

## Scripting the Revolutionary Worker Autobiography: Archetypes, Models, Inventions, and Markets\*

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**SUMMARY:** This essay offers approaches to reading worker autobiographies as a genre as well as source of historical “data”. It focuses primarily on one example of worker narrative, the autobiographical notes of Eduard M. Dune, recounting his experiences in the Russian Revolution and civil war, and argues that such texts cannot be utilized even as “data” without also appreciating the ways in which they were shaped and constructed. The article proposes some ways to examine the cultural constructions of such documents, to offer a preliminary typology of lower-class autobiographical statements for Russia and the Soviet Union, and to offer some suggestions for bringing together the skills of literary scholars and historians to the task of reading workers’ autobiographies.

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In the proliferation of the scholarly study of the autobiographical genre in the past decades, the autobiographies of “common people” have received insignificant attention. Autobiography, it has been argued, is a bourgeois genre, the artifact of the development of modern liberal individualism, the product of individuals with leisure and education to contemplate their selfhood in the luxury of time.<sup>1</sup> Peasants, particularly during the time of “motionless history”, are judged to constitute “anti-autobiographical space”. Workers, whether agricultural, artisanal, or industrial, are so constrained by their collective identity as workers that they, too, are incapable of creating a unique story of self. Roy Pascal argues that autobiography is a middle-class form of narrative, and workers who adopt the form sacrifice their independence: the act of testimony itself renders

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1. Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, Paul John Eakin (ed.), Katherine Leary (tr.) (Minneapolis, MN, 1989); Regenia Gagnier, “Social Atoms: Working-Class Autobiography, Subjectivity, and Gender”, *Victorian Studies*, 30 (1987), pp. 335–363, and Mary Jo Maynes, *Taking the Hard Road: Life Course in French and German Workers’ Autobiographies in the Era of Industrialization* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995), p. 32, point out this bias.

the testifier an invalid representative of the group.<sup>2</sup> For working-class autobiographers, subjectivity – being a significant agent worthy of the regard of others, a human subject as well as an individuated “ego”, or I for oneself, distinct from others – was assumed to be absent.<sup>3</sup> Insofar as the subordinate classes speak, their voices are so filtered through the expectations and constraints of the dominant society, that their expressions of self cannot be reliably interpreted as an autonomous act of creation.

Moreover, worker autobiographies lack sufficient aesthetic properties to render them of interest to critics. As Jane Gary Harris writes, “The most literary autobiographies, then, may be viewed as those in which the balance seems to shift toward aesthetic interpretation; the more commonplace autobiographies – usually not written by creative writers – as those in which the balance tends toward the life experience, memory, or truth as opposed to discourse.”<sup>4</sup> Reginald Zelnik, who has pioneered the study of Russian working-class autobiography, also reflects this judgment of the commonplace worker narrative when he praises the autobiography of Semen Kanatchikov for its style, which “though not elegant, is refreshing in comparison with much of what passes for working-class memoir literature”.<sup>5</sup>

Yet hundreds of such worker autobiographies exist in the languages of the industrializing world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and historians have come to recognize that these autobiographical statements can and must be apprehended not only in terms of their contribution to an understanding of “life experience”, but also with consideration of their status as narrative texts. The construction of these individual life stories is influenced by cultural narrative models, by collective memory, by scripts already circulating in society at large. The authors of these personal narratives, whatever their motives for forging the autobiographical pact, must thus necessarily reflect the array of discourses that shape the life narratives they create. But they are also seeking to tell their own story, a story of “I” as part of but also different from “we”.<sup>6</sup>

This essay will offer some suggestions for reading Russian worker autobiographies as a genre of considerable historical importance. Histor-

2. Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge, MA, 1960), as cited in Gagnier, “Social Atoms”, p. 337.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 338.

4. Jane Gary Harris, “Introduction. Diversity of Discourse: Autobiographical Statements in Theory and Praxis”, in Jane Gary Harris (ed.), *Autobiographical Statements in Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, (Princeton, NJ, 1990), pp. 24–25.

5. Reginald E. Zelnik (tr. and ed.), *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia: The Autobiography of Semen Ivanovich Kanatchikov* (Stanford, CA, 1986), p. xxix.

6. George Steinmetz, “Reflections on the Role of Social Narratives in Working-Class Formation: Narrative Theory in the Social Sciences”, *Social Science History*, 16 (1992), pp. 489–516; Lejeune, *On Autobiography*.

ians of the revolutionary movements and the working class have long utilized such documents along with archival records, proclamations, programmatic statements, and other sources, but they have tended to consider autobiographical narratives as raw data.<sup>7</sup> Few have attempted to analyze the genre as a whole, and none has done so for the huge output of Russian lower-class autobiographical literature.<sup>8</sup> Only Reginald Zelnik has turned explicitly to the Russian worker autobiography as discourse, but his brilliant studies have focused on a few individuals.<sup>9</sup> This essay too will focus primarily on one example of worker narrative, the autobiographical notes of Eduard M. Dune, recounting his experiences in the Russian Revolution and civil war. I will argue that we cannot utilize these texts even as “data” without also appreciating the ways in which they were shaped and constructed. I will propose some ways to examine the cultural constructions of such documents, to offer a preliminary typology of lower-class autobiographical statements for Russia and the Soviet Union, and to offer some suggestions for bringing together the skills of literary scholars and historians to the task of reading workers’ autobiographies.

#### AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES UNDER SOCIALISM

Historians who have paid attention to the formal structures of working-class autobiography have stressed the centrality of the bourgeois milieu in shaping the narratives of proletarian writers, and they call attention to the ambiguous role of the proletarian writer in a bourgeois society. Baldly stated by Pierre Bourdieu, “the controlled classes do not speak, they are spoken”, but even when they took pen to paper, argues Philippe Lejeune, their voice was controlled by the medium in which they spoke: as long as the bourgeoisie controlled the media of communication, proletarian

7. This is especially true for Alfred Kelly: introduction to Alfred Kelly (ed. and tr.), *The German Worker: Working-Class Autobiographies from the Age of Industrialization* (Berkeley, CA, 1987), pp. 1–47; but see also Wolfgang Emmerich (ed.), *Proletarische Lebensläufe: Autobiographische Dokumente der Zweiten Kultur in Deutschland*, 2 vols (Hamburg, 1974–1975); Mark Traugott (ed. and tr.), *The French Worker: Autobiographies from the Early Industrial Era* (Berkeley, CA, 1993), and two collections edited by John Burnett: *Annals of Labor: Autobiographies of British Working-Class People 1820–1920* (Bloomington, IN, 1974) and *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education, and Family from 1820 to 1920* (Harmondsworth, 1984).

8. Maynes, *Taking the Hard Road*; David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiography* (London, 1981); Gagnier, “Social Atoms”, Lejeune, *On Autobiography*.

