴⁶¹ In this event, it is psychologically understandable and hardly surprising that Maiakovskii, with his obsession of vanquishing time and becoming immortal,⁴⁶² and Limonov, with his desire to make more than simply his mark during his lifetime,⁴⁶³ recreate in their writings (either the two together, or individually) virtually all the attributes of the composite twin cult.⁴⁶⁴

Twin cults were often linked to the images of animals or heavenly bodies because of the zoomorphic and celestial beliefs of ancient tribes. This is the reason why Maiakovskii compares his lyrical hero to the bull (I, 105), bear (IV, 146-48), horse (II, 11) and wolf (X, 68) (all these animals are regarded as generally accepted representations of the twin

⁴⁶¹Shternberg, 1936, p.82.

⁴⁶²For more on this well-studied point it is sufficient to refer to Pomorska, 1981; and Masing-Delic, 1992 (index).

⁴⁶³'Drink something to my bones, to the fact that I did not become God' (Limonov, 1979, p.120).

⁴⁶⁴Maiakovskii's and Limonov's enthusiasm for the cinema could be interpreted in the light of their profound concern about their mortality. Film allows one to keep and re-run one's attempts to impersonate other people, or, in other words, it gives the illusion of extra-life to extra-lives imitated by Thespians. Maiakovskii would simply enjoy his screen appearances in disguise. As Lilia Brik recalled, she wrote the scenario *Liubov' i dolg, ili Karmen*, which encapsulated four different versions of the same story. Maiakovskii was to play four different parts consecutively. These roles included a philandering public prosecutor dressed up as an apache, a revolutionary disguised as the apache for conspiratorial reasons, a man who leads a double life (!!! - A.R.), and so on (see Brik, 1993, p.164). The screenplay was never filmed. Limonov would be happy to have some acting engagements too. It is not for nothing that he fantasizes: 'In the moving pictures Limonov played Stepan Timofeevich Razin, Emel'ian Pugachev, Vasilii Ivanovich Chapaev, Sergei Esenin and himself in the film "A National Hero". He also wanted to play the part of ataman Antonov' (Limonov, 1977a, p.60). This passage reads like an amplification of Maiakovskii's line 'Segodnia ia - Napoleon' (I, 73).

brethren).⁴⁶⁵ The real Maiakovskii was also fond of domestic animals.⁴⁶⁶ This appears to be a sensitive matter for Limonov's counterpart too. In the novel *Ukroshchenie tигра v Parizhe* the writer Limonov buys a kitten, which soon starts to suffer from some sort of virus. The writer comments: 'I cannot even have a pet. I sympathize too much with what happens to them...'.⁴⁶⁷

The connection of the twin cult with the sky is also quite strong (sometimes twins were worshipped as gods of light). That is why Maiakovskii associates his poetic 'I' with the sun and the moon:

СВЕТИТЬ -
и никаких гвоздей!
Вот лозунг мой -
и солнца! (II, 38);

Это я, взобравшись туда высоко,
луной томлю, ждуший и голенький (I, 204).

It is significant that Maiakovskii chose the word 'dvazhdy' (twice), not 'trizhdy' (thrice), which would also be appropriate for the rhythm, to describe an unprecedented natural occurrence - the moonrise which allegedly happened two times during the same night (VI, 325). In my opinion, it points once again to the dual foetus of twins, which has been perceived as something extraordinary in natural history.

⁴⁶⁵ See Shternberg, 1936, pp. 79-80, 85, 96; Ward, 1968, pp.11-12. Our further account of the main features and functions of the 'integrated' cult of the heavenly twins relies heavily on these two authorities.

⁴⁶⁶ See Brik, 1993, pp.107-15. The 'twin' roots of the canine metamorphosis of Maiakovskii's literary 'I' is apparently missing from the otherwise impeccable essay by Smirnov, based on the mytho-poetical analysis of the phenomenon (see Smirnov, 1978).

⁴⁶⁷ Limonov, 1994b, p.207.

The sun and the moon in ancient beliefs could symbolize opposite sexes, especially in the case of 'cross' twins (one male, one female). One of the aspects of these beliefs suggests that twins make incestuous love inside their mother's womb (cf. Maiakovskii's

идет луна -
жена моя (I, 46)).

Although Limonov's metaphors relating to the heavens do not seem to be specifically elaborated, he takes full advantage of unifying the opposite (this is a traditional mythological device) and ascribes the female sex to his fictional male double. This is where Edichka's notorious bisexuality comes from.⁴⁶⁸ A token of the same motif in the form of developing certain secondary characteristics of the female sex can be seen in the following passage by Maiakovskii (note the 'celestial' comparison between the process of switching sexes and the phenomenon of changing colours in the sky in the first line):

- и, как небо, меняя тона -
хотите -
буду безукоризненно нежный,
не мужчина, а - облако в штанах (I, 175).

⁴⁶⁸Some critics sagaciously call it 'intermediate sexuality' (see Siniavin, 1982, p.260). Some use this easy opportunity to punish the real Limonov by accusing him of sexual deviations (see Tuinov, 1995, p.5; the article, written by Limonov's political adversary, is entitled 'Est' Edichki v russkikh selen'iakh', so that the headline itself, being a periphrasis of Nekrasov's well-known 'Est' *zhenshchiny v russkikh selen'iakh* (italicized by me. - A.R.), is intended to indicate the writer's treacherously androgynous nature).

The 'bisexual' potential of the twin mythology is realized completely in the description of the hosts' daughter in the poem *Pro eto*:⁴⁶⁹

Дочка,
точь-в-точь
в меня, видно -
семнадцать с половиной годочков (IV, 160).

The case of parallel twins (children of the same sex) leads us to the motif of narcissistic love which both Maiakovskii and Limonov mercilessly exploited (see, e.g., the titles of Limonov's poem 'Sebe samomu' (*Sintaksis*, 15, 1986, pp.4-5) and Maiakovskii's poem 'Sebe, liubimomu, posviashchaet eti stroki avtor' (I, 126-27)).⁴⁷⁰

One of the most important functions of the divine twins was the role of cultural heroes and legislators. As his satirical verses testify, Maiakovskii did not flinch from considering a hypothetical stepping into the shoes of senior Soviet officials:

Эх!
Поставь меня
часок

⁴⁶⁹*Pro eto* is packed with *Doppelgängers*. For the precise meaning of the image of the double in the poem see Everts-Grigat, 1975, pp.141-43.

⁴⁷⁰It is also worth mentioning the essay by Smirnov, 1983, and the following lines by Maiakovskii:

Кто целовал меня -
скажет,
есть ли
слаще слюны моей сока (I, 248),

as well as Limonov's poem dedicated to 'E.L.', that is, 'E[duardu] L[imonovu]' (see Kuz'minskii, Tsvetkov and Limonov, 1981, p.71). In his later work Igor' P. Smirnov briefly examines the whole gallery of Limonov's doubles in *Molodoi negodiai* (these doubles, Smirnov maintains, owe their existence to Limonov's narcissistic inclinations; see Smirnov, 1994, pp.340-41).

на место Рыкова,

я б

к весне

декрет железный выковал (VII, 169).

The authoritative tone of a militant lawmaker manifests itself in the poems 'Prikaz po armii iskusstva (II, 14-15) and 'Prikaz No.2 armii iskusstv' (II, 86-88). Stahlberger generalized: 'In [the] poetry of Maiakovskii [...] the "I" of the poet aspires to the position of a "culture-hero" of modern times, to establish a meaning for life for himself and others. [...] The myth may be religious, social or scientific and the corresponding "culture-hero" will be the one who can convince himself and others of the significance of his myth'.⁴⁷¹ As far as Limonov is concerned, his double says: 'If all of a sudden I have lofty dreams of establishing a new party, state or religion, I have to do it by 2001-2005 AD, gentlemen'.⁴⁷² Versatile and numerous legislative and political initiatives by Limonov the private person, as well as Limonov the leader of the National Bolshevik Party (including his and Aleksandr Dugin's 'Prikaz o sozdanii natsional-bol'shevistskogo fronta')⁴⁷³ have gained considerable publicity, although they do not look very realistic at the moment.⁴⁷⁴

Apart from civil laws and regulations, the cultural hero normally introduces the whole package of professional skills and methods of exploiting natural phenomena, resources and materials (soil, iron, fire, etc.), thereby vastly increasing the multiplicity of his probable *Doppelgängers*. (Sometimes the doubles could even be inanimate.) This helps us to

⁴⁷¹Stahlberger, 1964, pp.12-13.

⁴⁷²Limonov, 1993a, pp.458-59.

⁴⁷³Some of these initiatives were called 'orders à la Maiakovskii' (Likhachev and Pribylovskii, 1998).

⁴⁷⁴See, for instance, Limonov, 1992e; Limonov, 1994d, pp.160-61; Limonov, Barkashov, Letov, Dugin, Bakhtiarov and Morozov, 1994; Limonov, 1994k; Deinego, 1994; Amelina, 1994; Radikaly, 1994.

understand why the personality of Maiakovskii's lyrical hero splinters alarmingly, almost at the very edge of sanity:

Я рабочий -
Этот май мой! [...]
Я крестьянин [...]
Я солдат [...]
Я железо [...]
Я земля [...] (IV, 30-31).

Limonov echoes:

Жизнь меня делала не только
но и делала меня кочегаром
я и грузчиком был на плечах
Вот и с мясниками побывал в друзьях.⁴⁷⁵

The picture of twins in their cultural-heroic function, as represented in Maiakovskii's and Limonov's writings, would not be complete if we omitted to discuss its religious aspect in favour of vocational and legal ones (or scientific and social, as Stahlberger puts it). Such an approach might provoke a reproach, because both writers could be justly blamed for theomachism, if not blasphemy. Maiakovskii's lyrical hero expresses his disenchantment with God:

Я думал - ты всеильный божище,
а ты недоучка, крохотный божик (I, 195).

In his later works Maiakovskii often found himself involved in anti-religious agitation of the most undemanding character (see his poems 'Nashe voskresen'e', 'Ni znakhar', ni bog, ni angely boga - krest'ianstvu ne podmoga', 'Tovarishchi krest'iane, vdumaites' raz khot' - zachem krest'ianinu spravliat' paskhu?' (V, 28-30, 193-95, 212-14).⁴⁷⁶ As far as

⁴⁷⁵Limonov, 1979, p.22.

⁴⁷⁶For more on the anti-religious works of Maiakovskii see Ruzhina, 1967.

Limonov is concerned, he says in an interview: 'I detest Jesus Christ. He is a victim, and I don't like victims'.⁴⁷⁷ His poetry proclaims that only students and the intelligentsia believe in (the non-existent) God.⁴⁷⁸

On the other hand, the situation is much more complicated than it seems at first glance. It is relatively easy to come across an equals sign being placed between Maiakovskii's and Limonov's fictional selves and the figure of Jesus Christ:

Слушайте!

Новая проповедь нагорная (II, 211),

exclaims Maiakovskii's lyrical hero. Limonov's *alter ego* narrates:

Мне приходилось работать Христом
И не с одной Магдалиной притом [...]
Целая очередь бледных блудниц
Хуже чем в худшей из худших больниц
Мимо прошли. Я работал Христом
Жил этим тяжким трудом.⁴⁷⁹

In conversation Maiakovskii and Limonov admitted that their inner motivations were religiously informed. Veronika Polonskaia recalled that not long before the suicide an exclamation broke from Maiakovskii: 'Oh God!'. She said to him: 'It is unbelievable! The world turned upside down! Maiakovskii appeals to God!! Are you a believer?!' He answered: 'Oh, I myself can't understand now what I believe in!..'.⁴⁸⁰ In one of his recent interviews Limonov assures us

⁴⁷⁷Limonov, 1994a, p.11.

⁴⁷⁸See Limonov, 1986a, p.5.

⁴⁷⁹Limonov, 1982a, p.111. Cf. an excerpt from Limonov's documentary prose: 'I might never have returned [from the war in Abkhazia], for I came under heavy fire, but God decided otherwise' (Limonov, 1994d, p.147).

⁴⁸⁰Polonskaia, 1983, p.89.

that he is religious and even had a wedding in church in 1973 (at that time in Soviet Russia this was quite dangerous) and continues with the following statement: 'I am not a sanctimonious person, I think that God is inside us. [...] I reckon one should converse with Him in private'.⁴⁸¹

Literary critics have already pointed out that the atmosphere of condensed religiosity is displayed in many of Maiakovskii's and Limonov's works, together with contradictory irreligious pronouncements. Stahlberger affirms: 'Whether Maiakovskii, with his avowed atheism, could seriously believe in [the] existence of a God or not, is not the question. The poetry of Maiakovskii assumes a God'.⁴⁸² Siniavin noticed in *Eto ia - Edichka* the 'resurrection [...] of the more than thousand-year-old versions of the perverted "candid repentance" [that is, confession in front of the whole Christian congregation]'.⁴⁸³ The root of the (anti)religious ambivalence of Maiakovskii and Limonov is once again to be found in the logic of the twin cult. As the delivery of the twins was almost invariably accompanied by their deification, they were regarded as divine creatures (the piety of the writers follows from this), and at the same time they challenged the existing pantheon (the theomachist pathos of Maiakovskii and Limonov derives from this).

The fictional doubles of the poets carry the light of the new knowledge elsewhere, employing various methods of spreading their doctrine. Thus, the press was expected to make an essential contribution to Maiakovskii's and Limonov's missions of enlightenment. At one time Maiakovskii, together with the literary group LEF, advanced the slogan, 'The newspaper is the only literature'. He published many of his poems in newspapers, maintaining:

В газеты!

⁴⁸¹Limonov, 1994j, p.5.

⁴⁸²Stahlberger, 1964, p.94.

⁴⁸³Siniavin, 1982, p.258.

Не потому, что книга плоха,
мне любо
с газетой бодрствовать! (IX, 112).

Limonov has asserted more than once that his true vocation is journalism (he even started his own Russian newspaper *Limonka: Gazeta priamogo deistviia* in December 1994),⁴⁸⁴ and his 'favourite literary genres are appeals and political leaflets'.⁴⁸⁵

Maiakovskii and Limonov, as well as their *Doppelgängers*, also need to travel a great deal in order to carry out their propaganda mission, for no journalistic article, however intelligently and belligerently written, could replace the impact of personal contacts between cultural heroes and their thereby ennobled flock. Maiakovskii's legendary 'business trips' across Russia, Europe and America, where he functioned as a spokesman for Futurism and Communism, are something that Limonov's record of public readings and meetings, although quite impressive in itself, will probably never match, especially given that the luxury of television appearances was unknown to Maiakovskii. (Perhaps this is why Limonov is sometimes prone to ascribe to his double a fictitious *curriculum vitae* according to which 'somebody like Limonov' not only visited Paris, New York and Rome, but also Arabia, Chile and Beirut, as in the poem 'Kto-to vrode Limonova').⁴⁸⁶ Both writers try to tell their Western audiences about their Russian experiences as well as to inform the Russians about life in the West, and they feel comfortable in their role as cultural mediators (or malevolent libellers - for those who have grounds to suspect that their accounts of Russia and/or the West are biased).

⁴⁸⁴For reviews see Coudenhove, 1994; Prikhodin, 1995; Gokhman, 1995a; Politkovskaia, 1995.

⁴⁸⁵Mirchev, 1989, p.102. See also Limonov, 1992f.

⁴⁸⁶See Kuz'minskii, Tsvetkov and Limonov, 1981, p.55.

The duality of the twins allows them to travel and to be the protectors of the travellers at the same time. In particular, the divine twins are regarded as saviours at sea. The awareness of this function explains Maiakovskii's inadequate statement 'ia matros' (IV, 31) and an unusual comparison of Limonov's autobiographical character Indiana to 'a sailor deprived of the ocean's good graces'.⁴⁸⁷

3.8. THE DARK SIDE OF THE PERSONALITY SPLIT.

It is the duality again that affects the feelings of a 'rolling stone' hero who enjoys his status as a wanderer and impersonator of others nearly as much as he hates it, having no place and face of his own (cf. Maiakovskii's verses:

Я - поэт,
я разницу стёр
между лицами своих и чужих (I, 159)).⁴⁸⁸

This brings us to the writers' increased interest in the question of citizenship, which secures for the individual a place to which he or she is attached with formal but stable bonds, and which he or she longs for (including the ID which reinstates the authors' true identity, so easily dissolved in their *Doppelgängers*). It would not be easy to name even a few other Russian writers who share, along with Maiakovskii and Limonov, such a strong concern with the purely bureaucratic aspects of their nationality. Maiakovskii's poetic variation of the theme, 'Stikhi o sovetskom pasporte' (X, 68-71), nicely corresponds to its wording in prose: 'The red passport of the RSFSR is a noteworthy object with which you can live [in Paris] for about two weeks and remain the centre of attraction, having no other merits but only showing this red document all the time' (IV, 218; see also *ibid.*, pp.206-08,

⁴⁸⁷Limonov, 1992b, p.12 and following.

⁴⁸⁸Irina Podgaetskaia registers the 'indissoluble unity of "I" and "we" in the disposition of [Maiakovskii's] lyrical hero' (Podgaetskaia, 1978, p.186).

221). Limonov, who was an *apatride* for thirteen years and has been compensated for this now with *dual* citizenship (French and Russian), devotes the most passionate pages of his documentary, as well as fictionalized, works to the émigré Mr Savenko's visa problems in Rome and Vienna, the abuse of power which the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service resorted to when issuing Mr Savenko a 'green card' and reentry permit, and the tricks which Mr Savenko himself was forced to fall back on while seeking from the French authorities an exceptional leave to remain in France.⁴⁸⁹

3.8.1. The *Doppelgänger* and the quest for love.

Another thing which assists in restoring the writer's (or his imaginary double's) self, shattered into smithereens, is love. Maiakovskii said to his close friends at the end of the 1920s: 'Only a good big love can still save me'.⁴⁹⁰ It has been noted about Limonov's *Eto ia - Edichka* that 'the pivot of the novel is LOVE. It is love that saves the hero Edichka from final decay, and it is love that saves the novel for literature'.⁴⁹¹ The same observation appears to be equally applicable with regard to other works by Limonov. The pubescent love of Edi-bebi and Svetka became the main subject for the book *Podrostok Savenko*. The love story of the mature writer Limonov and the young singer Natasha is placed at the centre of the novel *Ukroshchenie tigra v Parizhe*. In the adventure story *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia* the principal character Indiana comes back to the country of his youth to look for his lover lost somewhere in the Soviet Union. The plot of the last piece can serve as a metaphor for the leitmotiv running throughout

⁴⁸⁹See Limonov, 1990, pp.54-55; Limonov, 1990a, pp.416-17; Limonov, 1991a, pp.59-66.

⁴⁹⁰Iakobson, 1956, p.184.

⁴⁹¹Siniavin, 1982, p.257.

Limonov's (and Maiakovskii's) creative activity. This leitmotiv may be called 'the quest for love'.⁴⁹²

In his letter to Lilia Brik dated 1-27 February, 1923, Maiakovskii wrote:

Love is life, love is the main thing. My poetry, my actions, everything else stems from it. Love is the heart of everything. If it stops working, all the rest withers, becomes superfluous, unnecessary. But if the heart is working, its influence cannot but be apparent in all the rest.⁴⁹³

Maiakovskii's poetic practice does not contradict the declaration cited above. The title of his programmatic essay 'Kak delat' stikhi' itself contains a reference to the process of making love, supported by the reference to the 'sexual shudder and dying down', i.e. orgasm (XII, 82), which shows that for Maiakovskii to write and to chase women was nearly the same thing (the comparison between the poet and the

⁴⁹²In both cases the theme of love is closely linked with religious feelings, e.g.:

Вот я богохулил.
Орал, что бога нет,
а бог такую из лекловых глубин,
что перед ней гора заволнуется и дрогнет,
вывел и велел:
люби! (I, 200).

See also Limonov's poem 'Za raskrytoi Gospodom stranitsej' in Shchapova De Carli, 1984, no pagination (printed in 'the Appendix'):

Надо было Господу молиться
За сегодня, завтра и вчера
Надо было лоб разбить колени
Надо было к дьяволу идти
Чтобы кожу на моей Елене
Гладить трогать видеть и блюсти

⁴⁹³Mayakovsky, 1986, p.127.

possessed by a hypertrophic passion because he is bound to share it with his double(s), each time dividing the love he receives by two (or more). As a result, neither he nor his *Doppelgänger* can ever get enough. Lilia Brik maintained that

Maiakovskii felt lonely not because he was not loved and recognized or did not have friends. He was published and read and listened to in such a way that the venues [for his public readings] were mobbed. One could not count those who loved him and were devoted to him. However, all that was a drop in the ocean for the man who had an 'insatiable thief in his soul'. He needed those who did not read [his works] to start reading, those who did not come [to his public appearances] - to start coming, those who he thought were not in love with him - to fall in love.⁴⁹⁴

If Lavut's reminiscences are anything to go by, Maiakovskii was only too aware of the fact that his worst rival was his own double. The poet answers a question during one of his meetings with his readers: 'Why do you speak about yourself so often?' - 'I speak for myself. For example, I cannot say to the girl I am in love with: "We love you". It is to my disadvantage. In the end, she may ask: "How many of you?"'⁴⁹⁵ The fact that a plural personal pronoun was used is especially significant, bearing in mind Maiakovskii's verses in the poem *Khorosho!*:

понятной
 стала
 мне
 теплота
 любовью,
 дружб
 и семей (VIII, 291).

⁴⁹⁴Brik, 1993, pp.133-34.

⁴⁹⁵Lavut, 1969, p.185.

It is worth noting that the words 'love', 'friendship' and 'family' in the quoted passage are also put in the plural. Maiakovskii's biography gives us a clue as to what this is all about. Maiakovskii's *Doppelgänger* drove him into such a state that the poet, in his demanding search for an ever increasing abundance of love and care, was subconsciously forced to join already existing family units, such as Osip and Lilia Brik (Maiakovskii owed these two Jews a great deal in his poetic career; the love alliance between Eduard and Anna Moiseevna, a Jewish woman who polishes the rough diamond of the young *ingénue's* talent, is described in Limonov's novel *Molodoi negodiai*), the Mexican artist Diego Rivera and his wife; Elly Jones (the American mother of Maiakovskii's child) and her husband, the actors' family of Ianshin and Polonskaia, etc. Although Olga Matich assures us that Maiakovskii's affair with, say, Lilia Brik could not have been a *ménage à trois*,⁴⁹⁶ it does not really matter, since the act of becoming the third part of an intimate union, initially meant for a couple, in itself epitomizes the power of loving energy which the twin cult accumulates.

It was probably the same power that inspired Limonov to write a short story 'Velikaia mat' liubvi' (The Great Mother of Love) where, briefly touching on the motif of the *Doppelgänger* (the narrator says: 'I discussed, with my personality splintered, the problem of "those girls", that is, the prostitutes. [...] I found myself (or us, I used to have a split personality before, it was not my first experience) sitting at the fragile door of the studio...'),⁴⁹⁷ the author shifts to the story of a Parisian *ménage à quatre* involving the lonely Russian writer Limonov, the Yugoslav writer Brancic, his Latin American wife Isabel and the couple's eight-year-old daughter (the last does not participate in the group sex orgies of the adults, to the great disappointment of herself - and perhaps the reader). The story, which could have been repulsive, becomes, in fact, a kind of symbolic song of praise

⁴⁹⁶See Matich, 1991, pp.82, 83-84.

⁴⁹⁷Limonov, 1993b, pp.146-47.

to the all-consuming one-hundred-percent-pure emotion of love and devotion. Happiness and paradise in 'Velikaia mat' liubvi' do not last long, though. The narrator condemns 'envy, arrogance and *egoism*'⁴⁹⁸ (italics are mine. - A.R.) for the breakup of the relationship, thus coming back to square one of the unresolved problem of the writer's solitary 'I'.

3.8.2. The *Doppelgänger* and mortal danger.

What happens when the individual's demands for love and compassion fail to be met? A good example of this is given in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*⁴⁹⁹ in the episode where the French family which the loathsome monster wanted to befriend rejected him. The monster speaks for himself: 'All, save I, were at rest or in enjoyment: I, like the arch-fiend, bore a hell within me; and, finding myself unsympathized with, wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around me, and then to have sat down and enjoy the ruin'.⁵⁰⁰ In other words, the victim of unrequited love seeks consolation in revolution, which represents the highest and final stage of the process of the quest for love.⁵⁰¹

According to Mariia Burliuk, 'Young Maiakovskii loved people

⁴⁹⁸Limonov, 1993b, p.170.

⁴⁹⁹Since the image of the self-educated Frankenstein monster is loaded with the concept of denying culture and civilization (see Freeborn, 1994), it is very much akin to the nihilistic standpoint exhibited from time to time in the writings of Maiakovskii (Я над всем, что сделано, // ставлю 'nihil' (I, 181)) and Limonov (Горите, проклятые книжищи!) ('Knizhishchi', in Limonov, 1979, p.19).

⁵⁰⁰Shelley, 1977, p.143.

⁵⁰¹'The world is without love and must be brought under the rule of love',- that is how Stahlberger formulates one of Maiakovskii's leading imperatives (Stahlberger, 1964, p.91). See also Denisova, 1963 (this book is devoted to the innovations in Maiakovskii's post-revolutionary poetry).

more than they loved him'.⁵⁰² Maybe that is why he started to take part in revolutionary activity and ended up in the Butyraskaia prison, where he served time from August 1909 to January 1910. Later the poet expressed the main emotional result of his imprisonment in words of love:

Меня вот
любить
учили
в Бутырках (IV, 87).

The same complex of revolution intertwined with love is one of the basic characteristic features of Limonov's artistic world, as becomes apparent from the following passage:

I kiss the sweaty boyish fair curls of my Russian
Revolution [...] I kiss her scratched white Russian hands,
I cry and I say: 'White you my white! Red you my red!
My merry and beautiful - forgive me! [...] Speaking
Russian, with her badly scratched hands on the rifle belt
- this is Revolution, my love!⁵⁰³

It is curious that Igor Efimov, discussing Limonov's revolutionary sympathies, directly linked them to the image of the double: 'The Soviets [...] are a political manifestation of a certain state of soul. The state of soul which Limonov describes when *he looks at the mirror* (italics are mine. - A.R.). One can see only one type of stars from such an underground - the stars of the Kremlin'.⁵⁰⁴ Similarly, Lev Trotskii pointed to the fact that Maiakovskii was very subjective in his interpretation of the revolutionary theme, which epitomized for the poet some reverberations of his own 'I' (see our comparison of Maiakovskii's viewpoint to the

⁵⁰²Burliuk, 1993, p.36.

⁵⁰³Limonov, 1992c, p.64. It is interesting that Maiakovskii uses the same possessive pronoun for the October revolution in his autobiography: 'My revolution' (I, 25).

⁵⁰⁴Efimov, 1978, p.121.

mythic beliefs of the ancient Greeks): 'Maiakovskii was the Maiakomorphist who inhabited the squares, streets and fields of revolution with his own Self like the Greek anthropomorphists who naively equalled themselves to the forces of nature'.⁵⁰⁵ Another mythological link between revolution and the concept of the double is represented by the image of the double-faced god Janus Pater, or Janus Geminus. According to legend, he committed the revolutionary act of transforming chaos into cosmos and became the symbol of the Universe and the God of time (let us recall that it is time itself against which the uprising of Maiakovskii and Limonov is directed, as immortality is what they are preoccupied with).

The duplicity of Janus Geminus reveals yet another aspect of the twin cult so well preserved in Maiakovskii's and Limonov's works - namely, the duality of their fictional counterpart. The scholarly explanation of the double-sidedness of the twin mythology rests on the phenomenon of asymmetry which is supposedly concealed in any given pair of symmetrical objects, opposed to each other.⁵⁰⁶ If the hypothesis of Miliavskii, Duganov and Radzishevskii concerning Maiakovskii's probable authorship of some twenty articles on cinema published in the *Kine-zhurnal* in 1913-15 and signed by various pen-names is correct,⁵⁰⁷ the pseudonym 'Vladimirov' allowed Maiakovskii to express a view of the art of cinema quite opposite to what he was saying in the same magazine in the articles published under Maiakovskii's own name.⁵⁰⁸ As for Limonov, his dual attitude to the Russian Revolution and Civil War is very characteristic:

⁵⁰⁵Trotsky, 1991, p.119.

⁵⁰⁶See Ivanov, 1968.

⁵⁰⁷See [Miliavskii, Duganov and Radzishevskii], 1970; on the weakness of some arguments in support of the hypothesis see Eventov, 1971; Brown, 1973, p.319.

⁵⁰⁸See [Miliavskii, Duganov and Radzishevskii], 1970, pp.150-53.

Sometime in the past, in the spring, Limonov was crossing the Bay of Biscay on the cargo boat 'Baron Ungern' and found the Russian White Guard's ammunition in the hold. 'Defeat them!', said Limonov and surreptitiously threw the ammunition overboard during the night. That is how Lenin and the revolution gained victory over the White Guards and interventionists. But, you know, Limonov could have supported the opposite side.⁵⁰⁹

The ability to experience diametrically opposed feelings towards the same object can be viewed as a heritage of the duality of the twin cult where one of the twins could personify good and the other - evil (e.g., Ahura Mazda and Ahriman in Zoroastrianism). Thus, the real Limonov admitted that in the 1960s he felt simultaneously love and hatred for the Moscow underground poet Leonid Gubanov.⁵¹⁰ The dissimilarity between the two sides of the one Self (or between the doubles, if you prefer) is often underestimated to the advantage of their likeness. E.J. Brown stated about Maiakovskii: 'when his "lyrical I" speaks of a razor and a throat we may be certain that the razor and the throat are his, and that if blood flows in the poem, it will be real, and his own'.⁵¹¹ As has already been mentioned in Chapter 1, Dmitrii Lekukh points to the 'degradation of the writer Eduard Limonov to the level of his own fictional hero Edichka'.⁵¹² This does not clash with Maiakovskii's credo, to which Limonov seems to have subscribed: 'Even the poet's outfit, even his domestic conversation with his wife should be [...] determined by all his poetic production' (XII, 117). On the other hand, the non-merger of the doubles is as important for an understanding of the twin phenomenon as a whole, with its various ramifications, as is their inseparability. Jakobson pointed out: 'If one decided to put the mythology of

⁵⁰⁹Limonov, 1977a, p.58.

⁵¹⁰See Limonov, 1994d, p.24.

⁵¹¹Brown, 1973, p.7.

⁵¹²Lekukh, 1993, p.155.

Maiakovskii into the language of speculative philosophy, the exact correlation [...] would be the antinomy of the "I" and the "non-I".⁵¹³ Maiakovskii himself perfectly well realized this, as becomes obvious from the phrase 'Ia - ne ia' (IV, 169) (cf. Limonov's 'Eto ia ili ne ia? Zhizn' idet moia?' in his poem 'Veter. Belye tsvety. Chuvstvo toshnoty').⁵¹⁴ It is not for nothing that Lunacharskii emphasized the differences between Maiakovskii and his *Doppelgänger*:

[Maiakovskii's double] was made of the Philistinism which was left in Maiakovskii's personality. Maiakovskii's Philistinism was not repulsive, though. [...] It consisted of a great pity for his associates and a strong thirst for love, tenderness and a very intimate compassion. [...] In his poetry Maiakovskii was afraid of this very gentle, intimate and incredibly, painfully sensitive double. [...] He tried to get rid of this mildness in his poetry, but sometimes he failed, and then his double started to sing along with him.⁵¹⁵

If it was not for the fear of the double, who began to threaten his own creator by undermining the very foundations of his existence, Maiakovskii would not have written the following verses permeated with the horror of visualising his own *Doppelgänger* (all the subsequent italics are mine):

В постели она.
 Она лежит.
 Он.
 На столе телефон [...]
Страшно то,
 что «он» - это я
 и то, что «она» -
 моя (IV, 140);

⁵¹³Iakobson and Sviatopolk-Mirskii, 1975, p.14.

⁵¹⁴Kuz'minskii, Tsvetkov and Limonov, 1981, p.49.

⁵¹⁵Lunacharskii, 1957, pp.403, 405.

До чего ж
на меня похож!
Ужас (IV, 156);

Но самое страшное:
 по росту,
 по коже
одеждой,
 сама походка моя! -
в одном
 узнал -
 близнецами похожи -
себя самого -
 сам
 я (IV, 161).

In the short story 'Dvoinik' the writer Limonov also cannot avoid some kind of a shock when he meets his double: 'I felt a sudden fever and started to wipe the cold sweat off my forehead continually'.⁵¹⁶ It is noteworthy that Limonov's double is often pictured as a character loaded with 'negative' features, e.g., in the poems 'Zhivet on u teplogo moria' and 'Moi otritsatel'nyi geroi':

Злодей - он имеет рай [...]

Он энергичный - а солнце устало
Играть на его злом лице;⁵¹⁷

and:

Мой отрицательный герой
Всегда находится со мной

Я пиво пью - он пиво пьет
В моей квартире он живет

⁵¹⁶Limonov, 1985a, p.107.

⁵¹⁷Kuz'minskii, Tsvetkov and Limonov, 1981, p.69.

С моими девочками спит
Мой темный член с него висит.⁵¹⁸

The awareness of the potential danger of having a double is expressed in Limonov's work 'The Death of [a] Teenage Idol' partly based, it seems, on the story of the pop group 'Ramones',⁵¹⁹ the members of which, Limonov claims, were once good friends of his. The career and reputation of Douglas, the bass guitarist of the successful punk group named 'Killers', are endangered by the deeds of his double, who appears in fashionable venues dressed and having his hair done as Douglas and passes himself off as the musician. Even some members of the group are unable to spot the difference. Out of curiosity, Douglas's girlfriend finds the double, makes love with him and, since the double is younger and more likeable, she leaves Douglas for his counterpart. Douglas electrocutes himself by his guitar in the bathroom, and it is not clear whether it was suicide or an accident.⁵²⁰

The suicide (or provoked murder)⁵²¹ becomes an idiosyncratic remedy from the unwanted 'boomerang' effects

⁵¹⁸Kuz'minskii, Tsvetkov and Limonov, 1981, p.43.

⁵¹⁹For more details see Miles, 1981.

⁵²⁰See Limonov, 1993b, pp.283-98. The theme of the doubles of the celebrities is also touched on in passing in Limonov's short story 'Ekstsessy' (see Limonov, 1992, p.398).

⁵²¹It is obvious from Maiakovskii's and Limonov's works and biographies that they (or at least their *Doppelgängers*) contemplated and even rehearsed both the above-mentioned possibilities of losing their lives. Lilia Brik recalled that Maiakovskii tried to commit suicide several times before he finally succeeded; in Maiakovskii's screenplay 'Ne dlia deneg rodivshiisia' his *alter ego* Ivan Nov 'simulates suicide: he puts the skeleton wrapped in paper into the bed and sets it on fire' (XI, 481). Maiakovskii's symbolic desire deliberately to stand in the line of gun-fire (tantamount to suicide) is expressed in the following words:

со всех винтовок,

со всех батарей [...]

of the double life. The twin cult has always been surrounded by a deadly atmosphere because, considered as an anomaly, the twins could not only be deified by the tribe, but also killed by it (this may also explain the old superstition: meeting your double means that you are about to die). Both Maiakovskii and Limonov load the motif of the twins' violent death with the notion of the restoration of self-identity, which was previously lost in the multiplicity of the *Doppelgänger*-ish imagery. As Abramian puts it, 'the restoration of the primal division into two becomes feasible only at critical moments'.⁵²² It is very characteristic that Maiakovskii's suicide was interpreted by his contemporaries in terms of the animosity between Maiakovskii's self and 'the other' (the *Doppelgänger*, in our terminology) and the subsequent 'resurrection' of the integrity of Maiakovskii's 'I'. Mikhail Kol'tsov commented: 'Maiakovskii was busy up to his ears with private, group and general literary and political issues. It

в упор -

за зарядом заряд (IV, 176);

cf. also:

встретить я хочу

мой смертный час

Так,

как встретил смерть

товарищ Нетте (VII, 164).

As for Limonov, he proclaims that absolute freedom is possible only 'on the brink of suicide' (Limonov, 1994i, p.20); he is an émigré, and 'emigration is a rehearsal for your own death, something like a *petite mort*' (A.Genis, 'Amerikanskaia azbuka', quoted from Pann, 1995; Limonov completely solidarizes himself with this view in his short story 'Mother's Day', see Limonov, 1995b, p.157); one of Limonov's doubles, Savenko the adolescent, cuts his veins; another double, Edward the housekeeper, says, referring perhaps to the typical pose of Maiakovskii: 'I am sure that I can stand against the brick wall before a firing squad, smiling, my hands in my pockets, a cigar in my lips' (Limonov, 1993a, p.556; I have already cited these lines as part of a longer quotation in Chapter 1).

⁵²²Abramian, 1977, p.76.

was somebody else, temporarily in possession of the weakened psyche of the poet, public figure and revolutionary, who fired the shot'.⁵²³ Marina Tsvetaeva said: 'Maiakovskii killed himself as an enemy'.⁵²⁴ Lunacharskii stated: 'Regardless of the fact that Maiakovskii sympathized with his double and thought from time to time: 'Maybe this double is me myself', he trod on his double's throat. And Maiakovskii's double killed him for that'.⁵²⁵ On the other hand Arkadii Belinkov pointed out that the best of Maiakovskii eclipsed his worst part after his death: 'A shot in one's chest can be an excuse for many things, and the man who shot himself in the chest immediately ceased to be the author of the poem "Stikh ne pro drian', a pro drian'tso" and became the author of *Oblako v shtanakh* again'.⁵²⁶ In his stylistic analysis of Maiakovskii's suicide note⁵²⁷ Sergei Eizenshtein observed that there the temporal bifurcation (normally arising in the case of twins', as long as two similar human beings are doomed to lead more or less different lives) had been overcome: 'I think that the last thing written by Maiakovskii gives us one of the most tragic and majestic examples of the internal synchronism achieved through the seemingly non-related image and subject'.⁵²⁸

3.8.3. The *Doppelgänger* and immortality.

Thus the temporal aspect (the problem of earning victory over time)⁵²⁹ becomes incorporated in the theme of suicide and/or provoked death, together with the task of recovering

⁵²³Quoted from Iakobson and Sviatopolk-Mirskii, 1975, p.29.