9. In addition to Zelnik’s translation of the Kanatchikov autobiography, see Reginald E. Zelnik, “Russian Bebel: An Introduction to the Memoirs of Semen Kanatchikov and Matvei Fisher”, *Russian Review*, 35 (1976), pp. 249–289, 417–447; *idem*, “On the Eve: Life Histories and Identities of Some Revolutionary Workers, 1870–1905”, in Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds), *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class, and Identity*, (Ithaca, NY, 1994), pp. 27–65; and *idem*, *Law and Disorder on the Narova River: The Kreenholm Strike of 1872* (Berkeley, CA, 1995).

writers could reach the working class only through the mediation of the ruling class.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, more than a few of the most notable working-class autobiographers implicitly saw as their ideal reader the middle classes who preferred to read about domesticated, embourgeoisified workers rather than militants.<sup>11</sup>

The earliest Russian worker memoirs appeared in a similar although not identical context. Like their counterparts in western Europe, the Russian autobiographical worker subject was firmly embedded in a hostile, capitalist society. On the other hand, the resilient Russian autocracy had provoked a powerful revolutionary movement. The strength of this movement, the role played by its class-crossing intellectuals, and the explicit sponsorship by socialist organizations of workers' projects of self-expression lent these early efforts at personal narrative a particular self-conscious emphasis on class struggle and class values. Themes of struggle, as well as of the emerging self, dominated the early Russian worker life stories: a narrative of struggle made implicit sense to revolutionaries whose revolution still lay in the future.<sup>12</sup>

The revolutionary rupture affected these writers as well as those whom the revolution disenfranchised, and created for Russian proletarian autobiographers conditions quite unique in the annals of working-class writing.<sup>13</sup> The proletariat had assumed power. Nonetheless, the replacement of the dominant motif of struggle with the symbolism of victory perhaps injected as much confusion into proletarian memory as it cemented certainties of the meaning of socialist power. More fundamentally, the "triumph of socialism" as an official historical moment suggested that the narrative of proletarian struggle had come to a happy end. How would workers and others from the lower class now tell the story of their lives? What would become the decisive moment of conversion for those already born into the society of proletarian victors? The autobiographical act for Soviet workers thus becomes doubly complicated to interpret: in bringing themselves to language, lower-class writers in the Soviet period

10. Bourdieu, quoted in Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, pp. 199, 201.

11. Michelle Perrot, "A Nineteenth-Century Work Experience as Related in a Worker's Autobiography: Norbert Truquin", in Steven Laurence Kaplan and Cynthia J. Koepp (eds), *Work in France: Representations, Meaning, Organization, and Practice* (Ithaca, NY, 1986), pp. 297–316, Maynes, *Taking the Hard Road*, p. 38; Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, p. 200.

12. The first of these memoirs, Vasilii Gerasimov, "Pitomet vospitatel' nogo doma", *Byloe*, (1906), has been brilliantly translated and analyzed by Reginald Zelnik, in *Law and Disorder on the Narova River*, part 2. Others, such as Petr Moiseenko, *Vospominaniia starogo revoliutsionera* (Moscow, 1966), are discussed in Zelnik, "On the Eve". This article owes a significant intellectual debt to Zelnik's work.

13. The rupture stimulated autobiographical writing on both sides of the divide: a 1988 bibliography of book-length White memoirs on the Russian revolution lists 559 entries; David Arans (ed.), *How We Lost the Civil War: Bibliography of Russian Emigré Memoirs on the Russian Revolution* (Newtonville, MA, 1988).

now speak for the hegemonic classes, but yet they also seek to present a self that is both individual and firmly embedded in the collective.

Moreover, the victorious collective had the power to dictate its values in ways even more powerful than that of the hegemonic western bourgeoisie. As recent work on Soviet collective memory has suggested, worker writers were heavily edited by the collective in the process of telling their stories.<sup>14</sup> Igal Halfin argues further that communist autobiographies (of which worker autobiographies were a subset) required telling a particular narrative of confession and conversion, and that “autobiographical interrogation was a ritualized procedure designed to evaluate the consciousness of the applicant”.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the key theme of worker autobiography in the Soviet period may well be how the individual manages to negotiate the submersion of the self in the collective.

Thus, the autobiography did not go out of fashion with the coming of collective society. In an ongoing process, workers and other revolutionary victors were encouraged to testify to their personal experiences of revolutionary struggle, to speak up and to narrate their lives as a way of joining in the revolutionary transformation, and as Frederick Corney points out, of fixing and framing the memory of October in the minds of its participants.<sup>16</sup> Veteran socialist organizers found work in the newly established agencies of party and trade union history (Istpart and Istprof), where they wrote their own life stories, often many times over, and collected the recollections of their comrades who had participated in the revolutionary struggle. “Evenings of reminiscences” became a standard feature of revolutionary anniversary celebrations, and in some cases these oral recollections would be transcribed and published. Trade-union and other journals solicited autobiographical recollections for their anniversary issues in 1922 (five years after 1917), 1925 (twenty years after 1905), and 1927. Special collections of workers’ autobiographies also appeared in these years, and continued to be published throughout the Soviet period.<sup>17</sup>

14. See Frederick C. Corney, “Rethinking a Great Event: The October Revolution as Memory Project”, *Social Science History*, 22 (1998), pp. 389–414; and Corney’s dissertation, “Writing October: History, Memory, Identity, and the Construction of the Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1927” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1997).

15. Igal Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), p. 59.

16. Corney, “Rethinking a Great Event”, pp. 399, 401.

17. Corney, *ibid.*, provides an important analysis of the institutionalization of these projects, whose results are ubiquitous in Soviet publications. For guides to the published memoirs, see *Istoriia sovetskogo obshchestva v vospominaniakh sovremennikov. Annotirovannyi ukazatel’ memuarnoi literatury*, 3 vols (Moscow, 1958–1967); and *Sovetskoe obshchestvo v vospominaniakh i dnevnikakh. Annotirovannyi bibliograficheskii ukazatel’ knig, publikatsii v sbornikakh i zhurnalakh*, 2 vols (Moscow, 1987–1990). Autobiographical materials from the History of the Trade Union Movement (Istprof) can be found in Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, f. 6935, op. 7.

Bringing workers to language was very much a part of the socialist cultural project, as demonstrated by the massive programs to expand literacy and to make higher learning available to the working class.<sup>18</sup> But what is most important for our purposes is the form that was adopted or encouraged: the autobiographical form. Autobiography in fact was ubiquitous in Soviet society. The *anketa*, or standard questionnaire that constituted the mechanism of entry into all venues of privilege, whether school, factory, or party, requested a schematized version of one's life history. The life of an aspiring proletarian hero required the listing of age, nationality, family size, education, army service, party membership, former party membership (trick question!), history of arrests, responsible and elected positions in factory and public organizations, political sympathies, land ownership, whether one speaks out at public meetings and on what issues (another trick question).<sup>19</sup>

The autobiographical narrative form gained renewed prominence toward the end of the 1920s with the emergence of widespread local purge procedures designed to ensure the purity of the proletarian society.<sup>20</sup> Called before factory purge commissions, party members answered questions about their pasts, their families, and their private behavior. Their very identity lay on the line in these narratives: "Who are you?", asked the purge commissions, and "Where do you fit into socialist society?" "What did you do in the Revolution?" was a key question, as commissions probed for evidence of deviant socialist behavior.<sup>21</sup> A worker's social origin, as well as party and work history, also became standard elements of the purge narratives. To be a "hereditary proletarian" was the most valuable attribute; if one's father was a peasant, it was best to emphasize one's own early rejection of rural idiocy. This moment of proletarian conversion was central for Semen Kanatchikov and for the Moscow printer Kraiushkin, who claimed to have been a worker with ten years' experience, and to have broken with his village in 1918.<sup>22</sup> It was good to have become a proletarian in the year that many urban workers were rustivating themselves in order to feed themselves and their families.