⁵²⁴Tsvetaeva, 1979, p.23.

⁵²⁵Lunacharskii, 1957, p.406.

⁵²⁶Belinkov, 1976, p.584.

⁵²⁷Even the title of Maiakovskii's autobiography, 'Ia sam', could be read as a suicide note.

⁵²⁸ Quoted from Chertok, 1983, p.111.

⁵²⁹Cf. Limonov's line 'Vremeni bol'she net' in Limonov, 1978, p.26.

one's damaged identity. The moment of the 'time trial' is also closely linked to the motifs of love,⁵³⁰ revolution⁵³¹ and immortality. Lilia Brik characterized Maiakovskii's usual behaviour in this way: 'If somebody is late for a game of cards, for Maiakovskii it means that nobody needs him. If a girl Maiakovskii knows does not phone him when he waits [for her call], it means that nobody loves him. And if so, it is meaningless to live'.⁵³² Some of Maiakovskii's pre-suicidal statements show that the poet considered death as a means for attracting additional love from his contemporaries and securing the awe of future generations:⁵³³ 'Only after my death will you say what a remarkable poet has passed away'

⁵³⁰Love, suicide and the twin myth are combined in the famous poem 'Bliznetsy' (1852) by Fedor Tiutchev:

И кто в избытке ощущений,
 Когда кипит и стынет кровь,
 Не ведал ваших искушений -
 Самоубийство и любовь!

⁵³¹'There are only two unique events that can overcome this flow of time, the revolutionary leap into the Future in the social-historical sphere, and suicide in the individual-existence sphere' (Stahlberger, 1964, p.131).

⁵³²Brik, 1993, p.171. Cf. also a quotation from the play 'Klop': '- You shot yourself? [...] Because of carelessness? - No... Because of love' (XI, 251). Some of his contemporaries, however, believed that Maiakovskii shot himself for political reasons. Thus, the historian Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev in a private conversation suggested to me that Maiakovskii committed suicide because he had praised Trotskii in his poetry and was afraid of Stalin's revenge after Trotskii fell out of favour. As Dem'ian Bednyi's joke demonstrates, even the atmosphere of Stalinist terror could be seen in terms of the *Doppelgänger* complex: 'A scared man learned that every other person in the Soviet Union is an OGPU agent. Once, when drunk, he looked at a mirror and saw his own reflection. His hair turned grey from horror and he exclaimed: "O God, I'm dead! One of us is a spy!"' (Iordanskaia, 1994, p.225).

⁵³³Jakobson notes that Maiakovskii 'looks at his last lines with the eyes of the reader from the day after tomorrow' (Iakobson and Sviatopolk-Mirskii, 1975, p.10).

(XII, 398); 'when I am dead, you will read my poems and shed tears of emotion'.⁵³⁴ Limonov echoes:

Хорошо умереть молодым
Чтобы женщины плакать бы стали;⁵³⁵

В этой жизни только и осталось
Жест красивый. Рана на груди
Расползающейся крови алость
И смешная слава впереди.⁵³⁶

The act of suicide, which is termed 'premeditated' by Jakobson, signified for Maiakovskii the triumph over time and an access to the pantheon of immortal gods. Otsup tends to assess Maiakovskii's suicide in religious terms: 'Does the bullet which went through his heart mean that he finally understood?.. One cannot hide oneself from God'.⁵³⁷ That is why the image of Christ is crucial for the understanding of Maiakovskii's suicide: like Christ, the poet sacrifices himself (to his *Doppelgänger* and for his own sins) and ultimately gains immortality. The figure of Christ conveniently serves as a commonly perceived symbol of eternal life and a cover for the features of the 'twin religion', rather than a sign of Maiakovskii's Christian faith.

To conclude our extensive comparison, the nature of the impact of the properties of the twin cult on Maiakovskii's and Limonov's creative activity makes it relatively easy to assume that the final destination of the latter author may not seriously differ from that of the former. Since Limonov has followed so many of Maiakovskii's recommendations already, from choosing scandal as a crucial point for his literary

⁵³⁴Katanian, 1985, p.497.

⁵³⁵E.Limonov, 'Eti pary likuiushchikh dnei!', in Shchapova De Carli, 1984, no pagination (printed in 'the Appendix').

⁵³⁶E.Limonov, 'Lenochka! Ved' byli Vy poet', in Shchapova De Carli, 1984, no pagination (printed in 'the Appendix').

⁵³⁷Otsup, 1961, p.176.

career⁵³⁸ to sticking a portrait of Feliks Dzerzhinskii, the Head of Lenin's secret police, on the wall of his studio,⁵³⁹ one can only wonder how long Eduard Veniaminovich, who seems to be more emotionally stable than his role model,⁵⁴⁰ will

⁵³⁸Maiakovskii used to say that literary scandal 'is not an offensive thing, but very estimable' (XII, 111).

⁵³⁹Cf.:

Юноше,
 обдумывающему
 жизнь,
 решающему -
 сделать бы жизнь с кого,
 скажу,
 не задумываясь -
 «Делай ее
 с товарища
 Дзержинского». (VIII, 319)

⁵⁴⁰Among other common features, two appear to be of particular interest: the writers' penchant for marches (see IV, 229; Limonov, 1994a, p.11; Limonov, 1994i, p.21) and for drawing. Maiakovskii's activity as a painter is well-known. Limonov informs the reader about the artistic connections and talents of his fictional double in Limonov, 1987, p.154; Limonov, 1994b, p.180; Limonov, 1994c. In May, 1981, the real Limonov, together with Nikolai Bokov, Iurii Lekht, Elizaveta Mnatsakanova, Vagrich Bakhchanian, Vladimir Kotliarov and others, took part in the art exhibition 'L'émigration russe: L'art en voyage' in the 'Galerie TRANS/FORM' in Paris, introducing his composition 'Performance à New York'. For a photograph certifying Limonov's participation in an artistic performance of the members of the movement 'Vivrisme' in February, 1983, see the almanac *Muleta A*, ed. Tolsty, Paris: Vivrisme, 1984, p.144; see also Limonov, 1980a. The reader can compare the artistic manner of Maiakovskii and Limonov on the basis of the two sketches appended at the end of this chapter (see figures 1 and 2). For other sketches by Limonov see, for instance, *Sem' dnei* [New York], 1984, no. 27 (p.33) and no.32 (pp.27-29).

manage to keep balancing on the edge before experiencing death and resurrection.⁵⁴¹

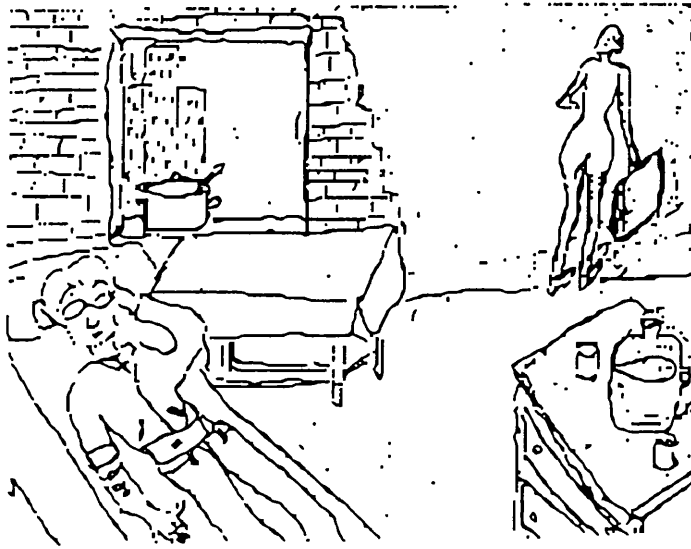


Fig.1. E.Limonov, "An illustration to the book *Eto ia - Edichka*", A-Ia: *Literaturnoe izdanie*, 1 (1985), p.104.

⁵⁴¹Another link in the endless chain of coincidences entangling Maiakovskii's and Limonov's personae is the 'doughnut' theme. Maiakovskii's mother recalled: 'Volodia loved doughnuts' (Reformatskaia, 1963, p.49). Limonov asserts that his grandmother used to address him as 'Edin'ka - charm, joy and doughnut (*ponchik*)!' (Limonov, 1977a, p.59).

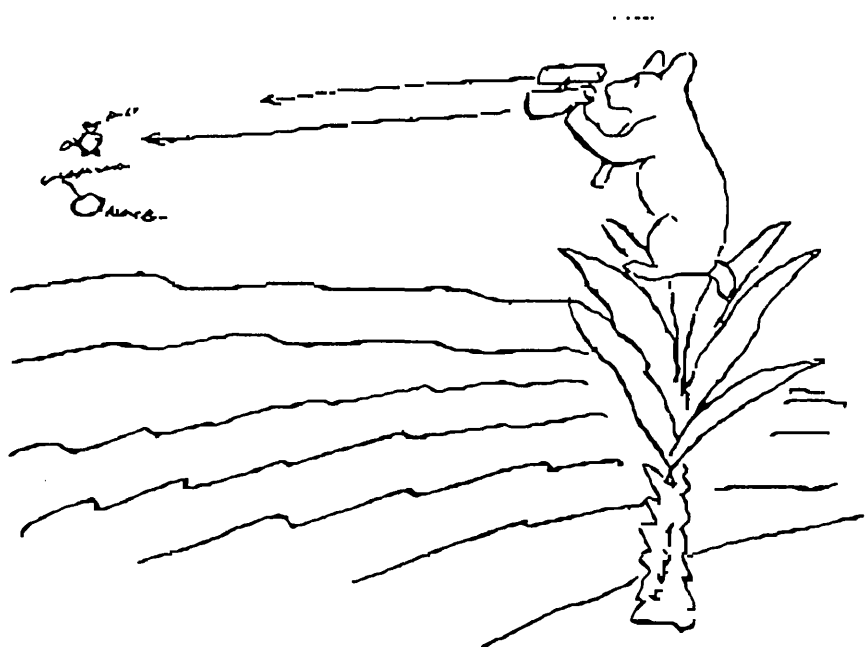


Fig.2. V.Maiakovskii, "A picture from a letter to L.Iu.Brik circa 15 July, 1925", *V.V.Maiakovskii i L.Iu.Brik: Perepiska 1915-1930*, ed. B.Jangfeldt (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiskell International, 1982), p.138.

Chapter 4

IA EBAL VAS VSEKH, EBANYE V ROT SUKI: Limonov and his critics

Let's talk about critics, about what we do,
and not have another boring academic
conference.

From Limonov's speech at an émigré
writers' conference in Vienna in 1987

4.1. LIMONOV AND HIS LITERARY CRITICS: MUTUAL DISTRUST.

Limonov's attitude to his numerous and often unrestrained critics was also partly shaped by Maiakovskii, who reportedly 'did not fear them and could defend himself if they were unfair to him'.⁵⁴² In one of his interviews Limonov responds to the question as to whether he is affected by the fury which usually accompanies the appearance of his publications: 'Absolutely not! I laugh at all these nonsenses and foul things which are told about me, I even enjoy them!'. Then the journalist asks how the writer has acquired such an immunity. Limonov explains:

[I] don't know. Perhaps all these attacks confirm my presence, my *strong* presence in this world. My existence is noticeable, if I cause such anger. The most dangerous thing for anyone is indifference. It is like a grave without an epitaph. This is what is horrendous for everyone.⁵⁴³

⁵⁴²Shamardina, 1993, p.33. See also Maiakovskii's poem 'Gimn kritiku' (I, 82-83).

⁵⁴³Limonov, 1994j, p.5.

Likewise, Limonov's autobiographical character, the writer in *Ukroshchenie tigr v Parizhe*, is sobered up by the shower of compliments, rather than becoming excited by it: 'Very often recently they have started to praise him. And this is suspicious. And it may be worth paying serious attention to this fact'.⁵⁴⁴

On a similar occasion the real Limonov behaves exactly like his hero when he says in a conversation with the editor-in-chief of the Canadian Russian-language magazine *Sovremennik* Aleksandr Gidoni: 'I read the essay by Karmazin [one of the very few positive reviews of *Eto ia - Edichka* which was published in *Sovremennik*, 1979, 42, pp.111-15], of course. It is not badly written, although its author 'overpoliticized' my book. However, I prefer to be sworn at'. (Gidoni comments: 'Haven't you had enough of that?')⁵⁴⁵

Limonov's feelings about his critics have become legendary, as the following anecdote by Sergei Dovlatov confirms:

It happened at a literary conference. Limonov and [the poet] Korzhavin took part in it, among others. At the end a discussion took place. Every discussant could speak for seven minutes. It was Korzhavin's turn. For seven minutes he was cursing Limonov for amoralism. At last the chairman said: - Your time is up. - I haven't finished yet. - But your time is up...

Limonov intervened: - Do I have a slot? - Seven minutes. - May I pass them on to Naum Korzhavin? - You have that right.

And Korzhavin continued to condemn Limonov for amoralism for another seven minutes. This time - at Limonov's own expense.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁴Limonov, 1994b, p.155.

⁵⁴⁵Gidoni, 1980, p.159.

⁵⁴⁶Volkova and Dovlatov, 1992, p.16.

However, this legend does not quite match the reality. Limonov is very well aware of the power of positive reviews. After the publication of the shortened version of *Eto ia - Edichka* in *Kovcheg*, he asks his then representative in Western Europe Bokov to arrange, if possible, for the novel to be reviewed in the Western press, especially in the London *Times*, which is regarded as one of the main literary authorities in the USA.⁵⁴⁷ In the 1989 afterword to the first metropolitan edition of *Eto ia - Edichka* he boasts that the foreign and Russian reviews of this book could cover the pavement of a fairly long Parisian street.⁵⁴⁸ It goes without saying that many of these, and subsequent, critiques were far from being very laudatory, and Limonov, in fact, was not too happy about this. In his early days he even tried to be careful with his words and attempted not to provoke people just for the sake of it, because so many of his critics (especially Russian émigrés) needed very little to see red. For example, when talking to Gidoni, Limonov coins a thoughtfully balanced phrase about Solzhenitsyn, as he fears that if he does not admit Solzhenitsyn's historical significance, 'they will start again: Limonov is this, Limonov is that'. (Gidoni remarks: 'Well, haven't you become accustomed to what they say about you?'. Limonov concludes bitterly: 'I have, indeed'.⁵⁴⁹)

Since then things for Limonov have been showing very little improvement. The American critique of his first novel was rather scathing.⁵⁵⁰ The British were not particularly

⁵⁴⁷See Limonov's letter to Bokov of 21 June, 1979 (Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection). The *Times Literary Supplement* did indeed review the English translation by S.L.Campbell of *Eto ia - Edichka*, published by Picador, but this happened only in 1984 (see Zinik, 1984).

⁵⁴⁸Limonov, 1993a, p.284.

⁵⁴⁹Gidoni, 1980, p.154.

⁵⁵⁰See, for example, Smith, 1981; Smith, 1981a; Bayley, 1984, pp.28-29; Leont'eva, 1992; Limonov, 1993a, p.284. One critic, however, views the reception of *Eto ia - Edichka* as 'mixed', with the 'most friendly'

appreciative either: on 8 March, 1984, *The Guardian* stated that 'the Russian émigré author of *It's Me, Eddie* and his picaresque howl register chiefly as noise.' The English translation of *Istoriia ego slugi* (published by Abacus under the name *His Butler's Story*) was praised, however, in the *Sunday Times* of 3 December, 1989, as 'a very funny send-up of the mega-rich in New York society'.⁵⁵¹

Limonov's relationship with the French critics was not much of a honeymoon either, although in general they were friendlier than their colleagues in other countries.⁵⁵² Thus, the French translation of *Podrostok Savenko* (published by Albin Michel under the title *Autoportrait d'un bandit dans*

judgements in the *Wall Street Journal* and *New Yorker* (see Campbell, 1984).

⁵⁵¹'The English [meaning 'British', presumably] critics [...] can be rather arrogant. Encouragingly, sort of, arrogant, this is their style', says Limonov (see Leont'eva, 1992).

⁵⁵²With the exception of Germany and the Scandinavian countries, which have proved to be fairly susceptible to Limonov's peculiar charm. The appearance of *Eto ia - Edichka* in *Kovcheg* was greeted by the German critic Helen von Ssachno, in whose opinion contemporary Russian literature had not witnessed anything of this kind before (see Ssachno, 1979). The Swedish journalist Disa Håstad assured readers that *Eto ia - Edichka* caused a sensation not only because of the sexual promiscuity of its protagonist and of the abundance of expletives that it contains, but also because it was the first publication which supported neither East nor West (see Håstad, 1980). A lengthy semi-scholarly article about Limonov's first novel was published in the Swedish-language Finnish journal *Finsk Tidskrift*. The author of the article, Janina Orlov, then at the Swedish University of Turku, paid particular attention to what she termed Limonov's mastery of the Russian language (see Orlov, 1991). Even the political views of Limonov have been taken very seriously in these parts of Europe (for discussions of Limonov's political position see, for example, an article by K.Holm in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of 18 December, 1990, p.27, and a comment by A.Sinnemäki in the Finnish periodical *Ylioppilaslehti* of 17 March, 1994, p.5).

son adolescence), as well as Limonov's collection of short stories *Salade Niçoise*, released by the 'Le Dilettante' publishing house, received a warm welcome from *Le Monde* in 1986.⁵⁵³ In 1987, upon the release of the French translation of *Palach* (re-christened as *Oscar et les femmes*), *Le Figaro Littéraire* interviewed Limonov and compared him to Lev Tolstoi and Maksim Gor'kii.⁵⁵⁴ The publication of Limonov's tenth book in French was even favoured with praise both from the left (*L'Humanité*) and from the right (*Le Figaro*).⁵⁵⁵ The French translation of *Inostranets v smutnoe vremia* was awarded the Jean Frostier Prize.⁵⁵⁶ But the good graces of the French critics did not last. By 1992 Limonov noticed that he started falling out of favour because of his unguarded political remarks (at the beginning of his literary career in France the author of *Eto ia - Edichka*, according to his own confession, tried to watch his mouth).⁵⁵⁷ Limonov says about his current literary reputation in France:

There is a real crusade against me in the press, and I know very well how it feels to be badgered. If I could take pity on myself, [this situation] would have seemed a tragedy to me. But as I am not prone to shed tears over myself, I endure it quite calmly.⁵⁵⁸

For this situation Limonov chiefly blames his strongly opinionated journalistic publications which used to appear

⁵⁵³See Zand, 1986.

⁵⁵⁴See Lautrédou, 1987.

⁵⁵⁵See Limonov, 1991b, p.36.

⁵⁵⁶See Limonov, 1992f; Mogutin, 1992.

⁵⁵⁷See Leont'eva, 1992. Limonov's 1985 attack against those French intellectuals who thought of the then Soviet Union as of something similar to Dante's Inferno (see his passage in the July-August issue of *Le magazine littéraire* devoted to literature in exile, pp.61-62) could serve as a relatively early example of his 'unwise' political statements made in France about the French.

⁵⁵⁸Limonov, 1994a, p.11.

regularly in the French periodical *L'Idiot International*.⁵⁵⁹ In it Limonov, a member of its editorial board, criticized French politics and politicians with no less strength than he bludgeoned the USA in his anti-American writings⁵⁶⁰ (in particular, he compared President Mitterrand to Brezhnev).⁵⁶¹ Presumably the above-mentioned campaign had undercut Limonov's publishing opportunities in France to the extent that the writer had to turn 'back to the USSR' in his search for a new market. In Russia he enjoys the benefit of easier access to the TV, the role of which in the promotion of contemporary literature he does not underestimate.⁵⁶² Speaking about the impact of the media on the literary situation in the West, Limonov judges it as mostly negative, perhaps because he was not a frequent guest on Western literary programmes⁵⁶³ (the passage below is based on his French experiences):

Unfortunately, the TV has already created its false [...] hierarchy in literature [...]. Are Nourissier, d'Ormesson, Philippe Labro really the best writers? (In general, it would be healthier for literature if the TV left it alone.) The totalitarian TV recommends the ready-made geniuses of today to the population. [...] The TV geniuses do not have competitors, because nothing is more

⁵⁵⁹For more details, see Limonov, 1998c.

⁵⁶⁰For an example of Limonov's anti-American attacks see Limonov, 1993n.

⁵⁶¹See Limonov, 1992f.

⁵⁶²Describing his current situation in Russia, Limonov says:

'Hundreds of journalists ask me for interviews. I do not agree to do this too often, and I try to avoid banalities. To get access to a TV programme is difficult for people like me, but in principle it is also difficult to deny [me such access], because I am a personality and a newsmaker. Many people want me, but they are afraid of me, whereas I would like to take part in all sorts of TV discussions' (Limonov, 1993f, p.1).

⁵⁶³However, according to the information of the ITAR-TASS news agency of 10 March, 1992, Limonov signed a contract with Channel 2 of French TV to make a documentary about the right-wing opposition in the former USSR.

powerful and totalitarian [...] than TV. This is why one can say with no exaggeration that the influence of Bernard Pivot on French literature was more harmful than the decrees of Stalin's Minister of Culture Zhdanov. For fifteen years Pivot has been fabricating phoney literary geniuses, five a week.⁵⁶⁴

The tone of this extract leads us to assume that Limonov's name was missing from the list of outstanding contemporary French writers. However, since his return to Russia the author of *Eto ia - Edichka* (a line from which is cited in the title of this chapter) has been making regular appearances on Russian TV,⁵⁶⁵ mainly as a politician rather than as a writer of fiction, but it still helps him to sell his books.⁵⁶⁶ His

⁵⁶⁴Limonov, 1993, p.321. Limonov is not quite correct here. In fact, Andrei Aleksandrovich Zhdanov (1896-1948) was a member of the Politburo (from 1939) and a Secretary of the Central Executive Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of the Soviet Union (from 1944). He supervised ideological issues.

⁵⁶⁵Thus, in the course of only one month he took part in the programme 'Potselui v diafragmu' (K-2) on 1 October, 1995, and crossed swords with the journalist Aleksandr Liubimov in the programme 'Odin na odin' on 3 November, 1995. On 28 November, 1996, he celebrated the second anniversary of the existence of his newspaper *Limonka* in Andrei Egorshhev's TV programme 'Press-ekspress'. For a review of one of the very first Limonov's appearances on Russian TV, see Troitskii, 1992.

⁵⁶⁶ Limonov's methods of self-promotion do occasionally misfire. Limonov's translator into Finnish, Mr Jukka Mallinen, told me that on one of Limonov's political tours in Russia, the author of *Eto ia - Edichka* spoke in front of Communist sympathizers (mainly pensioners) in the Siberian city of Krasnoiarsk (the bottom line of his speech was 'your cause is not yet lost'). Inspired by Limonov's appearance, the pensioners rushed to buy his books which were put on sale outside the hall where the meeting took place. However, Limonov's newly acquired readership did not find what they expected in these books. Within a week, the local Communist party bureau was deluged with complaints. The local Communist leader had to come

reputation in Russia, of course, is no less tainted than in France,⁵⁶⁷ but he has enough sympathizers to ensure the sell-out of a considerable print run (his latest 1995 collections of short stories, *Chuzhoi v neznakomom gorode* and *Kon'iak Napoleon*, were both published in 30 000 copies; his latest novels, *Poslednie dni Supermena* (1996) and *316, punkt "V"* (1998), had print runs of 15 000 and 10 000 copies respectively; and even the collection of his 1976-82 poems *Moi otritsatel'nyi geroi*, written in New York and Paris and published in Moscow in 1995, had a circulation of 1 000 copies, which is truly astonishing, given the fact that poetry now does not sell well at all;⁵⁶⁸ on the whole, these sale figures are rather impressive for today's book trade in Russia, which finds it hard to make a profit on anything other than thrillers).

4.2. LITERARY CRITICISM AS A SOURCE OF LIMONOV'S INSPIRATION.

Whether reviews are good or bad, it is known that Limonov follows them intently and keeps them all on record. He has his reasons for this:

I read the reviews of my books. Then I begin to understand what I am doing. [...] It does not help in the actual writing, but it does help you to define your path.

forward with an official explanation: 'Comrades, you've got to understand. Limonov is *our* author. His books demonstrate what capitalism does to human beings. It reduces them to giving blow-jobs to Negroes.'

⁵⁶⁷See L[imonov], 1995, p.4.

⁵⁶⁸The trouble with this fine collection of poetry was that apparently it had not been read even by those who reviewed it. For instance, an anonymous review of *Moi otritsatel'nyi geroi*, entitled 'Eduard Limonov vspomnil, chto on... poet' and printed in the magazine *Ogonek* (1996, no.45, p.53), stated that Limonov's poems included in this collection are devoid of obscenities and sexual episodes. This is not true (see, for example, Limonov, 1995g, pp.92, 95).

It helps you to understand something, even if you do not use your understanding for many years or books ahead. But you can define who you are, at least for the time being.⁵⁶⁹

Here are several examples of how Limonov uses the critique of his works as a source of inspiration. The alleged autobiographism of *Eto ia - Edichka* caused speculation over the possible link of this novel to the ancient Greek myth about Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection in the water.⁵⁷⁰ Limonov was evidently fascinated by the idea that *Eto ia - Edichka* has its roots in narcissistic writing (e.g., the novel's denouement is a mirror reflection of its opening), since in 1985 he published a short story 'Dvoynik', in which the idea of identical reflection materializes in the image of Father John.⁵⁷¹ In Chapter 3 of this study we argued that 'Dvoynik' represents the quintessence of Limonov's artistic method.⁵⁷²

The idea of the 'sadoomasochistic' novel *Palach* appears to have come to Limonov, at least partly, as a result of the following comment on *Eto ia - Edichka*:

By Western standards [...] *Edichka* has a curious innocence: it is quite without sadism for one thing. There is no rape, no sexual violence, not much domination of one sex over the other [...], no power struggle between the sexes. The sexuality described is not particularly neurotic or obsessional, and it is often very funny. [...] Unlike the majority of Western

⁵⁶⁹Glad, 1993, p.268.

⁵⁷⁰See Bokov, 1979, p.12; Smirnov, 1983, pp.21-45.

⁵⁷¹See Limonov, 1985a.

⁵⁷²For a similar understanding of 'Dvoynik' see Matich, 1986, p.537.

This essay, however, does not name the works of Bokov and Smirnov as a likely source for Limonov's short story.

erotic/pornographic books, it is not concerned so much with female sexuality.⁵⁷³

It goes without saying that all the features listed above are on hand in Limonov's fourth novel.

In Limonov's opinion, even a hostile analysis can be utilized to good effect. Thus, Igor' Efimov disparagingly called *Dnevnik neudachnika, ili Sekretnaia tetrad'* 'a portrait of the bandit as a young man'.⁵⁷⁴ It is very possible that Limonov had this phrase in mind when he was thinking over the plot of *Podrostok Savenko* (in the interview to Gidoni he confesses that he was 'madly pleased' with Efimov's characterisation).⁵⁷⁵ The same review by Efimov might also have influenced the short story 'Dvoynik' and the novel *Palach*: Efimov insists that in *Dnevnik neudachnika* Limonov describes a certain state of the human soul while 'looking in the mirror'; the critic also dubs the fruits of the fertile imagination of the loser 'the fantasies of an executioner'.⁵⁷⁶ *Palach* also appears to be affected by the remark of Nina Voronel', for whom spiders and cockroaches symbolize the image of Limonov's protagonist in *Eto ia - Edichka*.⁵⁷⁷ One can trace a polemic with this remark in the phrase of the Polish underdog Jacek Gutor, who keeps wondering whether a human being can kiss a cockroach. Moreover, a cockroach is found in the mouth of the dead body of the sadist Oscar, the leading character in *Palach*.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷³Shukman, 1983, pp.1-18.

⁵⁷⁴Efimov, 1978, p.121.

⁵⁷⁵Gidoni, 1980, p.159.

⁵⁷⁶Efimov, 1978, p.121. In pendant to Efimov, the problems 'Limonov as an executioner' and 'Limonov and sadism' were discussed in Losev, 1978, p.125.

⁵⁷⁷See Voronel', 1979, p.190.

⁵⁷⁸The real-life origins of the image of the cockroach in *Palach* were given in Chapter 1 of our work.

Another short story by Limonov, 'Mutant' [The Mutant], seems to be an answer to Mikhail Lemkhin's review of *Palach*, entitled 'Inoplanetianin Limonov' (Limonov the Alien, 1987). The critic maintained that Limonov's hero in this novel 'interacts with the world exclusively on the level of physiology. He does not live, he does not even exist, he carries out evolutions which are linked to physiological activities'.⁵⁷⁹ Then Lemkhin suggested that Limonov is just like his hero, and that he might just as well be an alien. 'Mutant' offers the reader a sketch of the American model Sally, an acquaintance of Limonov. She is ignorant (mistaking Notre Dame for the Eiffel Tower) and lacks human emotions ('makes love as if fulfilling a social duty')⁵⁸⁰, and she prefers cars to dogs and human speech on the radio to the sound of music. Something is wrong even with the structure of her body ('All her body is unusually hard. Her underdeveloped breasts, "underopened" for some reason, are no exception. [...] Her body is as cold as dead wood. [...] Sally the mutant isn't a woman any longer, and yet she is one').⁵⁸¹ Still, she makes more money from a few days in a show than Limonov makes from his lengthy work on a book, and the future clearly belongs to her. Limonov's comments are filled with indignation: 'She uses everything, while having no right to have anything. Is it for people like her, for the walking stomachs with the eyes of a cow, that the tragic history of mankind has taken place?'⁵⁸². However, Sally's agent, the Russian Sashka Zhigulin, rates Sally higher than the narrator, called Limonov, and himself: 'We are the neurotic children of an old-fashioned civilization. She is a new woman. We, full of artificial knowledge, gleaned from books, we have to disappear in order to give way to new people. To thousands and millions of Sallys'.⁵⁸³ By this means

⁵⁷⁹Lemkhin, 1987, p.396.

⁵⁸⁰Limonov, 1995c, p.223.

⁵⁸¹Limonov, 1995c, pp.222-23.

⁵⁸²Limonov, 1995c, pp.223-24.

⁵⁸³Limonov, 1995c, p.221. In these words one might see an allusion to *Zavist'* (Envy, 1927) by Iurii Olesha. See, in particular, Ivan Babichev's

Limonov is objecting to Lemkhin's definition, as if readdressing it to the appalling newcomers from the future. Limonov clearly disagrees with Lemkhin on the central point: he is not an alien or mutant, he is human.

The neurotic 'Chekhovian' self-consciousness of Limonov's *alter ego* in *Eto ia - Edichka* has been duly registered by the experienced critics Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis. They style Edichka as a 'lost, lonely, confused and pitiful' individual and define him as an 'anti-Superman'.⁵⁸⁴ Faithful to his habit of taking his readership by surprise, Limonov, however, appears to challenge this definition in his novel *Poslednie dni Supermena* (The Last Days of a Superman, 1996; written apparently at least a decade earlier). The novel features a forty-five-year-old Russian émigré, Genrikh, who used to live in England and now resides in Paris. Limonov generously endows Genrikh with details of his own appearance (a crew cut), habits (regular long walks and weightlifting) and biography (Genrikh's father, whose moralizing apparition haunts Genrikh at nights, is a military officer).⁵⁸⁵ Genrikh learns that he is terminally ill and decides to spend his last days robbing banks and restaurants, rather than on a hospital bed. He meets a fourteen-year-old girl called Alice who becomes his lover and accomplice. In bed with Alice, Genrikh is thinking:

'There is a strong chance that she will leave me' [...]
Then he realized at once that it would not be easy for the girl to do so now, when Berettas and Brownings had become part of their lives. No, Genrikh has simply forgotten that he is no longer Genrikh the Ordinary, to

and Nikolai Kavalierov's attitude towards Volodia Makarov and Valia (Olesha, 1977, p.122). Olesha has been named among Limonov's literary sources (see Ashkenazi, 1979, p.197), and the title of his novel might have influenced Limonov's poem 'Zavist' (Envy, 1986; see Limonov, 1986c), which will be discussed below.

⁵⁸⁴Vail' and Genis, 1984c, p.29.

⁵⁸⁵See Limonov, 1996e, pp.111, 137, 151, 173.

whom women come and whom they abandon [as they please]. He is Genrikh the Superman. Women don't drop Supermen all that often.⁵⁸⁶

This paragraph seems to dispute the following observation by Vail' and Genis made in connection with Edichka's sexual relationships: 'Almost always he plays a subordinate role. Even in the famous scene with the black man he is passive. Even his wife treats him like dirt'.⁵⁸⁷ Thus, with the help of one fictional double (Genrikh), Limonov apparently seeks, if only post factum, to save the face of another (Edichka).

To the best of our knowledge, borrowing ideas from ill-disposed reviewers, as well as using the secondary literature on the works of a writer as a literary source for the subsequent works of the same writer, is very rarely paralleled. Limonov recommends this approach to everyone: 'One should take advantage of negative criticism, too. If the critic loses his or her temper, he or she might write something useful, against his or her own will'.⁵⁸⁸

4.3. THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF *ETO IA - EDICHKA*.⁵⁸⁹

It seems that the writer was driven to this conclusion, as well as to the slighting treatment of his ill-wishers, by the reception of *Eto ia - Edichka* in the Soviet and Russian émigré press (before the publication of his first novel Limonov quite often had enjoyed a fairly sympathetic response from both the Russian and the non-Russian media abroad).⁵⁹⁰ The

⁵⁸⁶Limonov, 1996e, p.111.

⁵⁸⁷Vail' and Genis, 1984c, p.29.

⁵⁸⁸Limonov, 1991b, p.36.

⁵⁸⁹It would be virtually impossible and counterproductive to give a survey of the critical reception of all the books by Limonov. We prefer to focus on *Eto ia - Edichka*, because the criticism of this work largely set the standards for Limonov's critics in the future.

⁵⁹⁰See, for instance, the following interviews with Limonov and articles about him: *Destino*, 17 February, 1973, pp.6-7; *Neue Zürcher*

reaction to the book was simply ferocious. One reviewer stated categorically that the matter discussed in *Eto ia - Edichka* was clinical and had nothing to do with literature.⁵⁹¹ A more moderate opinion attacked Limonov for ignoring the Russian taboo against using f-words in print: 'without a doubt, this fiction is not untalented, but it is so heavily loaded with obscenities, whether or not they are appropriate (most of the time they are not), that one's reading is seriously impeded'.⁵⁹²

Some men of letters criticized Limonov, either gently or fiercely, without even mentioning his name.⁵⁹³ For example, Vladimir Voinovich wrote in his satirical novel *Pretendent na prestol* (Pretender to the Throne), commenting on a brutal scene of an interrogation of private Chonkin by lieutenant Filippov, when the lieutenant turned wild and abusive:

Here, completely helpless, the author must stop. Fearing to offend the reader's sense of decency, he is unable to depict the lieutenant's further speech except as a series of dots; there is no reason to include the few printable words which happened to occur in it for, taken out of context, they would transmit neither the depth, nor the

Zeitung, 17 June, 1973, p.53; *Il Giorno*, 25 May, 1975, p.5 and *Il Messagero*, 12 December, 1977, p.3.

⁵⁹¹See Bakhrakh, 1979, p.13.

⁵⁹²Sergeev, 1979. The fairly large number of 'sovietisms' in *Eto ia - Edichka* have also caused a negative reaction. The critic Konstantin Kustanovich likened the language of the novel to that of the *Komsomol'skaia pravda* newspaper (see Kustanovich, 1981, p.32).

⁵⁹³Quoting Limonov's American publisher Aleksandr Sumerkin, Elin Schoen describes the treatment given to the author of *Eto ia - Edichka* by the New York Russian-language newspaper *Novoe russkoe slovo* (as we mentioned in Chapter 1, Limonov had worked there as a proof-reader for a while, long before his notoriety reached the point of no return): 'They never printed his name. [...] They wrote articles about him, referring to "one notorious pseudo-writer, that pseudo-poet"'. (Schoen, 1980.)

vividness, nor even the sense in which these expressions were used.

It would seem, though, that there is nothing so dramatic here. A new fashion has caught on these days - if a person wishes to use a certain word in his writing, then he uses that very word; some people even build entire stories and novels on such a word, and in the company of such words a decent word looks as indecent as a man in a black suit and tie in a steam bath.⁵⁹⁴

(One can realise immediately that Voinovich is aiming at Limonov because, using a phrase coined by a British journalist, it is the author of *Eto ia - Edichka* who has 'made obscene language the hallmark of [his] writing style'.⁵⁹⁵ Limonov's contribution to this field has been acknowledged by A.Baranov and D.Dobrovol'skii, the compilers of the 1995 dictionary *Russkaia zavetnaia idiomatika: Veselyi slovar' krylatykh vyrazhenii* (published by 'Pomovskii i partnery' in Moscow under the pen-name 'Vasilii Bui'), and by T.V.Akhmetova, the compiler of the dictionary *Russkii mat: Tolkovyi slovar'* (Moscow: Glagol, 1996). Both dictionaries quote Limonov's scatological passages in abundance.)

However, using the same device (not mentioning Limonov by name) as a protective shield, other literary people went beyond all limits, rudely insulting the writer. Anatolii Gladilin concocted the following lampoon:

There was a young poet in the USSR. [...] Objectively speaking, in Moscow he was known rather as a [...] tailor. However, opinions differed. Some people cursed the style of his cut, others praised it. I cannot judge what it was like. I do not understand much about the sartorial art. So, our hero arrived in the USA and started to publish something somewhere. There was more than

⁵⁹⁴Voinovich, 1981, pp.36-37. The translation is slightly amended.