18. See Michael S. Gorham's very interesting analysis of the controversy over language and the written word in the early Soviet period, *Speaking in Soviet Tongues: Language Culture and the Politics of Voice in Revolutionary Russia* (DeKalb, IL, 2003).

19. Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Moskovskoi Oblasti (TsGAMO), f. 699, op. 2, f. 66, personnel records for members of the board of directors of the Moscow union; l. 15; TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 2, d. 67, questionnaires for factory committee members in 1922.

20. See also Halfin, *Terror in My Soul*, pp. 43–95.

21. *Krasnyi Proletarii*, 1 (96), 4 January 1930, p. 5; *ibid.*, 7 (83), 9 March 1929, p. 4. See also *Zhizn' Pechatnika* (factory newspaper of the First Model Printshop, Moscow), 1 (21 January 1930), p. 3, for more communist fears of Trotskyism and opposition.

22. *Zhizn' Pechatnika*, 3 (19 February 1930), p. 3. Also examples in *Zorkii Glaz* (factory newspaper of the 14th State Zinov'ev Printshop (after Zinov'ev's 1925 disgrace, the *Leningradskaia Pravda* printshop), Leningrad), 28 July 1929.

The autobiographical form also emerged in criminal as well as political trials.<sup>23</sup> One was judged not only by one's acts, but by one's entire life history.

The models for and examples of these life narratives could be found everywhere in Soviet society. I have explored elsewhere the phenomenon of the contest for best and worst Red Directors, in which the nominations took on prevalent forms of cultural representations of life stories. Katerina Clark has noted the similarities between the language of saints' lives and that employed in stories by Maksim Gor'kii.<sup>24</sup> Such forms were reflected in contemporary obituaries as well, as analyzed by Jeffrey Brooks.<sup>25</sup> These narrative forms were reproduced further in additional workplace rituals, such as the nominations of "heroes of labor" that took place inside factories and trade unions and that were widely reported in local press organs.<sup>26</sup>

#### THE PROBLEM OF WORKING-CLASS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

An approach to evaluating the whole corpus of Russian workers' autobiographies must keep in mind the two peculiarities of the group: first and foremost, they must be read as *worker* autobiographies written broadly in the historical time of class struggle. Scholars of working-class autobiographies note that most writers, and all militants, emphasize the insignificance of the individual and the importance of the collective. They stressed that they were ordinary people, one among many, mere social atoms among the undifferentiated mass.<sup>27</sup> In telling their life stories, working-class militants, especially, were telling the story of the movement, not themselves. The corpus of Soviet autobiographical writing dictates a second consideration, reflecting the USSR's unique historical position as the first socialist society: autobiographies written after 1917 were written with the knowledge of the happy ending of the story of struggle. Even if the ending did not seem so happy after all, as with Eduard Dune, who suffered continuing persecution for his opposition to Stalin, the conditions of production of these autobiographical documents in the context of a hegemonic workers' power must necessarily have structured the telling of the life story. In some cases, the official fact of "worker hegemony" could

23. For one example, see the references to the trial of the murderer of the worker-correspondent Spiridonov in Diane P. Koenker, "Factory Tales: Narratives of Industrial Relations in the Transition to NEP", *Russian Review*, 55 (1996), pp. 384–411.

24. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, IL, 1981), pp. 61–62.

25. Jeffrey Brooks, "Revolutionary Lives: Public Identities in *Pravda* during the 1920s", in Stephen White (ed.), *New Directions in Soviet History* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 27–40.

26. For examples, see the printers' trade-union journal *Moskovskii Pechatnik*, 8 (15 September 1921), pp. 8–9; 10 (1 November 1921), p. 13; 3 (1 May 1922), pp. 2, 15–16.

27. Gagnier, "Social Atoms", p. 338; Maynes, *Taking the Hard Road*, p. 33.

not be reconciled with lived experience. The reality of the Soviet system, as it increasingly channeled pluralist voices into a common story, led many workers, I would argue, to end their stories with “Great October”, if not before.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the peculiar conditions affecting the writing of Russian worker autobiographies, they can nevertheless be analyzed as part of a broader project of lower-class writing. Examining hundreds of autobiographies of German, French, and British workers, Mary Jo Maynes and Regenia Gagnier have independently developed typologies of worker narratives against which to measure differences by nationality and by gender. Within the genre of working-class autobiography, three basic types can be discerned: the first is the picaresque and the fairytale genre, adapting from popular culture narrative forms that had circulated through oral storytelling, inexpensive books, and reading aloud.<sup>29</sup> These accounts came with no protagonist, no plot, corresponding, argues Gagnier, to Bakhtin’s chronotopes of folkloric time and the road. The picaresque autobiography reveals a static subject, without development, without a sense of progress.<sup>30</sup>

Success stories of workers who climb the social ladder into the bourgeoisie constituted a second type, and the third type, a variant on the theme of self-improvement, is the conversion story. Gagnier finds conversion accounts in the eighteenth century that focus specifically on the individual’s religious life. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emerge the militants’ conversion stories, which recount the path toward militancy, whether through arduous self-education, encounters with charismatic socialist models, or decisive events that marked life’s turning point. The opposite of the picaresque, the political narrative tells a highly structured, militant story, channeling all experience into one great conflict, integrating social process and personal development over time.<sup>31</sup> This militant’s narrative, in fact, is the canonical worker autobiography, prevailing in Britain’s industrial north at the end of the nineteenth century, in industrial Germany at the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth

28. This conclusion is based on my reading of dozens of workers’ memoirs about the 1917 revolution. It is also true, however, as Corney demonstrates, that the institutional promoters of the autobiographical form encouraged the narratives to end with happy October. The purpose of putting pen to paper was to legitimize and commemorate that great event. Whether because of a loss of the organizing principle of struggle, or the constraints put upon memory by the official story, workers’ writings about the pre-revolutionary period and even the February revolution reflect much more spontaneity and variety than those about October and after. (This observation is corroborated by Barbara Engel, personal communication.)

29. Maynes, *Taking the Hard Road*, pp. 34–35.

30. Gagnier, “Social Atoms”, pp. 348–349.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 350–353.



century, and in Russia at the same time. Semen Kanatchikov's autobiography can be seen as a model of this type.

Such militants' narratives, I would argue, provide the standard by which to measure Russian workers' autobiographies. Their narrative structures possess definite beginnings, middles, and ends; they feature a plot – the triumph of socialism – as well as a story – the particular path that this individual has taken to class-consciousness. Among the key features that many of these narratives share are the formative experiences of childhood and youth: breaking with the village or with tradition; education and training, not necessarily through formal schooling but often with the aid of socialist tutors; the attachment to a new primary group; meetings with key figures and mentors who steered the autobiographers on to the path toward their adult careers as militants and activists.

Yet this standard form, too, has generated variations, stressing differing levels of militant experience: personal, collective, and institutional.<sup>32</sup> In many Russian worker narratives, for example that of Timofei Sapronov, the personal is almost entirely absent: his life story revolves around the party and trade-union organizations through which his revolution was made.<sup>33</sup> Gender plays an important role here. The well-known Russian worker autobiographies were written by men. Women workers contributed to the many collections of shorter forms of autobiographies, but it is my impression, based on reading a limited sample, that their stories were far less “coherent”. They lacked beginnings, middles, and ends.<sup>34</sup>

Theorists of autobiographical narrative stress the dual functions of narratives that are both referential, describing past events in their temporal order, and evaluative – making clear what the events mean in the present.<sup>35</sup> Selecting one story over another, privileging certain remembrances and staying silent about others, reflect the complications of individual subjectivity, but also the authors' sense of their place in the plot of history as well as of their own lives. For individuals, childhoods are rearranged mythologically to correspond to the subject's image of self as an adult, to reaffirm life choices that led to the present position of the

32. Steinmetz, “Reflections on the Role of Social Narratives”, p. 491, citing Alessandro Portelli, “‘The Time of My Life’: Functions of Time in Oral History”, *International Journal of Oral History*, 2 (1981), pp. 162–180.

33. T. Sapronov, *Iz istorii rabochego dvizheniia (po lichnym vospominaniiam)* (Moscow, 1925). Reprinted with a new introduction by Victoria Bonnell (Newtonville, MA, 1976).

34. This difference has been observed by Gagnier and Maynes, as well for autobiographies in their samples. See also Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Lives and Times”, and Yuri Slezkine, “Lives as Tales”, in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine (eds), *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War*, (Princeton, NJ, 2000), pp. 3–30.

35. E.g. Martin Kohli, “Biography: Account, Text, Method”, in Daniel Bertaux (ed.), *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences* (Thousand Oaks, CA, 1981), p. 67.

autobiographer.<sup>36</sup> But, as George Steinmetz points out, “one must also attend to the various discourses that influence the ways individuals narrativize their own lives”.<sup>37</sup> Here is where the worker militant finds meaning in the story of unfolding class-consciousness. The evaluative function of the narrative becomes predominant, signaled by small formal units that mark the turning points or hinges of the narrative (the meeting with a student bearing socialist literature), and by the assignment of causality (class struggle).<sup>38</sup>

Class and class-consciousness need not be the primary organizing principle of one’s life story, notes Steinmetz (alternatives might be nation, religion, or family), but the more successful cases of working-class formation, he argues, “involve the elaboration of coherent narratives [...] that are organized around the category of social class”.<sup>39</sup> For Russian workers before and after 1917, social class provided just such a conceptual category for organizing their life narratives, however much or little “class” reflected what we might call objective social relations before or during socialism. And we must remember that class principles were frequently layered or reinforced by other more personal evaluative issues: a sense of dignity, of personal justice, of self.<sup>40</sup>

The existence and traditions of these militant narratives themselves provided models and structures for Russian worker autobiographers to come. Reginald Zelnik pays particular attention to the autobiography of Vasili Gerasimov precisely because his account was written prior to the others, and was thus not “contaminated” by the plot line developed later.<sup>41</sup> But we need to pay close attention to the ways in which these worker narratives were in fact conditioned by the “collective narrative” as well as by a dialogue with the dominant classes. Working-class autobiographers were surely influenced in assembling their retrospective stories, as Steinmetz points out, by official nonfictional historical narratives, by journalists, and by novels and other fictional genres.<sup>42</sup> They were influenced, as well, by other lower-class autobiographers who had come before, as Zelnik so rightly points out. Finally, we must note what Gagnier terms a very special kind of intertextuality, a co-dependency between the working-class writer and the bourgeois form.<sup>43</sup> In the Russian case, in

36. Agnes Hankiss, “Ontologies of the Self: On the Mythological Rearranging of One’s Life-History”, in Bertaux, *Biography and Society*, p. 204.

37. Steinmetz, “Reflections on the Role of Social Narratives”, p. 490.

38. *Ibid.*, citing Barthes and Jameson, pp. 496–500.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 489.

40. These are the themes emphasized by the worker-writers that Mark D. Steinberg studies; see his *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910–1925* (Ithaca, NY, 2002).

41. Zelnik, *Law and Disorder on the Narova River*, p. 224.

42. Steinmetz, “Reflections on the Role of Social Narratives”, p. 490.

43. Gagnier, “Social Atoms”, p. 343.

addition to “standard” bourgeois forms, we can locate this tension of intertextuality and co-dependency in the complicated relations between worker activists and revolutionary intellectuals.<sup>44</sup>

Reading Russian revolutionary worker autobiographies, then, requires the historian to pay attention to five key issues. First, the dominant collective narrative – the narrative of class struggle and revolutionary conflict – provides a crucial template on which most of the narratives can be situated, and interpretations of such autobiographies must attend carefully both to the ways in which this narrative structures individual stories, and to the points at which the personal narrative diverges from the collective, if it does.

Second, each autobiographical narrative must be interrogated for the particular conditions of its production. Gagnier and others suggest that an important distinction between working-class and middle-class autobiography lies in these conditions of production. British worker autobiographies “unanimously state that their reasons for writing are functional rather than aesthetic: to record lost experiences for future generations; to raise money; to warn others; to teach others; to relieve or amuse themselves; to understand themselves”.<sup>45</sup> The moment of autobiographical impulse, forging the autobiographical pact, is an act of subjectivity, but it also reflects other conditions in the author’s life.<sup>46</sup> Here, the historian must consider the motives for writing or telling the story (for money, to defend oneself against charges of heterodoxy, to instruct future generations, to reaffirm one’s place in the grand collective narrative, etc.). Under these conditions, the dialogic relationship between the author of the autobiography and the ideal reader must also be considered. For autobiographies produced in the Soviet Union, understanding these conditions is absolutely essential in order to read the narrative.

Third, the historian must pay attention to the discourses and texts available to the author that might shape or provide borrowed structure for the narrative. Here too, the patterns and master plots dictated by the Soviet memory projects offer templates against which to compare any individual work.

Fourth, a criterion that perhaps applies more to historical uses of autobiography than literary, the analyst must attempt to verify those

44. For a recent set of papers on the issue of worker–intelligentsia relations, see S. I. Potolov (ed.), *Rabochie i intelligentsiia Rossii v epokhu reform i revoliutsii 1861–fevral’ 1917 g.* (St Petersburg, 1997), and the English-language version: Reginald E. Zelnik, (ed.), *Workers and Intelligentsia in Late Imperial Russia: Realities, Representations, Reflections* (Berkeley, CA, 1999).