⁵⁹⁵Beeston, 1997.

enough freedom, but fame somehow or other evaded him. [...] And our hero wanted to attract people's attention so much!.. When he realized that he was living in a free country, he took off his pants and showed the respectable public the back part of his body, below the waist. And published an account of his physical experiences. Then the reading public started speaking about the exposed part of the body, as well as about its owner. Success? Probably. But what kind of success is that?..⁵⁹⁶

A similar piece in the form of a letter, signed by Ian Evzlin,⁵⁹⁷ was submitted to the magazine *Kovcheg* and never printed. It

⁵⁹⁶Gladilin, 1979. This publication is a press-cutting found among the *Kovcheg* papers in the Leeds Russian Archive, with no page reference or name of the source on it. In the same collection there is a letter from Limonov to Bokov in which the former writes to the latter about Gladilin's escapades: 'Why don't you read what this Soviet pig's snout has written? What a scoundrel, petty, repulsive'. Strangely enough, Gladilin's idiosyncratic appreciation of Limonov's creative methods has been recently complimented in Vinokurov, 1995. Another Russian émigré writer, Boris Khazanov, made better use of the metaphor of a man undressing, as applied to the author of *Eto ia - Edichka*: 'Limonov is not without talent [...] but I'm not comfortable with his work. [...] This kind of writing is so easy. It's the easiest path to take. Because of its accessibility, naturalism is a disease many go through, especially the young. They have the feeling that while other writers are hypocritical and cover life's awful truth with fig leaves, they will undress man and show their readers the naked truth. But in undressing man, you lose a part of him. As soon as you take man's clothes off, you have taken away part of his being. Clothing is part of his personality. But you may want to go even further and remove his skin, which leaves only the bare anatomy. Then you can remove his muscles, and you're left with only his skeleton. And that is no longer man at all. It is the paradox of naturalism' (Glad, 1993, pp.125-26; English as in the original).

⁵⁹⁷On Evzlin see Vail' and Genis, 1984a, pp.6-13; Vail' and Genis 1984b, pp.18-19. Evzlin publicly objected to Limonov's assessment of Vasilii

is not altogether clear whether this *curriculum vitae* of Limonov in America was compiled seriously, with the view of exposing his true nature, or merely as a parody. Its tone of a semi-literate book-lover who is preoccupied with the issue of saving the green mantle of the planet Earth, sounds too genuine to be invented:

It is not the phenomenon of Limonov in itself which is strange. What is strange is why these tiny journals, which multiply like Australian rabbits, give their pages to such marginal literary (*okololiteraturnye*) scoundrels. Who is paying for this? I have known Limonov in New York for several years now. He is neither a 'politician', nor an 'extreme leftist', nor a 'rebel' [...]. He is a scheming stingy Philistine. A tailor by profession, with a dubious past, Limonov simply let himself go in New York, counting on the liberalism of the local authorities. He got himself a pocket knife, and on every street corner called himself now an anarchist, now a Trotskyite, now a Maoist, now a 'hero of the world'. [...] Here is Limonov's brief resumé: at first he pursued the occupation of a proof-reader in a minor Russian-language newspaper in New York. In it he published miserable defamatory articles, written in a rough, shallow manner. Soon Limonov was fired, because he made a worthless proof-reader. The lack of education took its toll. Abandoned by the woman whom he had brought abroad, this he-man went completely ballistic and wrote a so-called pamphlet [*Peredacha n'iu-iorskogo radio*], in which he [...] personally shoots the millionaires from Fifth Avenue and incinerates the *New York Times* and corrupt journalists. Then in the

Shukshin, Vladimir Soloukhin and Vasil' Bykov printed in one of Limonov's articles in *Novoe russkoe slovo* (see Evzlin, 1975). It is possible that Limonov portrayed Evzlin under the name of Ian Zlobin (this surname is derived from the Russian word 'zloba', which means 'malice') in his short story 'Ekh, barin tol'ko v troechke promchalsia...'; see Limonov, 1995b, pp.241-54.

Palestinian rag *Nedelia* he slandered his fellow émigrés, whom he talked to every day. Is there anything this rogue has not done, when looking for any kind of popularity?! He threatened one émigré with his knife and read his doggerel for the Voice of America, even sending it to the Soviet magazine *Novyi mir*! Devils are leading his lost soul, indeed. But now all is going well: the tailor Limonov has got a job as a caretaker in an apartment block for the rich, whom [he claimed] he hated so much. And he's calmed down. That is what this 'rebel poet' and 'dominant influence' really needed. I would not write about this if I did not feel sorry for the paper on which the opuses of people like Limonov were printed. Just think about the wasted timber! So, the damage is twofold: the waste of trees and the pernicious influence of the evil words of such 'men of letters' on the potential reader.⁵⁹⁸

By analogy, the friendly critique of Limonov's work can also be divided into the open, the hidden and the unpublished.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁸Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection.

⁵⁹⁹An extraordinary piece of friendly criticism of *Eto ia - Edichka* in verse is to be found in the newspaper *Vechernii zvon*. The following lines, ascribed to the clearly non-existent Russian Israeli poet Arkadii Chepovetskii (allegedly a Second World War veteran), humorously criticize Edichka's undue self-abasement and lack of spirit, caused by the infidelity of his wife Elena and her subsequent remarriage to the Italian Count de Carli:

[...]«Карли», «Марли», «Джакомо» и «Конти»
 (Им неважно, еврей или гой)
 Навидался их в прорезь на фронте,
 Под Смоленском и Курской дугой!
 Руку сводит как будто наганом,
 Согласиться, сынок, не могу -
 Даже в страшном бреду, даже пьяным -
 Отдавать нашу прорезь врагу!
 Русский бард ты? Не верится что-то,
 бросив русскую честь на весы,

It goes without saying that the positive accounts of *Eto ia - Edichka* were outnumbered by the negative ones. *Russkaia mysl'*, for instance, published only two articles in defence of Limonov's novel: by the man who was brave enough to introduce *Edichka* to the reader, Nikolai Bokov,⁶⁰⁰ and by the musician Aleksandr Rabinovich. It is curious that in his analysis the musician proved to be more profound than many professional literary critics. He wrote:

Limonov throws a red herring to his future critics and faultfinders [...] by creating [...] the illusion of his depravity and moral degradation, which has nothing to do with the reality, of course. [...] Limonov wrote the confessions of a 'son of the twentieth century' with an astonishing artistic expressiveness. With amazing power he describes the artist's struggle for the preservation of his own 'I' and his own dignity in the modern world. Love [...] and [...] politics have been intermingled in this book. Would it not be better to take one's hat off to such a man, instead of trying to hush up his work or whining over too many f-words on its pages?⁶⁰¹

The dubious support came from the Soviet media. Thus, *Literaturnaia gazeta* approved *Eto ia - Edichka* as an exemplary description of the common fate of those seduced by Western propaganda who leave their socialist homeland for the West.⁶⁰² As Limonov was one of the few émigré

Вместо пороха, крови и пота -
Ты паршивке ей нюхал трусы! [...]
Лезу в жизнь твою, скажешь, без стука?
У Отчизны у всей на виду
Проворонил, прокаркал, профукал
Ты коварную эту пизду! [...]

('Patrioticheskoe poslanie byvshemu riadovomu Limonovu ot kapitana Chepovetskogo', *Vechernii zvon*, 1, 1986, p.4).

⁶⁰⁰See Bokov, 1979, p.12.

⁶⁰¹Rabinovich, 1979.

⁶⁰²See Pochivalov, 1980.

writers who were favoured with an almost sympathetic reference, this article led to the accusations that Limonov was a KGB agent.⁶⁰³

The literary parody 'Eto ia - Fenichka' (It's Me, Fenichka) by Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis represents the hidden friendly critique of *Eto ia - Edichka* which, as a rule, does not refer to Limonov by name. Vail' and Genis focused primarily on the bisexuality of the protagonist in the novel. This uncommon sexual orientation was disparaged by a device which is untranslatable into English. In the monologue of the main personage in the parody, the masculine nouns were accompanied by feminine adjectives (e.g., *damskaia master, progressivnaia portnoi*). This confrontation with the rules of Russian grammar emphasized the 'unnatural' character of bisexuality. Notwithstanding this, it seems as if 'Eto ia - Fenichka' was written not in order to blame Limonov for telling his supposedly most intimate secrets to everyone, but to commemorate the revival of the controversial subject of bisexuality in the Russian literary tradition. At any rate, in their serious critical essays Vail' and Genis have always shown a sober and balanced approach to the works of Limonov.⁶⁰⁴ Therefore this caustic satire should be regarded as an innocuous and benevolent send-up,⁶⁰⁵ albeit not necessarily in the best possible taste.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰³See, for example, Liubarskii, 1991, p.35; and the letter of A.Alekseev-Gai to the editors of the magazine *Ogonek* (*Ogonek*, 29, 1991, p.4).

⁶⁰⁴See Vail' and Genis, 1982, pp.106-08; Vail' and Genis, 1984, p.11; Vail' and Genis, 1987, pp.118-33.

⁶⁰⁵Vagrish Bakhchanian is responsible for yet another friendly send-up of *Eto ia - Edichka*. In June 1983, in the émigré newspaper *Novyi amerikanets* (no.173, p.36) he published a number of fictitious book announcements allegedly released by the non-existent publishing house 'Pont' (Fraud). The French artist Edouard Manet, the then Mayor of New York City Edward C. Koch, the politician Edward Kennedy, the Russian footballer Eduard Malofeev, the Russian poet Eduard Asadov and even the Polish-Russian female singer Edita P'ekha

As for the unpublished friendly critique of *Eto ia - Edichka*, some documents among the *Kovcheg* papers in the Leeds Russian Archive indicate the unequivocal support from some readers (see letters to Bokov from the authoritative Slavists John E. Bowlt and Simon Karlinsky of 13 March and 4 April, 1979, respectively; the former, however, insisted that his letter should not be printed). According to the unpublished opinion of another Slavist, Andrej Kodjak from the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures of New York University, dated 5 March, 1979,

the language of E.Limonov is powerful, his images captivating. Some of his episodes could be classified as pornographic, however [...] by mistake. Edichka's sexual adventures are closely interwoven with his political, psychological and existential problems, thus serving a definite artistic purpose rather than sexual excitement of the reader. The author's straightforwardness in sexual matters would be a novelty in Russian, mostly puritanic, literature; being published in English, however, and therefore incorporated in the

were listed as authors. All their books had a similar title, that of *Eto ia - Edichka*. (This joke, by the way, proves that the publication of his first novel turned Limonov into a celebrity of sorts.)

⁶⁰⁶Here is an example of a similarly untranslatable but equally unsavoury joke made in connection with *Eto ia - Edichka* and implying the sexual orientation of its protagonist (and, by analogy, its author). In the newspaper *Novyi amerikanets* of 26 September - 2 October, 1983, Vagrish Bakhchanian (on him see Chapter I) placed a series of mock 'classified advertisements' one of which read: 'Ishchu prikliuchenii na svoiu zhopy. Eduard Limonov' (the first sentence in the citation means literally 'I am looking for trouble'). This idiomatic expression successfully hints both at the adventurousness of a particular individual (*prikliucheniia*) and at his alleged proneness to homosexual love (*zhopa*). The best English equivalent we could come up with is 'Needed. A companion for arsing about', but it is nowhere near the hilarious original.

contemporary Western literature, the impact of sexual episodes is doubtlessly reduced.⁶⁰⁷

These letters of support, however, did not see the light of day; nor did the positive reactions to the book expressed in the letters to Bokov from the less academic readers

E.Podberezkina and V.Antoshchenkova).⁶⁰⁸ It was almost impossible to persuade those who ruled the roost in Russian émigré literature to publish a vindication of *Eto ia - Edichka* in their periodicals, because the tactics employed were either to attack Limonov⁶⁰⁹ or, even more effectively, to ignore the entire matter.

4.4. LIMONOV AND MAKSIMOV.

The person who proposed the idea of keeping silent about Limonov was Vladimir Maksimov, editor-in-chief of the émigré magazine *Kontinent*. In 1978 Maksimov printed a selection of Limonov's poetry in this magazine, preceded by Iosif Brodskii's favourable foreword.⁶¹⁰ After the appearance

⁶⁰⁷Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection. English as in the original.

⁶⁰⁸See the Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection. For the few recent positive evaluations of Limonov's first novel, as well as of his creative activity in general, see, for example: Sukonik, 1991, pp.43-92; Mogutin, 1993a.

⁶⁰⁹After the publication of *Eto ia - Edichka* 'some were so outraged that a commission was formed [...] "for the annihilation of Limonov"' (Brown, 1986, p.381).

⁶¹⁰See *Kontinent*, 15, 1978, pp.153-58. The publication took place owing to the efforts of Vladimir Maramzin and Iosif Brodskii. For Brodskii's letters of recommendation of 10 October, 1975, and 15 September, 1977, see V.E.Maksimov's collection in the Historisches Archiv at the Forschungsstelle Osteuropa (University of Bremen). The same collection contains Limonov's letter to Maksimov of 2 November, 1977, with an explanation of the rumours which were damaging to Limonov's reputation and presumably instrumental in initially preventing Maksimov from publishing Limonov's poetry.

of *Eto ia - Edichka*, Maksimov's attitude to Limonov underwent certain changes. In his speech at a meeting of representatives of the three waves of the Russian emigration on 27 February, 1979, Nikolai Bokov accused Maksimov of visiting Countess Zinaida Shakhovskaia, editor-in-chief of *Russkaia mysl'*, and advising her to stop the polemics around Limonov's book.⁶¹¹ Shakhovskaia declined the suggestion, but since then many others had been pursuing the strategy first proposed by Maksimov,⁶¹² applying it to Limonov's writings in general. For example, Vladimir Kozlovskii, the author of the study *Argo russkoi gomoseksual'noi subkul'tury* (Benson: Chalidze Publications, 1986), confessed that the original version of his book contained quite a substantial chunk of Limonov-related material, later excluded at the insistence of Kozlovskii's publisher, Mr Valerii Chalidze (see an article about Kozlovskii, entitled 'Moi milenok dissident...', in the Moscow newspaper *Inostranets* of 1 September, 1993). Self-censorship also might have played a considerable role among the reasons which urged various scholars and literary critics to avoid mentioning Limonov's name whenever possible. It is not quite clear, for instance, why Limonov, one of the most

⁶¹¹Maksimov expressed his private opinion of *Eto ia - Edichka* in one of his interviews: 'As for Limonov, I just don't consider that serious literature. Frankly, the things he does in his writings are inappropriate and unnecessary - all that anti-American pro-Soviet stuff. And when they say it's nonpolitical literature, what do they mean - "nonpolitical"? His little book manages to sling mud at Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn and at me, as well as Radio Liberty, *Novoe russkoe slovo*, the Trotskyites... He got everyone. How is that apolitical literature? No wonder *Literaturnaia gazeta* raved: at last somebody recognized the West for what it was. Well, I refuse to publish it' (Glad, 1993, p.257).

⁶¹²Limonov responded in his letter to Bokov of 30 September, [1979]: 'I didn't know that Maksimov went to Shakhovskaia. What a scum! Well, this is what one has come to expect from the former writer for the magazine *Oktiabr*' (Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection). See also Limonov, 1992f: 'A number of [French] literary critics boycott my books and refuse to review them'.

original poets of his generation, is not included in the otherwise fairly comprehensive bilingual anthology *Contemporary Russian Poetry*, selected by Gerald S. Smith (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).⁶¹³ Limonov's name is also missing from the 'Poetry Chart', appended to the first issue of the directory *Kto est' kto v sovremennoi kul'ture?* (Moscow: Gumanitarnyi fond imeni A.S.Pushkina, 1992), compiled by S.Gandurina and E.Bogatykh. Finally, it is a complete mystery why Limonov is omitted from Vasilii Betaki's study *Russkaia poeziia za 30 let* (Orange, Conn.: Antiquary, 1987) and from Robert Porter's recent survey of contemporary Russian writing.⁶¹⁴ It was none other than Betaki who introduced one of Limonov's very first poetic publications in the magazine *Grani* in 1975,⁶¹⁵ and Porter has

⁶¹³Scandinavian compilers, however, deemed Limonov worthy of being included in various collections of modern Russian writings in translation. Thus, extracts from Limonov's *Dnevnik neudachnika*, as well as several poems, were chosen by Hans Björkegren for his anthology *Octoberlegendernas land* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1991, pp.81-85). A selection of passages from *Dnevnik neudachnika* also appeared in the Finnish yearly collection of contemporary literature *Kalenteri 86* (Espoo: Weilin and Göös, 1986, pp.54-56). An extract from *Istoriia ego slugi* was included in the Finnish anthology of contemporary Russian fiction *Hauskat hautajaiset* [A Happy Funeral], edited and translated by Jukka Mallinen (Helsinki: Orient Express, 1991, pp.39-70; the circumstances of Limonov's two publications in Finnish are explained in his letter to Jukka Mallinen of 3 November, 1986, a copy of which, courtesy of Mr Mallinen, is now in my possession). Recently Limonov's works have appeared in *The Penguin Book of New Russian Writing*, edited by Viktor Erofeyev and Andrew Reynolds, as well as in *The Penguin Book of International Gay Writing*, edited by Mark Mitchell.

⁶¹⁴See Porter, 1996. A possible explanation could perhaps be extracted from Porter, 1996a, pp.396-98.

⁶¹⁵This is how Betaki characterized the 'young absurdist' Limonov: 'his manner is based on the primitivization of the lyrical anti-hero, on behalf of whom Limonov's poetry is written. Hence [...] the humour,

also shown genuine insight in his earlier studies of Limonov's work.⁶¹⁶

Maksimov's negative reaction to *Eto ia - Edichka* was predictable. One of Edichka's digressions in the novel characterizes Maksimov as a sly dissident who, instead of castigating the Soviet power structures, issues one attack after another on the left-wing Western intelligentsia, 'which has become deaf because it is idle and blasé'.⁶¹⁷ Therefore

stemming from intentional senselessness and grammatical incoherence; this is one of the dominating devices of Limonov' (Betaki, 1975, p.44). In his article 'O dvukh knigakh' [On Two Books], printed in *Novoe russkoe slovo* of 15 June of the same year, Limonov thanked Betaki for this publicity, but pointed out that Betaki's introduction was full of embarrassing mistakes as far as other poets mentioned in it were concerned. Thus, Betaki ascribed to Genrikh Sapgir one poem by Evgenii Kropivnitskii, one by Igor' Kholin and two by Viktor Tupitsyn. Limonov commented: 'If one can confuse [these poets one with another] one should not write about them.' (Limonov, 1975e, p.5.) Perhaps this explains why Betaki excluded Limonov from his 1987 book? Our suspicions seem to be confirmed by Limonov's letter to V.E.Maksimov of 2 November, 1977 (Historisches Archiv, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, University of Bremen, the Maksimov collection).

⁶¹⁶See Porter, 1991; and Porter, 1994.

⁶¹⁷Limonov, 1993a, p.75. Limonov quotes verbatim from Maksimov's piece 'Iz-pod glyb nasiliia i lzhi' (From Under the Clods of Violence and Lies) published in 1975 in *Kontinent* (no.3, p.400). Maksimov's political position was criticized by Limonov as early as 1975 for preventing the 'Western intelligentsia and the Russian opposition from drawing together, given the fact that a considerable part of the Western intelligentsia is sympathetic to the struggle [against Communist oppression] in which the Russian opposition is engaged.' (Limonov, 1975.) Limonov also reprimanded Maksimov for including in the first volume of his collected works, released by the émigré publishing house Posev in 1975, such publications as 'My obzhivaem zemliu' (We Render the Earth Habitable) and 'Zhiv chelovek' (Man Is Alive) which were first published (and received official accolades) in the Soviet

Limonov's information in his letter to Bokov of 12 February, 1979, about a telephone conversation between the artist Mikhail Shemiakin and Vagrich Bakhchanian after the publication of the novel in *Kovcheg*, is hardly surprising. Shemiakin said that Limonov had shit on his own head and *Kontinent* would not publish him any more.⁶¹⁸ Limonov commented: '*Kontinent* is nothing special in the literary sense; politically, it's simply nonsense'.⁶¹⁹ However, one should do justice to Maksimov, since he printed another selection of Limonov's poems on the pages of *Kontinent* in 1980.⁶²⁰ Still, Limonov bore a grudge against Maksimov and publicly criticized his aesthetic principles:

I read Maksimov's *Sem' dnei tvoreniia*. Five or so years ago there was such a to-do about it! I was not interested. I think that it is the same result of the sovietized perception of reality, only turned upside down and adjusted to the needs of a completely different political movement. [...] As a reader, I would like to find something about myself, so to speak, about my own life, my generation. I recall that in 1977 (if I

Union. Limonov ironically comments on Maksimov's unwillingness to retract his Soviet-style fiction: 'either the Soviet regime is not nearly as bad as [Maksimov] asserts in his other books, or (and this is more likely) [...] his creative activity of the time suited the Soviet regime.' (Limonov, 1975a.) It is possible, however, that Maksimov was not aware of these remarks because Limonov did not refer to him directly by his name, but called him discreetly 'a former Soviet author' (Limonov, 1975).

⁶¹⁸*Kontinent* paid good fees, and this is one reason why its importance for émigré writers was so great.

⁶¹⁹Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection.

⁶²⁰See *Kontinent*, 25, 1980, pp.148-56. On the circumstances surrounding this publication see Limonov's letter to Aleksei Tsvetkov of 21 June, 1980, and Shchapova's undated letter to Konstantin Kuz'minskii (Historisches Archiv, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, University of Bremen, A.P.Tsvetkov's and D.A.Tarasenkov's collections respectively).

am correct) the journal *Newsweek* printed a list of Russian émigré authors. Maksimov and Solzhenitsyn were called *historical* writers. [...] There is nothing offensive in that, it is a confirmation that these authors write about the past. A historical novel is a historical novel. I have never been attracted by this genre.⁶²¹

In a later publication Limonov expands this point of view in an attempt to establish a link between Maksimov's poetics and the scope of his political horizons:

Maksimov has no information at all about the Western world. What information he has is from his secretary, who gives him some descriptions or short translations of what he needs, but it is not possible to cover everything. I heard that he desperately tried to learn the [French] language, but was not successful, and he complained that he was too old. That's not true, because he came here when he was almost the same age as I am, and I have been reading French books for nearly two years. [...] You cannot take Maksimov's political speeches seriously, because he doesn't know what he's talking about. If he doesn't read *The New York Times* or *Le Monde*, he's not an intelligent man. He's not informed.

I don't know him to the extent of talking about his psychological structure and how he behaves. I have met him a few times. I think he's a creation of 'dissident fever'. He's a creation of the Western world, together with some conditions in Soviet society. In the USSR he was a typical writer of the Right. He was a writer for the magazine *October* [*Oktiabr'*]. He's still a writer of the Right. He automatically changed camps, just as the KGB defectors change camps to the CIA. It's natural.⁶²²

⁶²¹Gidoni, 1980, p.153.

⁶²²Limonov, 1990a, pp.415-16.

It is genuinely surprising that after such a humiliation Maksimov retained enough magnanimity to give a fairly sympathetic sketch of Limonov in his play 'Tam vdali, za rekoï' (Far Away, Beyond the River, 1991), set in Paris.⁶²³ In it Limonov is depicted as the philosopher Varfolomei Ananasov,⁶²⁴ who strolls around Paris in an officer's greatcoat (over his bare flesh), listens to the pop music of Stalin's time, longs for the Great Epoch and spouts monologues reminiscent of *Eto ia - Edichka*. He also asserts that 'greatness does not live by any code of morals; it has different criteria'.⁶²⁵ Limonov's opposition to everything and everyone is ridiculed in a dialogue between Ananasov and Marianna, the woman he loves: '- [The name] 'Ananasov' sounds excessive even for a pseudonym. - I [have done it] out of spite. - To spite whom exactly? - All of them'.⁶²⁶ Nonetheless, Ananasov's provocative standpoint does not deceive Marianna. She concludes: 'I think you are a good, nice boy. You're only

⁶²³In 1987, however, Maksimov published in his magazine a biased review of Limonov's *Palach* (see Lemkhin, 1987, pp.393-97). That same year Maksimov also sent a letter to *Libération* protesting against the methods by which Limonov was seeking French citizenship (see V.E.Maksimov's collection at the Historisches Archiv, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, University of Bremen).

⁶²⁴'Ananasov' is a derivative from the Russian word for 'pineapple'. The origins of Limonov's pseudonym (see Chapter 3) more than once suggested to those who portrayed the writer in their fiction a recognizably disguised surname derived from the Russian words for fruits and citrus plants. For example, Limonov is called 'Apel'sinov' (a derivative of the Russian word for 'orange') in a novel by Valentin Prussakov (see Prussakov, 1982, pp.32-33; for a rare review of this novel see, incidentally, Krylova, 1982) and appears as 'Tsitrusov' in an article by Vladimir Iankilevskii (see Iankilevskii, 1997). 'Ananasov' may also bring to mind 'onanist'. It is common knowledge that Limonov's literary characters did not see solo sexual acts as something which they should abstain from.

⁶²⁵Maksimov, 1991, p.128.

⁶²⁶Maksimov, 1991, pp.163-64. Ananasov's 'real' name is Lev Georgievich Razumovskii. His father sewed trousers in Khar'kov.

pretending to be a cynic, because you are so vulnerable'.⁶²⁷ She persuades Ananasov to go back to Russia, where his talents should be of some use.⁶²⁸

Maybe it was this play which convinced Limonov that he should moderate his anger against Maksimov.⁶²⁹ In 1992 he said in an interview to a *Pravda* journalist, in an attempt to differentiate the editor of *Kontinent* from his fellow émigrés:

⁶²⁷Maksimov, 1991, p.162.

⁶²⁸Perhaps it would be appropriate to mention here yet another example of the critical depiction of Limonov as a literary character. Under the name of Ferdinand Iziumov (fruits again!) he appears, alongside the democratic unionist Valeriia Novodvorskaia (renamed Starosel'skaia), the right extremist Aleksandr Barkashov (re-christened as Kartashov) and many other well-known figures of today's Russia, in Lev Gurskii's satirical thriller *Ubit' prezidenta* (To Kill a President, 1995). Limonov's obsession with the attention of the media, his love of flashy clothes, his 'friendship' and 'rivalry' with Zhirinovskii (a prototype for the President), his French citizenship and even his homosexual admirers are not spared in this moderately entertaining spoof (see Gurskii, 1995, pp.48-53, 116-20, 277-83, 307-11; for those still in doubt, a portrait of Iziumov looking very much like Limonov is appended on p.49).

⁶²⁹Limonov definitely knew about it (see Gryzunovy, 1995). In 1991 Maksimov also published a non-fictional résumé of his views on Limonov, with special reference to his political attitudes: 'As for me, I am not on the same wave-length as Limonov, either as a writer or as a human being. I do not subscribe either to his declarations or to his opinions. However, he is no less intelligent than you and me, and he realizes perfectly well that his latest statements will not bring him any political and moral dividends. He is not only losing his reputation, he is also losing his money, as the doors of many democratic publishing houses are being closed to him. However, you may not agree with Limonov, but one has to have intellectual bravery to say [in public] what he is now saying. Once again, Limonov knows how to sell himself, and if he acts against the logic of the market [it means that] his pain [for Russia] has become unbearable [*u nego naboletelo*]' (Maksimov, 1991a).

'Maksimov at least found the courage to acknowledge many things - in particular, some of his mistakes'.⁶³⁰

The combination of personal resentment and aesthetic incompatibility⁶³¹ explains the recurrent repudiation of the figure of and works by Maksimov within Limonov's general tendency to minimize the 'significance of his ties to the Russian tradition', to declare 'his independence from the writers who inhabit the "ghetto" of Russian émigré literature', to shun the 'factionalism endemic to the émigré community' and to stress 'his affinity with Western writers'.⁶³²

4.5. LIMONOV AND BRODSKII.

Another critic of Limonov, Iosif Brodskii, falls victim to Limonov's own defensive critique for the same reasons as Maksimov, plus envy. To a considerable extent Brodskii helped Limonov to establish his name in literature when he wrote a preface to the selection of Limonov's poems in *Kontinent*⁶³³ and recommended Limonov's book of poems *Russkoe* to the publisher Carl Proffer, head of the 'Ardis' publishing house. It is quite possible that the proud Limonov could not forgive Brodskii precisely for this assistance (in his 1988 interview Limonov confessed that he had always considered Brodskii to be his rival).⁶³⁴ In the letter to Bokov

⁶³⁰Bol'shakov, 1992, p.6.

⁶³¹In her letter to Nikolai Bokov of 8 March, 1979, Emma Podberezkina stated that aesthetically Maksimov and Limonov were antipodean: 'Maksimov's conventional, "Socialist realist" style cannot hold a candle to Limonov's agitated monologues. I am contrasting these two authors not by chance. They are diametrically opposed' (Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection).

⁶³²Ryan-Hayes, 1988, p.438.

⁶³³Comparing Limonov to Lomonosov, Khlebnikov and the OBERIU. See Brodskii, 1978, p.153.

⁶³⁴See Mirchev, 1989, p.98. It is curious that when talking to the same interviewer in 1983, Limonov said that he went to school for eight years, and Mirchev noted: 'So you can touch Brodskii, then' (ibid.,

of 13 July, 1977, Limonov sarcastically characterized Brodskii's life in America: 'Here Brodskii is surrounded by rich old ladies, he has received a Guggenheim award and become fat, but apparently he is suffering deeply inside' (at that point Limonov himself was doing odd jobs to make ends meet).⁶³⁵

When *Russkoe* came out in the middle of the scandal caused by *Eto ia - Edichka*, no one dared to review it.⁶³⁶ According to Limonov's letter to Bokov of 30 September, [1979], Brodskii, who had earlier promised to write about the book (and kept saying to Limonov that he rated him highly as a poet and

p.83). Nataliia Medvedeva recalls that her circle of Russian émigrés in the United States bitterly argued over the question 'who was better, who was more modern', Limonov or Brodskii (see Medvedeva, 1996, p.17).

⁶³⁵Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection.

⁶³⁶We are aware of at least three unpublished analyses of *Russkoe*, the first written by the poet and artist Mikhail Grobman, the second by one N.Moskvin and the third by the poet Igor' Burikhin. Grobman stated that the book is 'Russian in name and Russian in spirit. [...] There are no mediators between Limonov's poems and life. There is a pure link of truth, a complete absence of striving after literary effect (*literaturshchina*). Limonov's poems are not the poetry of fact, but the fact itself; it is not a description, but the phenomenon itself' (M.Grobman, "'Russkoe": (O stikhakh Eduarda Limonova)', Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection). N.Moskvin observed how the poetic manner of Limonov was changing: 'in the course of time the refinement of his perception progresses, the plot becomes less and less essential, the poet becomes more and more immersed in his vague visions, and more and more skilfully, more and more persistently, he forces [the reader] to show him some compassion' (N.Moskvin, 'Poeziia Eduarda Limonova', *ibid.*). Igor' Burikhin points at the affinity between *Russkoe* and *Eto ia - Edichka* in terms of challenging all forms of prominence and authoritativeness (I.Burikhin, 'E.Limonov. Russkoe. - Ardis, Ann Arbor, 1979', Historisches Archiv, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, University of Bremen, V.R.Maramzin's collection).

would not mind being the author of some of Limonov's poems), at this juncture changed his mind, referring to his lack of time and skill. 'It is clear that he does not want to be involved in the scandal',⁶³⁷ Limonov stated. Soon Limonov's dissatisfaction with Brodskii's personality and with Brodskii as a successful representative of a cultural tradition which Limonov never associated himself with⁶³⁸ reached a critical mass, and the 'literary Smerdiakov'⁶³⁹ published a venomous essay on Brodskii, entitled 'Poet-bukhgalter' (The Poet-cum-book-keeper, 1984). In it Limonov ridicules Brodskii's manner of making virtual catalogues of everything seen by his lyrical hero; finds the vocabulary in Brodskii's love poetry vulgar, and considers his melancholic temperament and penchant for 'counting and including in the estimate all the beams, spikes, pilasters, columns and nails in the world'⁶⁴⁰ preposterous. Limonov maintains that Brodskii's exile is an exile for a person with independent means, that his poems are fated to be studied by the conformists in the Slavic Departments of American universities, and that he is fated to be awarded the 'prize named after the inventor of dynamite'.⁶⁴¹ One can also come across this prophetic remark in Limonov's undated letter to Konstantin Kuz'minskii

⁶³⁷Leeds Russian Archive, the *Kovcheg* collection.

⁶³⁸In one of his interviews Limonov says: 'Brodskii represents a certain trend in Russian poetry which was canonized a long time ago [...]. It is some kind of academic classicism or something... [...]. Comparing Brodskii to myself, I can say that I prefer my pop prose. I am modern. I am the beginning of something. Brodskii is the end of the line. If he is Caruso or Frank Sinatra, I am Johnny Rotten, and sometimes David Bowie' (Mirchev, 1989, pp.98-99).

⁶³⁹This is what Brodskii called Limonov, likening him to the loathsome probable patricide in Dostoevskii's *Brat'ia Karamazovy* (see Mirchev, 1989, p.26).

⁶⁴⁰Limonov, 1984, p.134.

⁶⁴¹Limonov, 1984, p.135.

(another person who loathed Brodskii),⁶⁴² the humorous slogans in which read:

Down with the cult of Kuz'minskii, Solzhenitsyn and Brodskii!!! Our goal is Russian literature without a leadership! [...] Dear comrades! Do not forget that the system of 'stars' destroys literature. If the New York Jews cadge the Nobel Prize for Brodskii, it will be the most horrible thing to happen. P.S. And they will cadge it for him! ⁶⁴³

The material aspect of Limonov's jealousy of Brodskii seems to be dominant in his attitude to his fellow writer.⁶⁴⁴

Discussing Brodskii's paper 'The Condition We Call Exile' at the December 1987 conference of writers in exile (Vienna),⁶⁴⁵

Limonov expatiates upon the phenomenon of Brodskii (who has just been awarded the Nobel Prize), as he understands it:

[Brodskii] is an illustration of the star-making process - something that may be all well and good in Hollywood, but which I see as bad for literature. It's not healthy to single out one individual and praise him to the exclusion of everyone else. Is Brodsky the wisest of the exiles? I think not. Is he the best writer? [Voice from the audience: He is!] It's questionable. He was born to be studied; in my opinion, he belongs to the nineteenth century, or, rather, to the beginning of the twentieth century. That's why he is so prized; he's so good, he's a dead poet.⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴²See Kuz'minskii's comments on a selection of Brodskii's poems in Kuzminsky and Kovalev, 1986, vol. 2B, pp.283-330.

⁶⁴³Kuzminsky and Kovalev, 1986, vol.3A, p.37.

⁶⁴⁴In the same letter to Kuz'minskii Limonov introduces yet another straightforward slogan concerning Brodskii: 'Iosif! Give your money to indigent poets!' (Kuzminsky and Kovalev, 1986, vol.3A, p.36).

⁶⁴⁵For reviews of this conference, and Limonov's contribution to it, see Weinzierl, 1987; Kruntorad, 1988.

⁶⁴⁶Glad, 1990, p.111.

Everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion, and there is a great deal of truth in Limonov's point of view, but unfortunately his unworthy motives for defaming Brodskii are too patent. Very revealing are Limonov's comments on the proposal to establish an annual prize for a work written in exile, made by Horst Bienek at the same conference: 'And the prize,- Limonov says,- will again be given to Joseph Brodsky, because he has already received half the prizes of the world'.⁶⁴⁷

Limonov even published a poem, 'Zavist', which carries the dedication 'to Iosif Brodskii, on the occasion of being awarded a prize'. In it, while parodying Brodskii's distinctive enjambement, Limonov openly confesses that, money-wise, he would like to step into Brodskii's shoes:

Между камнями на песке скелет
 Большой макрели. Чайки Тихоокеана
 От рыбы не оставят мяса. Нет [...]
 Мы все нечестен. Каждый нас смешон
 А все же получает деньги «он»
 Мне интересно как это бывает
 Что деньги все же «он» все деньги получает [...]
 Однако б мне хватило этих сумм
⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁷Glad, 1990, p.92.

⁶⁴⁸Limonov, 1986c, pp.11-12. Mr Jukka Mallinen recalls that none other than Andrei Voznesenskii, having mislaid his spectacles, once asked him to read out this particular poem by Limonov and enjoyed it immensely. Although the poem had appeared before the Nobel Prize was bestowed on Brodskii, it reached Voznesenskii only after the award ceremony had taken place. According to Mr Mallinen, 1987 was a year of the most bitter disappointment for Voznesenskii, Evtushenko, Bella Akhmadulina and even Viktor Sosnora. They had all at some point secretly hoped that the Prize would be awarded to one of them, and envied Brodskii badly. The fact that the Nobel Prize went to

However, when asked what he thinks about Brodskii's Nobel Prize for literature, he responds: 'One should not object to the Nobel Prize. What is given, is given. I was not asked whether to award [it to] Brodskii or not. And if I had been asked, I would have answered: give it to him. Someone has to receive Nobel Prizes'.⁶⁴⁹

On 14 May, 1990, Limonov commemorated Brodskii's fiftieth birthday by a short speech broadcast by the BBC Russian Service. In it he stated that Brodskii had been lucky to receive the Nobel Prize shortly before the fall of the Berlin wall. According to Limonov, in 1990, in the troubled time of *perestroika*, even the Nobel Committee would have passed the candidature of Brodskii over, because in the last two years he had become utterly obsolete. In effect, posits Limonov, 'Brodskii was born circa 1888, near St. Louis in Missouri, USA; the peak of his creative activity falls in the period between the two wars - the epoch of jazz, psychoanalysis and soporific novels by Proust. [...] On the library shelves Iosif Brodskii fits in well with Byron and Briusov; by this I mean that he is astonishingly archaic.'⁶⁵⁰

The final point was made when Brodskii died and Limonov's newspaper published the following unsigned 'appreciation', almost certainly written by Limonov himself:

[Brodskii] is servilely overestimated when he is called 'great'. Rubbish! He is mediocre. The talented, vainglorious, prim and dull poet-cum-book-keeper Iosif Brodskii has died. Well, as a poet he died nine years ago, in 1987, when he received his Nobel Prize. At the same time the epoch when and for which Brodskii was writing, and when he was readable, [also] ended. The

Brodskii seriously reduced the chances for any other Russian poet born in the 1930s or 1940s of repeating his success.

⁶⁴⁹Mirchev, 1989, p.98.