45. Gagnier, “Social Atoms”, p. 342; see also Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, who notes the intentions of middle-class (but nonliterary) autobiographers to address their families present and future (pp. 169–170).

46. Janet Varner Gunn, *Autobiography: Toward a Poetics of Experience* (Philadelphia, PA, 1982), p. 12.

elements of the narrative that can be independently evaluated. If literary theorists can apply a criterion of “sincerity” to assess the “truth” of the autobiographical narratives that they study, historians can and should check the autobiographical accounts against other available sources. Ideally, they can construct a “theory of bias” in order to discount the biases of the narrator.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, once we have done all these things, we can bring to the narrative our analysis of the subjectivity of the author, the ways in which the author has shaped the text of the life he or she is telling; we can explore the evaluative apparatus the author imposes on his or her life story. Here is where questions of identity and one’s place in the world come to the fore, and we can interrogate these texts for the author’s answers to the questions: “Who am I?” and “Where do I belong?”<sup>48</sup> The events and moments that the autobiographer chooses to tell and recount can all be evaluated as part of the author’s strategy to address these questions of individuality, at the same time that the working-class author seeks also to write him- or herself into the broader historical narrative of the revolution.

An examination of Eduard Martynovich Dune’s *Notes of a Red Guard*, an eyewitness account of the Russian Revolution and civil war, illustrates how these principles may be applied.<sup>49</sup> The Dune autobiography is especially appropriate for this analysis because we possess substantial evidence concerning the conditions of its production. In the introduction to our translation of this autobiography, Steve Smith and I paid attention primarily to the value of this work as a social document, as a set of social facts. In the pages to follow, however, I will be addressing the work primarily as a text.

#### READING EDUARD DUNE AS A WORKING-CLASS AUTOBIOGRAPHER

Eduard Martynovich Dune entered the world of work as a teenager in Moscow during World War I. His father was a foreman at the Provodnik rubber plant, which had been evacuated from Riga to Moscow in 1915; young Dune found work at the plant as soon as it was operational. During the war years, Dune acquired not only important skills with a salary to match; he enrolled in evening technical courses in order to complete his high school education, and he became involved with various underground socialist groups. By the time the February revolution came to Moscow,

47. Kohli, “Biography”, pp. 69–71, discusses this task. See also introduction to Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, p. ix.

48. See Gunn, *Autobiography*, pp. 22–23.

49. Eduard M. Dune, *Notes of a Red Guard*, Diane P. Koenker and S.A. Smith (eds and tr.) (Urbana, IL, 1993).



Figure 1. A Red Guard (I. Rasnianskii) at the Bol'shoi Theatre, Moscow, July 1918.

Source: L. Volkov-Lannit, *Istoriia pishetsia ob'ektivom* (Moscow, 1971), p. 201. Photograph by A. Dorn.

Dune was a committed Bolshevik, an activist within his plant, and a member of the newly formed Red Guard unit there. After the October revolution of 1917, Dune answered the call to form a military unit to defend the revolution, and he spent most of the next four years in uniform, as a political commissar, as a prisoner of the White armies, and in hospitals. His work experience, therefore, consisted of a few short but formative years from 1915 to 1918.

When the civil war ended, Dune returned to his native factory as an assistant director, one of many workers promoted “from the bench” to management positions, but he then moved into administrative positions in the Soviet government. By the early 1920s, Dune had enrolled as a student in the mathematics-biology-physics faculty at Moscow University, working toward a degree in biochemistry and physics, and he spent the rest of his working life in the Soviet Union as a scientist. The autobiography that he wrote in 1952, however, indicated how formative was his work experience as an adolescent.

Also formative was Dune’s political experience during the revolution. He was recruited to the Bolshevik Party by Timofei Sapronov, an underground trade-union activist, and he shared Sapronov’s post-1917 political opposition as well. This deviance resulted in the expulsion of Sapronov, Dune, and twenty-one other members of the “Group of Sapronov” from the party in 1927, resulting in terms of prison and exile between 1927 and 1932, and in 1936, even having renounced all political activity, in a five-year prison term spent in the Arctic mines of Vorkuta. Dune returned from prison to rejoin his wife and son, exiled from Moscow to Viatka and to Vitebsk, in June 1941, a few days before the German invasion. He and his family were separated, and Dune was told that the Germans had killed his wife and son, as Jews; Dune was captured by the Germans and assigned to work in the local German military hospital. He moved with the hospital when it was evacuated to France, then escaped, joined the French partisans, and then the French Foreign Legion when he feared repatriation to a Soviet Union he no longer wished to see.

He eventually found work, again as a factory laborer, in France in the late 1940s, and he also made contact with the local Menshevik organization in Paris, writing and serving as a distribution agent for its journal, *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik*, even though his socialist political views differed significantly from theirs (as well as from Stalinist communism). He died of stomach cancer at age fifty-three in 1953, still in the midst of writing his memoirs. He never knew that his son and wife had survived the Nazi invasion, nor did they know he had survived the war. His wife appealed successfully for Dune’s posthumous rehabilitation and re-admission to the Communist Party in 1956, and she remained a staunch believer in communism until her death in the early 1980s. Their son also served in the Red Army and then as a Communist Party and Soviet official until his retirement during the *perestroika* period. Thanks to *glasnost* and telephone directories, I was able to locate Dune’s son, who was living in Moscow in 1992, and to bring to him and his family the autobiographical notes of his father.

Like Gor’kii and many other working-class autobiographers in Europe and the United States, Dune had left his working-class milieu by the time he sat down to reflect on his life. But this transformation was a part of

Soviet history, and a part of Dune's identity. He was a real Soviet man, whose life course had taken him from being a member of the hereditary working class to a member of the intellectual class, from Latvian to Soviet citizen (he rejected his Latvian identity quite vehemently), and from defender to victim of Soviet power, without ever losing his fundamental faith in the socialist ideal. Does this mean that we should evaluate his autobiography as a "worker" autobiography, a socialist autobiography, or a literary one? The clues to these identities can be found in his writings, and in a comparison with other autobiographies by similarly mobile individuals.

Why did Eduard Dune make the autobiographical pact in 1952? His fellow revolutionaries had recorded their memoirs much earlier: Dune's mentor, Timofei Sapronov, for example, wrote several versions of his autobiography, the most significant one in 1925. Evenings of reminiscences of Moscow workers had produced scores of collections of worker autobiographies; leading socialists contributed their autobiographies for the Granat encyclopedia, published in 1927.<sup>50</sup> Eduard Dune did not participate in this initial round of autobiographical self-reflection, despite his continuing membership of the Communist Party and in oppositional politics.

Instead, Eduard Dune decided to record his autobiography late in his life. He was quite ill during his years in Paris. He had already lost an eye and an ear in Vorkuta, and had undergone surgery for stomach cancer in Paris in 1950.<sup>51</sup> Dune's financial situation was precarious, and once unable to work, he lived on public aid and on charity: "I've lived my entire fifty years out of a suitcase", he wrote Rafael Abramovich in May 1949.<sup>52</sup> He was also worried about an imminent nuclear war in Europe, this time against the Soviet Union: "I hope we have a drink together before the Third World War", he wrote a friend in 1952.<sup>53</sup> Abramovich assured Dune that, if the worst came, he would be on the evacuation list as a political victim of Stalinism.<sup>54</sup> And he was trying to emigrate, to whatever country would accept him: Canada, the US, Australia, or New Zealand, "far enough so Stalin will not invade and the atom bomb will probably not

50. *Deiateli SSSR i Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii. Avtobiografii i avtoriz. biografii*. Ch. 1–3 Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' Granat. Izd. 7–e, t. 41 (Moscow, 1927).

51. Hoover Institution Archive, Boris Nicolaevsky Collection, box 235, folder 1 (correspondence with Rafael Abramovich, 1949–1950); letter from Eduard Dune to Abramovich, 15 May 1949; letter from Abramovich to Dune, 23 November 1950; letter from Dune to Abramovich, 16 June 1951.

52. Nicolaevsky Collection, box 235, folder 1: Dune to Abramovich, 15 May 1949; public aid receipts in box 236, folder 5; gift of a coat in letter from Sara Jacobs of New York, 25 September 1949; box 236, folder 7, letter to Jacobs, 20 October 1951.

53. Nicolaevsky Collection, box 235, folder 8, Dune to Ivan Maistrenko, 4 May 1952.

54. Nicolaevsky Collection, box 235, folder 1, Abramovich to Dune, 8 August 1950.

fall”.<sup>55</sup> The conditions under which Dune would write his memoirs were thus extremely tenuous: he sat down to recall his past at a time when the present and future looked absolutely bleak. It was his last chance to take stock of his life, a life “lived in a suitcase”, that had begun with hope and now looked so hopeless.

The immediate impetus for Dune’s autobiography, however, came from outside, and was related to his desperately poor financial condition. A Columbia University Russian Institute project, with Ford Foundation money, was financing displaced Soviet citizens in Europe and North America to record information about the USSR. At the height of the Cold War, the academic community in the United States sought knowledge about its hitherto unknown adversary, as well as to extend humanitarian aid to individuals seen to be victims of that system.<sup>56</sup> In September 1951, Dune was invited, through Abramovich, to contribute his memoirs to this project. He would receive something between \$100 and \$125 a month while he worked, but only upon receipt of completed chapters.<sup>57</sup> At last, in December, Dune’s proposal was accepted, and terms were arranged. Whatever other motives Dune may have shared with those who made the autobiographical pact, immediate pecuniary incentive was clearly a decisive influence. We know that he did not write to leave a testament to his family, since he presumed his son had perished in the war. But given that he had recently been writing other accounts of his experiences for the Menshevik emigré journal *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik*, we can assume that Eduard Dune was already prepared to reflect on his life in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Eduard Dune was not a writer, a fact that tormented him as he began to record his recollections of the revolution and civil war. We need also to pay attention to the source of the funding for his autobiography. If Dune’s recollection of the 1917 revolution was written outside the orbit of Stalinism, which gives his autobiography a perspective that is missing from those produced under the watchful eye of Istpart, Dune was also aware that he still must reach a market, an audience. “Who will read this, let alone

55. Nicolaevsky Collection, box 235, folder 8, Maistrenko to Dune, 23 April 1952.

56. In its first year, 1952, the Research Program on the USSR of the East European Fund, directed by Philip E. Mosely, considered 532 applicants and awarded 157 research grants of three to twelve months duration. Dune’s project does not appear to be among them, but no names were attached to the list. Alexander Dallin, then associate director of the Research Program, contacted Dune in Paris in late 1951, as well as many other potential project participants. University of Illinois Archive, Philip E. Mosely papers, box 22, folder “EEF: Research Program on the USSR. Annual Reports 1952–57”, annual report no. 1, 1 July 1952; folder “EEF: Research Program on the USSR. Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1952–55”, e.g. letter from Philip E. Mosely to George F. Kennan, 7 November 1951, and Alexander Dallin to Mosely, 19 May 1952. I am grateful to Ralph Fisher for directing me to this collection.

57. The correspondence concerning this arrangement can be found in Nicolaevsky Collection, box 235, folder 2.



pay for it?” he wrote to Abramovich in early 1952.<sup>58</sup> He felt that he must not just provide interesting facts, but demonstrate his ability as a writer, an ability that he did not feel he possessed. “Concerning my ‘literary talent’, this is the most complicated – I have to write like Lev Tolstoi: I rework every line dozens of times.”<sup>59</sup> Abramovich hastened to reassure Dune that the Russian Institute was not expecting a work of literature, that it needed historical material: “notes, chronicles, facts, events, documents, eyewitness testimony, diaries”. If the Ford Foundation were to decide to publish part of Dune’s memoir in the Chekhov publishing house series, *then* it could be revised with an eye to literary appeal.<sup>60</sup> Another friend, Ivan Maistrenko, also sought to encourage Dune to overcome his sense of literary inferiority: he reminded Dune that the Soviet novelist Aleksandr Fadeev was pleased if he could write one printed page a day.<sup>61</sup>

The struggle to write his formal autobiography is significant. By the time he was commissioned to record his memoirs for the Columbia project, Dune had already written a number of short pieces for *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik*, recounting parts of his experience in Stalin’s camps, in Vitebsk under German occupation, and his adventures escaping from the Germans and joining the French Foreign Legion.<sup>62</sup> Several features distinguish these pieces from the autobiography to come. In the first place, they focused on Dune’s adult experiences, rather than his formative youth. Second, and related to the first, the authorial “I” is effaced. Dune, as subject, is not much in evidence in these pieces: they could be a reporter’s notes about somebody else’s experiences. (The fact that they were written under the pseudonym I. Ivanov may reflect this distance, but just as importantly signify a concern about the long hand of Soviet vigilance.) They were also brief, although they contain many of the stylistic features Dune would employ in his autobiography: sharp

58. *Ibid.*, Dune to Abramovich, 26 February 1952.

59. *Ibid.*, Dune to Abramovich, 27 December 1951.

60. *Ibid.*, Abramovich to Dune, 29 February 1952. The participants in these projects incorrectly identified the Ford Foundation as the source of all decisions. In fact, the foundation insisted on distancing itself from agencies such as the East European Fund, which passed Ford money through to a number of projects. University of Illinois Archive, Philip E. Mosely papers, box 18, folder “FF: American Committee for Emigré Scholars, etc.”, Nelson P. Mead to Joseph M. McDaniel, 6 February 1953; box 22, folder “EEF: Research Program on the USSR. Misc. Correspondence, 1952–55”, Waldemar E. Nielson to Philip E. Mosely, 3 June 1954.