⁶⁵⁰Ru, 1990.

epoch of stagnation is well and truly over. It is 1996 now. 'Regiments of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs have been attacked in Dagestan', patters the radio. [...] There is no time to read Brodskii in such an epoch; it is impossible and unnecessary. There is no rocking-chair for it... Brodskii could have become somebody, though... Some notes in his rare and not very characteristic poem 'Na smert' Zhukova' arouse one's admiration. [...] Brodskii was fairly dull as a person: his life lacked pretty women and adventures. Being a stay-at-home bibliophile, he [...] early grew old and mangy. However, he was undoubtedly serious and even sullen both in his life and in his poetry. Untidy and allegedly awkward, he ran his business with distinction, rose to the rank of Nobel laureate and died in his sleep. Russia will not be reading him. When his generation becomes extinct, only female librarians in spectacles will fumble through his volumes from time to time. Farewell, Dzhozef.⁶⁵¹

It is a rhetorical question, of course, but it would be interesting to know how Limonov would react if he read something similar in an obituary of himself. If sports terminology can be used for the description of literary rivalry, one might say that Limonov's feelings towards Brodskii can be compared to those of a boxer who wins on points towards another boxer who wins by knock-outs. And such feelings have led Limonov very far indeed...⁶⁵²

⁶⁵¹[S.n.], 'Umer pevets "zastoia"', *Limonka*, 32, 1996, p.4.

⁶⁵²In addition, it should be pointed out that Limonov does not mind using an occasional quotation from his more successful literary rival. Thus, in his article 'Imperskii instinkt' [The Imperial Instinct] Limonov cites a line from Brodskii's poem 'Pis'ma rimskomu drugu' [Letters to a Roman Friend, 1972] in order to support a proposal to assemble the representatives of all the separatist Popular National Fronts in one cell in the Moscow Butyrki prison: Взгляд, конечно, [очень] варварский, но верный (see Limonov, 1993k, p.7). This proposal

Nevertheless, there is at least one conclusion which can be drawn from our examination of the Limonov-Maksimov and Limonov-Brodskii controversies, and which is to Limonov's credit. Apparently Limonov's attitude to his critics does not depend on whether they praise him or revile him. On the one hand, Limonov attacks Maksimov, who did not object to his poems and violently opposed *Eto ia - Edichka*. On the other hand, he sets upon Brodskii, who highly commended Limonov's poems and felt more or less indifferent about his prose. He approves of a complimentary review of the English translation of *Istoriia ego slugi*, published by Edward J. Brown in *The Nation* of 26 September, 1987,⁶⁵³ but he is even happier with a hostile article in the *Washington Post* which blames Limonov for falling upon the USA (which, after all, granted him asylum) with Leninist fury.⁶⁵⁴

4.6. LIMONOV AS A WRITER-CUM-CRITIC.

This impartiality of Limonov stems from his (often subconsciously) condescending attitude to criticism in general. Such an attitude applies not only to Russian critics, but to their Western colleagues too. Limonov's erstwhile mouthpiece, Nataliia Medvedeva, states: 'Serious literary criticism in the West is virtually non-existent. An example: they write all sorts of garbage about Limonov'.⁶⁵⁵ Dissatisfied with the

was made by the political journalist Robert David (the pseudonym of an Israeli journalist).

⁶⁵³See Glad, 1993, pp.268-69.

⁶⁵⁴See Limonov, 1993a, p.284.

⁶⁵⁵Aleksandrov and Fedorov, 1994, p.23. This opinion is exaggerated because Limonov has found more appreciation among Western critics than among his fellow countrymen (on the other hand, Limonov's phrase in the 1989 interview to John Glad ['I rarely receive negative reviews in the West', Glad, 1993, p.262] is also an exaggeration). In 1976, for instance, in his monograph about contemporary non-official Russian literature Iurii Mal'tsev called Limonov the poet 'an eccentric humorist' (Mal'tsev, 1976, p.286). One might like to compare this

critics, Limonov, however, avoids polemicizing with them.⁶⁵⁶ He says about one such critic, the Russian émigré Lev Navrozov:

One can answer people who criticize you on matters of substance, for what you've written. As far as I know, Navrozov's critiques are exercises in literary jealousy. I think he is a loser; he is irritated by the success of others - Brodskii, for instance. Navrozov had known me for many years and never paid much attention, but when he realized that I was somebody, he decided that he could pounce on me. Thus Navrozov himself was rising in his own estimation.⁶⁵⁷

Curiously, it was Navrozov who in his recent essay 'Literatura bez literaturnoi kritiki' (Literature Without Literary Criticism, 1993) touched on the burning issue of the denigration of literary criticism, so typical of many writers, especially those with strong links to Russian culture.⁶⁵⁸ The scholar Igor'

misleading label to the following penetrating remarks which preceded the publication of translations of some of Limonov's poems in a British magazine the very same year: 'Eduard Limonov creates moods that agitate a change in psychic situations and gives them colour, smell and taste, clothing them in concretely formed environments. Courageous formal experiments or semantic transformations are seldom found in his work. He uses a common vocabulary, while being a sharp observer of human landscapes, not only his own but also social and literary ones. His poems are limned in personal gestures full of verve and rich in fantasy. The free, loose form of Limonov's poetry leaves him far from the conventional frame. To a certain extent he expresses the folk soul in his work, but he also reflects ironically on his literary fate' (Hunt, 1976, pp.45-46).

⁶⁵⁶Limonov eagerly disputes with his political opponents, though. Thus, he did not fail to reply to the criticism of excerpts from his book *Limonov protiv Zhirinovskogo* (see Beliak, 1994; Limonov, 1994l).

⁶⁵⁷Mirchev, 1989, p.92.

⁶⁵⁸See *Megapolis-ekspress*, 23, 1993, p.8. Here Navrozov mentions Limonov in passing, calling him a writer who became bored with the

Kondakov finds stronger words to label the same phenomenon. According to him, there is a mortal combat between literature and literary criticism, and it has been the most characteristic feature of Russian culture over the past three hundred years. He gets to the bottom of this problem in his wonderful study 'Pokushenie na literaturu' (The Assault on Literature, 1992). In this study Kondakov points to an alarming tendency in the relationship between literature and literary criticism:

Literature was being pushed, more and more persistently and unceremoniously, to the background of culture, and used as a source, as material and a pretext, for the critical consideration of *social* [...] life. In contrast, literary criticism which regarded literature [...] as an excuse for its own broad, extraliterary generalizations and theories was moving to the forefront. For its part, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian fiction was gradually accumulating its irritation towards the professional critics and to literary criticism as a whole, because they laid claim to the leadership of and control over culture and categorically judged literature and writers from the 'highest' point of view, which was known only to the critics themselves and was almost insulting to art and literature.⁶⁵⁹

This fundamental controversy extended its influence well into the twentieth century. However, in Russian culture there have always been tendencies opposite to the one described above, and they mitigated, if not undermined, its all-pervading impact. In particular, one of the common ways for a Russian writer to fight the dictatorship of literary criticism was to assume the role of critic himself. Pushkin and Dostoevskii, Briusov and Brodskii were formidable essayists. Limonov

West because, failing to surprise anyone with his pornographic writings there, he could not gain either money or notoriety and was forced to transfer his activities to the inexperienced Russia.

⁶⁵⁹Kondakov, 1992, pp.90-91.

stuck to the beaten track when he chose the plight of a writer-cum-critic. Nevertheless, Limonov's individual contribution to the critical genres seems to have aggravated the conflict between Russian literature and literary criticism, rather than assisting to bridge the gap.

Apart from his critiques of Brodskii and the group 'Konkret',⁶⁶⁰ Limonov has produced a number of essays (most notably in 1975 in *Novoe russkoe slovo*; in it Limonov was in charge of the rubrics 'Chto chitaiut v Moskve' [What They Are Reading in Moscow], 'Novyi avangard' [A New Avant-Garde] and 'Tret'ia emigratsiia - kto oni?' [The Third Wave - Who Are They?]), marked with insights into the subtlety of nuances in the manner of the poets and prose-writers analysed, and revealing the knowledge of a genuine insider. Limonov was one of the first to introduce to the Russian émigré community and Western Slavists those underground authors from the Soviet Union who had not previously enjoyed (a well deserved) wide recognition, Venedikt Erofeev and Iurii Mamleev among them.⁶⁶¹ In certain instances Limonov chose to present talented literary figures of whom very little is known even today, such as Aleksandr Morozov, the author of the novels *Chuzhie pis'ma* [Other People's Letters], *Filosof Zherebillo* [Zherebillo the Philosopher] and *Sestry Kozomazovy* [The Kozomazov Sisters], as well as the poets Viktor Tupitsyn, Dmitrii Savitskii, Vladimir Aleinikov, Genrikh Khudiakov and Il'ia Bokshtein.⁶⁶² It is obvious that Limonov the critic largely saw his mission as creating a reputation for those authors who had not yet come into prominence⁶⁶³ (cf.: 'The readers of

⁶⁶⁰See Chapter 1.

⁶⁶¹See Limonov, 1975b.

⁶⁶²See Limonov, 1975b; Limonov, 1975c; Limonov, 1975d; Limonov, 1975j; Limonov, 1985b. Limonov's piece on Khudiakov was reprinted in Kuzminsky and Kovalev, 1980, vol.1, pp.509-10.

⁶⁶³In accordance with his programme of action in the West devised in his poem 'Novyi 1975-i' [New Year 1975] (the poem is addressed to his old Khar'kov friends whose names and lives would have disappeared into total oblivion had it not been for Limonov): 'Ребята! Я Вами

Novoe russkoe slovo have heard of Brodskii; there are other names, however'⁶⁶⁴), and, as we have seen earlier, as damaging the reputations of those who, in his view, have become part of literary establishment in the Soviet Union and in the West (Evtushenko, Voznesenskii, Maksimov, Brodskii and others; thus, Limonov denies Bella Akhmadulina's claims that her poetry is in opposition to the Soviet regime, calling her 'a poseur' who 'imitates the unruly Tsvetaeva with affectation'⁶⁶⁵).

When reading Limonov's critical appreciations of his colleagues, it is hard to believe, as he wants us to, that he has not completed his secondary education. The depth of his observations, as well as his erudition⁶⁶⁶ and flair for precise terminology should make many fully qualified literary critics jealous. He was probably the first to use the term 'the third literature' to describe the material he chiefly worked with, i.e. neither Soviet, nor Russian émigré literature.⁶⁶⁷ Later he suggested the use of the term 'unofficial literature' which seems to be even more appropriate for the description of the main subject of his interest as a critic. According to Limonov, the term 'unofficial literature' should be used on a par with the more widespread term 'Samizdat' in order to differentiate unofficial fiction and poetry from the 'social and political journalism which has recently inundated Samizdat'.⁶⁶⁸ He also

отпущенный / Чтоб тут бы ходить и жить / Другое видеть. Не лучшее / Другим о Вас доложить' (see Limonov 1975k; italics are mine - A.R.).

⁶⁶⁴Limonov, 1975i.

⁶⁶⁵Limonov, 1975e.

⁶⁶⁶Thus, Limonov compares Kropivnitskii to Aleksandr Stepanovich Roslavlev (1883-1920), the now forgotten author of the poem 'Iude' [To Judas, 1907] and the novella 'Zapiski politseiskogo pristava' [Notes of a Police Officer, 1916] (see Limonov, 1975i); he also draws a parallel between Khudiakov and Isidore Isou, creator of the French *lettrisme*, and analyses Mamleev in the context of Egyptian mythology (see Limonov, 1975j; Limonov, 1975b).

⁶⁶⁷See Limonov, 1975j.

⁶⁶⁸Limonov, 1975l.

raises objections to the terms 'avant-garde' and 'underground literature' as applied to the phenomenon in question. Limonov deems the word 'avant-garde' obsolete and points out that many representatives of 'unofficial literature' do not see themselves as avant-gardists. He rejects the expression 'underground literature', because 'unofficial literature', in his opinion, does not hide in the underground; 'on the contrary, it tries to distribute its production by all possible means'.⁶⁶⁹ Limonov is also unhappy with the term 'small circle' proposed by the émigré writer V.Andreeva in her series of articles devoted to the 'unofficial' poets L.Aranzon, A.Volokhonskii, S.Krasovitskii, L.Ioffe etc. (see *Novoe russkoe slovo* of 20 July and 10 August, 1975). 'Who is in the big circle, then? Evtushenko? Vinokurov?' asks Limonov venomously.⁶⁷⁰

Limonov the critic demonstrates a firm grasp and an invariably pertinent application of the professional phraseology of literary scholars. Here are but a few examples: 'Kholin is often called an "anti-poet". However, that means only that he is not a lyric poet. He is an epic poet.'; 'Vsevolod Nekrasov's poems are mostly propped up by intonation. There are rhymes in them, but they are chiefly sustained by an inner tension. He often uses reiterations (*povtory*).'⁶⁷¹ Limonov even ventures to take part in an argument about the lyrical hero in contemporary Russian literature led by an American Professor, a specialist in Slavonic Studies (one should treat this fact as an early proof of Limonov's eagerness to theoretize on his favourite subject of the literary hero):

I am sorry to say, I was almost shouting. I was saying: 'You do not know much about Russian literature! This is not your fault, of course, you are badly informed. You know only those [authors] who are named by the Soviet press in a positive or a negative context. Are you aware that there is a whole world of authors outside the

⁶⁶⁹Limonov, 1975l.

⁶⁷⁰Limonov, 1975l.

⁶⁷¹Limonov, 1975g.

[Soviet] Writers' Union? [...] There is an intense spiritual life out there! The lyrical hero of the 'third literature' is certainly a tragic figure!⁶⁷²

Limonov's expert guidance through the uncharted area occupied by the Russian literary underground of the 1960s and 1970s is highly valuable (it is worth recalling that the first volume of the comprehensive Kuz'minskii and Kovalev anthology appeared only in 1980). One can only regret that Limonov's literary criticism is so condensed, and that he has written so little.⁶⁷³ However, it is no surprise that he has been so prolific as a political journalist. After all, what is political journalism, from the Russian point of view, if not literary criticism taken to extremes? As Kondakov points out, 'from the late works of Belinskii onwards, [...] Russian literary criticism has been more and more consistent in deviating from purely cultural [...] problems, and has assumed a purely political function'.⁶⁷⁴

Political criteria seem to have influenced Limonov's opinion of his fellow writers from an early stage. Thus, he deems fashionable representatives of the so-called Russian village prose, such as Vasilii Shukshin, Vladimir Soloukhin and

⁶⁷²Limonov, 1975j.

⁶⁷³Limonov also tried his hand as an amateur art critic. In his articles featuring the work of such semi- and unofficial Russian artists and sculptors as Petr Belenok, Vladimir Iakovlev and Ernst Neizvestnyi (see *Novoe russkoe slovo* of 18 and 25 May, and of 7 September, 1975), Limonov has made full use of his gift for describing rather vividly those objects of art which he was not able to illustrate with photographs (for an example of a later manifestation of this gift, now in a novel, see Limonov's description of the pictures by the fictional French artist Monique in Limonov, 1996e, pp.314-15). Besides, the taste of Limonov the art connoisseur is revealed in his recognition of the exotic work of the Armenian artists Kachaz, Rubik Kochar'ian and Varuzhan Tshit'ian exhibited in New York (see *Novoe russkoe slovo* of 21 September, 1975).

⁶⁷⁴Kondakov, 1992, p.119.

others, 'honest, but oversimplified and dull-witted artists' whose primitive schemes ultimately do damage to Russian culture, because the Soviet Union uses these authors to cultivate and successfully promote a supposedly humane image of its own.⁶⁷⁵ It is small wonder, therefore, that some twenty years later Limonov, in his preface to the collection of short stories *THE* by the prose writer and radical political activist Aleksei Tsvetkov,⁶⁷⁶ praises Tsvetkov for 'ignoring the differences between the spheres of politics, art and science, as he believes that this distinction has been foisted onto society'.⁶⁷⁷ It seems only logical that literature and politics tend to intermix in Limonov's most recent journalism, as happened recently in his debate with the then Chairman of the Russian Federation's Committee for the Press, Sergei Gryzunov. Gryzunov lists *Limonka* among the Russian Fascist publications and suggests that it should be banned; he calls Limonov an adept of Adolf Hitler, claims that Limonov's characters are 'spiritually devastated' and suggests that one can create such hopeless personages only out of one's own personality. Limonov points to the differences between Fascism and nationalism and wonders who Gryzunov thinks he is when he tells the Russians what to read and what not to read.⁶⁷⁸

In his innumerable purely political articles, directed at his rivals, Limonov often goes beyond the limits of decency and

⁶⁷⁵See Limonov, 1975a.

⁶⁷⁶One of the leaders of the left-wing movement 'Fioletovyi Internatsional' (The Purple International, founded in 1992; its Moscow branch, of which Tsvetkov is a member, has been known as 'the Partisan Movement' since 1993) and of the student union 'Studencheskaia zashchita' (The Students' Defence, founded in 1994). Not to be confused with the poet and employee of Radio Liberty Aleksei Tsvetkov, who has also been mentioned in this dissertation.

⁶⁷⁷Limonov, 1997a, p.3.

⁶⁷⁸See Gryzunov, 1995; Limonov, 1995e; Gryzunov, 1995a.

nearly always hits the nail on the head.⁶⁷⁹ As far as Russian political high-fliers are concerned, he suggested that Gorbachev should be guillotined⁶⁸⁰ and exposed El'tsin's alleged tryst with a French prostitute during the official visit of the Russian President to France in 1992.⁶⁸¹

Limonov's political views were essentially summarized in his 'Manifest Rossiiskogo natsionalizma'. A Russian person (*rossiianin*) is a person who accepts Russian culture and the history of the Russian state (including the Soviet period) as his or her own culture and history, regardless of his or her national or racial origin.⁶⁸² Russian nationalists do not recognize the anti-constitutional act of the destruction of the Soviet Union. Where Russian people live, there lie the

⁶⁷⁹See, for example, Limonov, 1992h; Limonov, 1994m; Limonov, 1994n; Limonov, 1994o; Limonov, 1994p; Limonov, 1995f; as well as Limonov's articles in the newspaper *Limonka*. Here is a recent ironic appreciation of Limonov's social and political journalism by Feliks Efimov:

СПАСИТЕ ВАШИ УШИ

Писатель Эдик занят очень,
он социально озабочен.
В крикливых опусах сполна
всех посылает в ..., к ..., на
Брань под личиной прямодушья
бьет по глазам, полощет уши.
Труд с лексикой генитальной
рекомендован... вагинально.

(Efimov, 1996, p.362).

⁶⁸⁰See Limonov, 1993f.

⁶⁸¹See Limonov, 1993l. Limonov's contemptuous attitude towards El'tsin as a grey, semi-literate, narrow-minded and indolent opportunist has been expressed in the article 'Prezident?' (see Limonov, 1993m). A caricature of El'tsin in the disguise of President Kuznetsov is to be found in Limonov, 1998.