61. Nicolaevsky Collection, box 235, folder 8, Maistrenko to Dune, 12 June 1952.

62. I. Ivanov, “Vorkutskaiia tragediia”, *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* 28, nos. 4–5 (607–608) (20 May 1948), pp. 93–96; I. Ivanov, “Vorkuta”, *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* 28, nos. 8–9 (611–612) (27 September 1948), pp. 159–160; 29, no. 3 (618) (25 March 1949), pp. 50–51; 29, no. 5 (620) (27 May 1949), pp. 87–88; I. Ivanov, “Vitebskoe getto”, *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* 32, nos. 1–2 (650) (January–February 1952), pp. 26–27; 32, no. 3 (651) (March 1952), pp. 49–50; I. Ivanov, “Russkii Di–Pi vo Frantsii”, *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* 31, nos. 9–10 (647) (September–October 1951), pp. 198–200; 31, no. 11 (648) (November 1951), pp. 220–24.

description, indirect reported speech, and clear and direct narrative. *Notes of a Red Guard*, on the other hand, bears many of the hallmarks of the autobiographical pact, as I will discuss below.

To my knowledge, few working-class (or socialist) memoirs exist for which we have even this much information on the conditions of their production, and it is worthwhile to consider what light these communications shed on our own reading of the Dune autobiography. Although Dune, like many other working-class autobiographers, wrote for income, and in his case, perhaps for his very survival, his motives must have been more complicated. Dune was committed to a set of socialist principles that he felt had been betrayed by the Stalinist state, principles of socialist equality and technological rationalization that had remained so far unfulfilled under communism. His own account of his experiences in the revolution and civil war could thus serve to testify to a different, alternative vision of socialism. He was conscious, too, of the effect of time and subsequent life-experience on his version of the revolution: “Am I idealizing the past, like all old men?”, he wrote at one point in his memoir, when fondly recalling his life as a factory worker.<sup>63</sup>

We must also consider the issue of censorship and self-censorship. No evidence exists that Research Program on the USSR, through its agent Alexander Dallin, specified the content or tone of the autobiographies that it commissioned. But Dune’s efforts to publish a German edition may have foundered for political reasons. He was encouraged in the German edition by his friend, Maistrenko, who also warned, however: “I only worry that publishers might resist this: the revolution is too earnestly justified. Maybe someone will have to soften it (in the sense of its formulation).”<sup>64</sup> No such publication ever appeared, although the probable cause is not censorship, but rather the fact that Dune had become extremely ill by the time these negotiations took place in November 1952. He died in January 1953.

Dune’s worries about his literary abilities and his interest in testifying to his revolutionary experience also suggest that we consider his interaction with sources and models for his literary production. Once contracted to write his autobiography, Dune proceeded to visit Paris libraries in order to verify his recollections, and to provide additional “historical” context for his own experience. From his own notes, and other intertextual clues, we know that he read memoirs by White participants in the civil war, and that he engaged in a dialogue with their explanations and assessments of the social and political significance of the Bolsheviks.<sup>65</sup> He also consulted the published records of Communist Party congresses, again to evaluate and respond to issues of the political significance of the events and movements

63. Dune, *Red Guard*, p. 15.

64. Nicolaevsky Collection, box 235, folder 8, Maistrenko to Dune, 22 October 1952.

65. For example, see his discussion of Denikin’s views; Dune, *Red Guard*, pp. 110–111.

in which he participated.<sup>66</sup> Fortified by a dialogue with these “authorities”, and the narrative of his own lived experience, Dune could find a structure and themes for his autobiography.

I would suggest, however, that we might profitably look further for additional models and scripts for Dune’s reflections. Surely the Paris libraries provided Dune with access to the published recollections of Bolshevik participants, as well as of White generals. In particular, Dune would have long been familiar with the autobiography of his mentor, Timofei Sapronov. Indeed, specific passages in Sapronov’s memoir directly recall events at the Provodnik plant in which Dune would also have participated.<sup>67</sup> But the Sapronov autobiography (and many other Bolshevik memoirs) differs fundamentally from Dune’s autobiography, in that Sapronov completely submerges his own identity and ego in the history of the movement. His recollections contain no “I”, but recount only the history of the collective: the underground trade-union organizations, illegal party groups, key moments in the history of this collective, such as organizational meetings, strikes, demonstrations, and arrests. This author is only an instrument in the larger narrative of the revolutionary movement. For example, Sapronov describes his arrival at the Provodnik plant (where Dune encountered him in late 1916) in the following way:

The author of these lines arrived there [at Provodnik] in the middle of November 1916. Comrade Zhalkov did all he could to get me a job there and he introduced me to some other comrades. In November at Provodnik the first cell succeeded in being organized [note the impersonal construction], and by the beginning of January there were already three of them.<sup>68</sup>

Dune describes his introduction to Sapronov in much more personal terms:

One day my mother told me that a painter, who was working in our hostel, had seen my books and asked if he might read some of them. I replied that she should let him take whatever he wanted. I had no time for books because I was too busy rushing to the technical college. This proved to be the beginning of a new friendship, which was greatly to determine the course of my future life.<sup>69</sup>

Dune goes on to provide another paragraph on Sapronov’s biography, humanizing and personalizing his friend and their common revolutionary experience. Dune’s subjectivity is far stronger than that of authors of many of the standard revolutionary autobiographies. Despite Sapronov’s role as Dune’s political mentor, therefore, Sapronov’s impersonal, movement-

66. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

67. Sapronov, *Iz istorii rabocheho dvizheniia* (1976), pp. 121, 126.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

69. Dune, *Red Guard*, p. 23.

oriented autobiography did not provide a model that Dune chose to follow.<sup>70</sup>

By contrast, fiction may have provided a more appropriate script and set of structures. Nothing in the archival record or the text itself points to this directly, but a close reading of the popular civil war novel of the 1920s, Dmitrii Furmanov's *Chapaev*, offers a number of points of correspondence. *Chapaev* was first published in 1923, and this account of the relations between a charismatic military leader and his political commissar became enormously popular.<sup>71</sup> As a former political commissar himself, a confessed avid reader, and in 1923 a student at Moscow University, it would be likely that Dune read this novel during these years. The adventures of Furmanov, the autobiographical protagonist of the novel, must have resonated with Dune's own experiences in the Red Army. Both of them served as political commissars, responsible in their units for the ideological soundness of the military effort.

One of the striking parallels between the two works is the portrayal of key military leaders. Vasilii Chapaev (1887–1919) was an impulsive, charismatic, undisciplined natural fighter, loved by his men, a leader whose political understanding was less sophisticated than his instincts for battle. Chapaev's reputation preceded his first meeting with his new political commissar, Furmanov (the character Ivan Klichkov).

From Grisha's stories one might think that Chapaev's most outstanding traits were his boldness and spirit. He is in fact more a hero than a fighter, more an ardent lover of adventure than a conscious revolutionary. A striving for an extreme level of anxiety as well as a thirst for changing impressions evidently dominated his character. But how unique was this personality against the background of peasant insurgencies; what a unique, vivid, colorful figure!<sup>72</sup>

But Chapaev was a hothead as well: "In rage and blind fury, he would shout, create rows, cut you to the core with malicious insults, swear, inflame, he regretted nothing, he broke everything; and he could see no farther than his own nose."<sup>73</sup> Chapaev's "lads" were similarly unruly and

70. Other memoirs, such as Kanatchikov's, offer a more introspective personal narrative. Only more systematic study of the worker autobiographical genre in Russia could enable a more definitive understanding of the representativeness of these types.