⁶⁸²Nevertheless, Limonov repudiated Zhirinovskii's candidacy in the Russian presidential elections on the grounds of his Jewish roots (see Limonov, 1993o).

territorial claims of the nationalists. Asia, not the hostile West, is regarded as Russia's natural ally. El'tsin's regime has nothing to do with democracy and should be replaced by a nationalist dictatorship which will bring law and order to Russia via the strengthening of the army and security forces. Although such a power structure should not be reminiscent of the old Communist authorities, it will need a period of the so-called economic dictatorship in order to remove foreign capital from Russia, abolish the predatory policy of 'shock therapy' and bring the Russian economy back to its senses. To achieve this, a nationalist revolution should be staged - a peaceful one, if nobody stands in its way, and a violent one, if otherwise.⁶⁸³ Russia should be restored as an empire, since empire is essentially 'a magnificent, superior form of a state'.⁶⁸⁴

Numerous articles critical of Limonov's political views have been quoted and/or referred to throughout this thesis, and it seems that there is no need to recapitulate their content here. I can only express my regret that Limonov's ideas are so rarely taken notice of,⁶⁸⁵ since his publicistic skills seem to

⁶⁸³See Limonov, 1992g. For a scenario of a peaceful takeover linked to Limonov's hopes to enter the Russian Parliament in 1999 see the unsigned interview 'Novogodnie voprosy vozhdia NBP' in *Limonka*, 82, 1998, p.3. For an alternative plan for a rebellion linked to a rock-festival in Sevastopol' (Sebastopol) scheduled for summer 1999 see Limonov's 'Stsenarii vooruzhennogo vosstaniia' in *Limonka*, 83, 1998, pp.1-2.

⁶⁸⁴Limonov, 1993k. On the notion of 'nationalist revolution' see also Limonov, 1993p.

⁶⁸⁵Here are the few examples of a sound approach to Limonov: Bogomolov, 1992 (an analysis of the roots of Limonov's extremism); Simonian and Druzenko, 1991 (a discussion of Limonov's economic programme); Toporov, 1993 (a brief study of the links between Limonov's politics and poetics). It is much easier to come across an unsubstantiated irony (see, for instance, Ivanov, 1991; Kuznetsova, 1991, p.15; Gol'din, 1992). An uncritical reception of Limonov's political standpoint is almost impossible to find even among his

have no match among contemporary Russian commentators on current affairs.⁶⁸⁶ This activity, which gives voice to Limonov's extremist and dictatorial inclinations even better than do his innovative poetry and rebellious prose, seems to have replaced his fiction almost completely. It looks as though he has not written any significant work of art since the beginning of the 1990s, and the books which keep appearing are simply collections of what was created by him earlier, but which had not been published in Russian until recently.⁶⁸⁷ It is very characteristic that despite his fervent publishing activities (over ten titles in the last five years), current literary surveys do not include Limonov the author in their picture of today's Russian literature.⁶⁸⁸ In Russia, apparently, Limonov's popularity/notoriety rating might be compared only to Solzhenitsyn's (if we confine ourselves to Limonov's fellow writers only), but Limonov, like Zinov'ev, is not considered to be an active participant in the current literary process. The outstanding achievement of Limonov the writer of fiction is not just underestimated, it is ignored,⁶⁸⁹ and

nationalistic allies (for a unique example of such an attitude see Zadonskii, 1991, pp.10-11).

⁶⁸⁶Vladimir Kozlovskii deems certain political analyses in *Limonka* 'prophetic' (see Kozlovskii, 1997).

⁶⁸⁷Cf. Nataliia Medvedeva's testimony given in 1991: '[Limonov] wrote [enough books] in advance for several years to come. His publishers could not keep up with him' (Medvedeva, 1997, p.99).

⁶⁸⁸See Korabel'nikov, 1994. Limonov offers his own interpretation of why he is often ignored by literary critics and political observers alike. He calls such people the 'professionals of the establishment' (*professionalny ofitsioza*) and emphasizes that he has never belonged to any establishment (see Limonov, 1993i, p.1).

⁶⁸⁹Although he has achieved a celebrity status and is clearly enjoying himself when he becomes a piece of news for gossip columns (see the unsigned information 'Eduarda Limonova perestali puskat' v nochnye kluby' in *Moskovskii komsomolets* of 29 September, 1997, p.12), or tells the readers of *Moskovskaia pravda* how he spent his latest weekend (see the issue of 26 September, 1997, p.9), or offers the readers of the

Limonov's reputation is not the only reason for this. We are witnessing a battle between Limonov the author and Limonov the critic (the latter being the logical continuation of the former), and the critic appears to be winning.

The roots of such a struggle, which seems to be inherent in cultures other than Russian (although, perhaps, not to the same degree of tension), were exposed by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*, written in the 1930s. The Italian revolutionary stated:

Any fixed image is a priori reactionary for the man of politics: the politician examines the phenomena as they develop. The author, on the contrary, should work with fixed images, images in their final shape. [...] In a sense, a 'political' critic (or a politician involved in literary criticism) and an author cannot understand each other at all. In practice, their 'alliance' is always unnatural.⁶⁹⁰

Therefore it is hardly surprising that Limonov's political activity is destroying the very foundations on which it was initially based, namely, the writer's artistry (although this was not the case with, for example, Dostoevskii). Limonov himself admits: 'My journalistic activities negatively affect my career as an author'.⁶⁹¹ A Western journalist notes: 'Limonov makes no secret of his political ambitions. Should he ever come to power he has promised to ban the books of Eduard

Moscow English-language newspaper *Exile* his advice on how to stay young (see Limonov, 1998b).

⁶⁹⁰Quoted from Kondakov, 1992, p.120.

⁶⁹¹Limonov, 1992f. However, as early as 1977 Limonov planned to study journalism at the Columbia University of New York (see his letter to V.E.Maksimov of 2 November, 1977, currently in the Maksimov collection in the Historisches Archiv, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, University of Bremen).

Limonov the writer'.⁶⁹² Thus the life and art of Limonov are nearing their logical end.⁶⁹³

⁶⁹²Tien, 1993, p.34; Limonov, 1993f. Cf. also Limonov's own note that he 'abandoned [his] creative activity for the sake of the [National Bolshevik] Party' (Limonov, 1996) and his confession that he is not interested in writing books any more (see Markina, 1998).

⁶⁹³Limonov's latest novel, entitled *316, punkt 'V'* (Article 316, Clause 'c'; see Limonov, 1998), aptly illustrates the internal controversy between Limonov the author and Limonov the critic/politician. This is an anti-Utopia, set in 2015 in a post-nuclear-war world, when, according to the eponymous law, all citizens of the USA over 65 years of age become eligible for elimination. Ippolit Luk'ianov, author of crime novels, has just reached this age, but he regards the law as inhuman and does not want to obey it. He flees from the special agents of the Department of Demography who have been put in charge of implementing this law. It turns out that Luk'ianov is a lookalike of Saul Jenkins, Head of the Department of Demography, the author of the ruthless article 316 and the most powerful person in the USA. As a result of a number of lucky coincidences which lead to a successful 'palace revolution', Luk'ianov replaces Jenkins and no one notices the difference. Instead of reversing Jenkins's policy, however, Luk'ianov, after much cogitation and mature reflection, decides to continue to go ahead with it, because he cannot see any other radical solution to the crucial problem of overpopulation. Needless to say, *316, punkt 'V'* is little else than a thinly veiled explanation of how and why Limonov the politician has taken over from Limonov the author. It is tempting to treat *316, punkt 'V'* as Limonov's farewell to fiction, although, with Limonov's everlasting ability to take his readership by surprise, other fictional works might still materialize.

CONCLUSION

Any conclusion other than a very cautious and preliminary one seems to be pointless in the analysis of the creative activity of any living author. It often happens that the scholar does not really have time to come up with some kind of generalization concerning his or her author before the 'subject' lets the scholar down by making sudden and dramatic changes in his or her views, style and manner and, therefore, ruining the whole piece of research. Limonov definitely belongs to this very inconvenient category of highly unpredictable writers. If this dissertation looks a little patchy, with some issues (such as Limonov's concept of the Hero and Limonov's use of fictional doubles) taking priority over and therefore occupying more space than the others (the writer's language, for example, or the psychoanalytical approach to his creative activity⁶⁹⁴), it is the controversial Mr Limonov who is to blame. We tried merely to outline the main *raison d'être* behind Limonov's elusive Self as it is exhibited in his chaotic, multilateral and multilayered body of work.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹⁴A short, but promising, study by the Canadian scholar Ljiljana Coklin suggests that Edichka's seemingly uncontrolled monologue in Limonov's first novel has a therapeutic significance as it helps the narrator to recover from his neurotic trauma inflicted by his numerous personal losses (see Coklin, 1997). A Freudian insight into Limonov could also be developed further by recourse to such studies as Rogers, 1970 and Rank, 1971.

⁶⁹⁵Incidentally, as for the question why Limonov the politician now clings so desperately to the remnants of the Soviet system which in the old days ousted him to the West, a possible explanation could be drawn from the following comment made by Dr Donald Hunter in connection with the Soviet double agent Oleg Bitov, who defected to the United Kingdom in 1983 and then returned, perhaps involuntarily, to the Soviet Union in 1984: 'Which émigré is not, in his heart of hearts, a double agent of sorts, owing the deepest allegiance to a

However, there are some theoretical corollaries to be discussed in the wake of our study of Limonov's output. The focus of our research was partly aimed at Limonov's biography (his life, his work and the critical reception of it) and partly at the literary sources of his writings (including the critique of these writings - the critique which Limonov apparently peruses when looking for ideas about what and how to write next).

The subject of literary sources as we term it (see Introduction) should be ascribed to the department of the theory of literary influence and, more specifically, to that model of influence according to which the author

consciously chooses literary predecessors and traditions of social, political, historical, economic and scientific thought with which to interact in a freely defined intertextual space. This model assumes an active, positive and mutually illuminating relationship between the poet's work and that of both predecessors and contemporaries.⁶⁹⁶

In the case of Limonov this widespread presupposition looks debatable, at the very least. Whereas in Chapter 3 of our thesis we have every indication, including Limonov's own admissions, that he indeed reveres Maiakovskii and has taken

vision, albeit an impossible vision, of his *patria*, from which, in the end, his identity and his very being derives? [...] He remains, at root, a Soviet man, *homo naturaliter sovieticus*, impossible to understand and unable to exist except in the context of the Soviet system.

Paradoxically, outside the Soviet Union, the émigré derives more of his meaning and his very *raison d'être* from that system than ever he did inside.' (Hunter, 1985, p.6.)

⁶⁹⁶Beach, 1992, p.42. This definition, of course, should not be taken as gospel; for a different approach to the problem of literary influence see, for example, *Aspects of the Novel* by E.M.Forster (Forster, 1966 [1927], pp.21-30).

a great deal from this great poet, Chapter 2 seems to be struggling for evidence when it comes to the question of whether Limonov has actually read Krasnov's novel *Za chertopolokhom* at all. In fact, our positive answer to this question, chiefly based on the comparative analysis of Limonov's and Krasnov's texts, contradicts Limonov's own statement. When asked in a private conversation with my supervisor, Mr Martin Dewhirst, whether he knew Krasnov's works, Limonov replied that he did not. But then again, who will believe a man who at one point in his career (when living in the West) denied almost any connection between his writings and the traditions of Russian literature,⁶⁹⁷ and now (when living in Russia) says directly the opposite?⁶⁹⁸

At any rate, in the light of what has been said above, the creative relationship between Limonov and Krasnov can hardly be called 'conscious' (we are unaware of the reasons why Limonov disputes it, and we do not know whether Limonov himself is aware of the reasons for disputing it). This relationship cannot be deemed very 'positive' either (simply because Limonov disputes it in the first place), but it is still an example of literary influence, as our text analysis suggests. It looks as if the traditional model of literary influence, as described in the above quotation from Christopher Beach, needs a correction - to allow for the relative 'independence' of the literary production from its creator.

Notwithstanding this, in the case of Limonov this independence never goes beyond certain limits. The theory of literary influence, in its turn, has been incorporated into the theory of intertextuality, as developed by Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes and their numerous followers. This theory usually emphasizes the interdependence of any one literary text with all those texts that have chronologically preceded it. Intertextuality, however, is not necessarily connected with the study of literary sources of such a text. Since both terms,

⁶⁹⁷See, for example, Mirchev, 1989, p.91.

⁶⁹⁸See, for example, Limonov, 1992d, p.169.

influence and intertextuality, have too many definitions for us to be able to choose only one for each, we will content ourselves with an operating generalization that 'influence has to do with agency, whereas intertextuality has to do with a much more impersonal field of crossing texts'.⁶⁹⁹ Such an assertion implies, above all, that two types of technique - tracking down literary influences and establishing intertextual links - should not be confused and are more useful when not intermixed. For our part, throughout our thesis we deliberately combined both the biographical approach, which deals predominantly with agents (in particular, with the agents of influence), and the technique of close reading, which mainly deals with depersonalized texts. As a result, we demonstrated successfully, we hope, that in Limonov's case (we would not wish to extend our speculation any further) the biographical approach serves not as an obstruction, but as a correlative to a number of texts which might have influenced Limonov the writer. Regardless of the lack of direct indications that Limonov has read Krasnov, Krasnov still falls within the circle of 'Limonovian' authors, whereas, say, Mikhail Kuzmin does not (despite the importance of the homosexual theme for both Limonov and Kuzmin, these two writers are from different literary galaxies). In other words, the study of Limonov prompts us to ally ourselves with the theoretical point which now is often considered old-fashioned, namely that 'influence depends on the lives of authors, and in our accounts of these lives, incident should illustrate character and character determine incident'.⁷⁰⁰ If our outline of Limonov's life, work, literary sources and critics argues about anything at all, it is an argument against the practice when certain formulae are established by a given literary theory and then texts have to be bent or ignored to fit this theory.

One more question which demands an answer by way of conclusion is whether Limonov will still be read by future

⁶⁹⁹Clayton and Rothstein, p.4.

⁷⁰⁰Clayton and Rothstein, p.14.

generations of Russian readers, and if yes, then why. Although it seems rather unwise to make forecasts of this type, we shall give it a try.

In our opinion, the main reason why Limonov turned into what he is derives from the fact that all his life he has been trying to sell his art to those people who did not want it. An undoubtedly gifted author, he issued Samizdat collections of his poetry with moderate success, but failed to get through to the official Soviet literary establishment due to his fairly avant-garde manner and was ultimately expelled from the Soviet Union for what might be termed incompatibility with the Soviet life-style. As the West refused to take much interest in yet another dissident Russian poet, the stubborn Limonov, instead of adjusting to the demand of the labour market and recycling himself accordingly (his broken English precluded him from pursuing a career as an American writer), decided to create a scandalous myth around his own name and thus make his way to (dubious) stardom. Not that he was unprepared to compromise in order to achieve his goal. His switch from poetry to prose was aimed at facilitating the potential translatability and, therefore, accessibility of his work. Skilfully manipulating his status as an undesirable outsider to attract the (usually brief and condescending) attention of editors and critics, he managed eventually, by hook or by crook (his tumultuous romance with politics included), to get his books published, to make ends meet and to achieve a certain degree of recognition, usually exaggerated by Limonov himself. However, if Limonov's unquestionable competence in the art of self-promotion constituted the only grounds for him to remain in the history of Russian literature he would hardly be remembered for long.

If Limonov's poetry and fiction stand the ghost of a chance of being re-read, say, one hundred years from now, it will have very little to do with his self-proclaimed cult status (as is well-known, a product should be advertised repeatedly to make customers buy it, and there is no guarantee that after

Limonov's death anyone will continue to push his publications with the same devotion). Neither will his undisputed talent help (there are innumerable talented Russian writers who have sunk into complete, if unjust, oblivion). Nor will Limonov's slim opportunities of becoming, God forbid, a prominent Russian statesman save his writings from falling victim to posterity's amnesia (Leonid Brezhnev was Head of the Soviet state and his autobiographical trilogy *Vozrozhdenie*, *Tselina* and *Vospominaniia* used to be part of the school curriculum - does anyone read them now?). The only thing which could secure Limonov's triumph with the generations to come is, in our view, Russia's perpetual and vexing underachievement leading to a massive inferiority complex on a national scale. Limonov's obvious obsession with social justice⁷⁰¹ stems not from his philanthropic love of his

⁷⁰¹The ultimate artistic expression of Limonov's social standpoint seems to be captured in an untitled poem reproduced below in its entirety:

Я ходил в супермаркеты вместо дворцов
Проводил я там множество тихих часов
Злобно слушая музыку, о дорогая!
И скопления мяса кровавых кусков
Реквизитом казались мне рая...

Я дрожал перед стендами. Горы еды
Моря пива и реки шипящей воды
Ударяли мне в челюсти, их омывая
Разминая в кармане горсть теплых монет
Ощущал я как хрупок мой хрупкий скелет
Под одеждой дрожит распухая

Я ходил в супермаркеты... Там как Мальмот
Я топтался часами. Презрительно рот
Искривлялся в улыбочке бритвенно-тонкой
Вы хотите чтоб после, я род бы людской
Бы любил бы как прежде. Как червь городской
Умилялся мадонне с ребенком...? (Limonov, 1995g, p.101)

neighbour but from his profound conviction that he has been undeservedly denied his fair share of the pie. In the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union, with a handful of corrupt *nouveaux riches* taking over the impoverished and disorderly country, millions of Russians harbour the same strong feelings, blaming everyone but themselves for the current state of affairs. As long as the above-mentioned

An unexpected comparison between Limonov's lyrical 'I' and the protagonist in the novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by the Irishman Charles Robert Maturin (1782-1824) invites a brief inquest into the nature of their affinity. Melmoth and the lyrical hero of Limonov's poem share demonic laughter, prompted by their contempt for mankind (Презрительно рот /Искривлялся в улыбочке бритвенно-тонкой); life after death (Melmoth receives an additional 150 years of life in exchange for his immortal soul; as for the 'I' of Limonov's poem, his émigré existence gives him his chance of a fresh start which is comparable to re-birth); the ability to travel through time and space (it is not incidental that the supermarket in Limonov's poem is described as a country of sorts: Горы еды /Моря лива и реки шипящей воды); the futile quest for paradise (Реквизитом казались мне рая); a female confidant (the unspecified "дорогая" in the case of Limonov, and Immalee, a girl from a desert island, in that of Melmoth) on whom the image of an intrinsically unfair world order is foisted (Melmoth's speeches to that effect, addressed to Immalee, remind us of the content of the above-cited poem). Most important of all, however, seems to be the following little note added by Maturin to the main narration: "As, by a mode of criticism equally false and unjust, the worst sentiments of my worst characters [...] have been represented as *my own*, I must here trespass so far on the patience of the reader as to assure him that the sentiments ascribed to the stranger [Melmoth] are diametrically opposed to mine, and that I have purposely put them into the mouth of an agent of the enemy of mankind." (Maturin, 1977, pp.404-05.) In the light of this note we are inclined to treat Limonov's reference to *Melmoth the Wanderer* as a hidden request to differentiate between Limonov the author and Limonov the character - a notion which the majority of Limonov's critics are still struggling to grasp.

underachievement lasts, enough Russians will continue to associate themselves (and sympathize) with the sentiments of Limonov the outsider to keep his posthumous fame alive.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Only the books and articles referred to in the notes to each chapter are listed here. When parts of almanacs and edited volumes are being used as sources, they are normally referred to under the name of the author of the contribution. However, the book itself is usually listed under its title when there are other parts of it which are relevant for our topic. TV and radio programmes and interviews, archival documents, reference books and periodical articles of minor importance mentioned in the thesis, as a rule, are not included. Page references are missing only in the instances where newspapers were not available and cuttings were used instead. For more obscure periodicals the place of publication is provided. I used lower-case letters to differentiate between the works of the same author published during any one year (e.g., 1993a, 1993b etc.). However, the alphabetical order of these letters does not necessarily coincide with the chronological order of the publications within each year. It rather reflects the order of appearance of these publications in the notes to the dissertation.

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