71. Clark, *Soviet Novel*, pp. 83–86; Edward J. Brown, *Russian Literature since the Revolution*, rev. edn (Cambridge, MA, 1982), pp. 117–122. The film version of the novel (*Chapaev*, directed by Sergei and Georgii Vasil'ev (1934)) was also a critical and popular success; Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of Russian and Soviet Film* (New York, 1960), p. 317. The characters of Chapaev and his sidekick Petka have also become the source of innumerable Soviet jokes, and most recently, Chapaev has returned to the literary scene in Viktor Pelevin's post-modern novel, *Chapaev i Pustota* (Moscow, 1996; English translation *Buddha's Little Finger*, Andrew Bromfield (tr.), New York, 2000).

72. Dmitrii Furmanov, *Chapaev* (Moscow, 1938), pp. 26–27. All translations are my own.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 90.



Figure 2. Portrait of Vasilii Chapaev.

Source: *frontispiece*, I. S. Kutiakov, Vasilii Ivanovich Chapaev, Moscow: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo Ministerstva Oborony Soiuza SSR, 1958.

undisciplined, but their love and respect for Chapaev compelled them instantly to obey his every order.<sup>74</sup>

The counterpart to Chapaev in Dune's civil war service was the fiery Georgian commander, Vasili Isidorovich Kikvidze (1895–1919). Kikvidze “always entered a room in a state of agitation; from the threshold he would gesticulate and shout, but then would congenially shake hands with all who were present”. He too had his unit of followers: “He would arrive imposingly, accompanied by a crowd of Dzhigits, who worshipped their commander.” Kikvidze shared Chapaev's “reckless display of courage”: in battle, Kikvidze “was always prancing on ahead of his whole division. He had been wounded sixteen times, but never once did he have to stay in the hospital: ‘They haven't cast the bullet yet that could kill Kikvidze!’”<sup>75</sup>

Both commanders mistrusted central authority, and were convinced that White traitors had lodged themselves inside central headquarters.

Chapaev was utterly certain that some tsarist generals were almost exclusively occupying the “headquarters”, that they “were betraying the Red Army left and right”. But the “people” under the direction of such leaders as he, Chapaev, would not be fooled, and acting crosswise to the orders of “headquarters”, they usually did not lose but emerged the victor.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, Dune wrote, “Kikvidze was certain that a copy of the order was already in the hands of our opponent and to carry out an offensive according to the instructions of army headquarters would signify certain defeat.”<sup>77</sup> Indeed, both authors recount episodes of treason in battle, and soldiers in both accounts feared such officers would doom their units. Furmanov wrote, “Only later it emerged that the soldiers harbored doubts about their commander – who was a former tsarist officer. They had suddenly decided that the officer was leading them to slaughter.”<sup>78</sup> Red Army men in Dune's account wailed, “We are being led to slaughter. How can we fight with rifles against the Cossacks' sabers?”<sup>79</sup>

Counterpoised to these heroic and undisciplined warriors were the true Bolshevik commanders, Mikhail Frunze in Furmanov's novel, and Vladimir Baryshnikov and Gusarskii in Dune's account. The Red Army, under Frunze's command, had been transformed from a motley band of partisans into a disciplined fighting force. “They arrived, but everything seemed strange, novel, unusual. They could not even enter the headquarters immediately, but had to be announced. To whom? Announced to Mikhail Vasil'evich, whom they knew so intimately, with whom they had

74. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

75. Dune, *Red Guard*, p. 133.

76. Furmanov, *Chapaev*, p. 94.

77. Dune, *Red Guard*, p. 134.

78. Furmanov, *Chapaev*, p. 105.

79. Dune, *Red Guard*, p. 128.

worked so closely and simply as comrades.”<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Dune’s first encounter with the new Red Army discipline took him aback. “The headquarters of the army was just as busy as the military commissariat had been, but with a completely different look about it. People here worked calmly and deliberately; signs on the doors read: ‘Do not enter without a report’ or ‘Entry forbidden’.”<sup>81</sup> But within this newly disciplined structure, Frunze remained a man of the people, and when Klichkov received a note from him, he was relieved at the difference between this comrade and the tsarist officers. “It was written by the *commander of the army*, but don’t you really feel it was written by one of us, by a man equal with us in every way?”<sup>82</sup> Dune respected the former tsarist officer, Gusarskii, because of Gusarskii’s relations with his political commissar: he “conducted their relations informally; in difficult situations they conferred as equals”.<sup>83</sup>

Both authors recalled the dilemma posed by the conflict between Bolshevik humanism and the exigencies of battle. Torture and the mistreatment of prisoners were something that only the Whites ought to have engaged in, but Dune and Furmanov both confessed that their own troops also executed prisoners outright. After the torture of two cooks from the Red Army, Klichkov ordered his men not to take revenge. But “after the fighting the next morning, not one prisoner was brought to the regiment’s headquarters”. Klichkov, who had participated in this retaliation, found his qualms dismissed by Chapaev.

“It is strange to you!” Chapaev laughed. “But if you’d been with us in 1918 – how would you have managed without shooting people? We’d take some officers prisoner, but there’d be no one to guard them – every soldier was needed for the attack and not for convoy duty. So we’d finish off the whole pack of them. It was the same with them – would they have spared us?”<sup>84</sup>

Dune recounted a similar episode of a gruesome death inflicted by the White armies on Red supporters, but claimed that revenge was not on their agenda.

Because of our sense of discipline, we sent all prisoners to staff headquarters and felt no particular animosity toward them. We were fighting against those with gold epaulets, but they had the same right to defend themselves as we did. True, there was a feeling of class hatred among us, but this had nothing to do with the wild personal hatred that turns a person into brutal thug and executioner.<sup>85</sup>

80. Furmanov, *Chapaev*, p. 33.

81. Dune, *Red Guard*, p. 125.

82. Furmanov, *Chapaev*, p. 15.

83. Dune, *Red Guard*, pp. 132–133.

84. Furmanov, *Chapaev*, pp. 176, 180.

85. Dune, *Red Guard*, p. 110.

To be sure, Dune also recounted the story of a “deviation from the norm”, in which two captured White officers were shot once they had been questioned. And, like Chapaev, Kikvidze condoned such behavior. “Kikvidze had bragged to our Fifteenth Division about how many people he had slashed up in battle, and of course all of them were officers. I knew, from stories people told, that officers were not taken prisoner: an eye for an eye.”<sup>86</sup>

One final example of these correspondences also suggests a conscious intertextuality on the part of Eduard Dune. He devotes an entire chapter, entitled “Rob the Robbers”, to the theme of Bolshevik morality, recounting his own assignment to guard against looters in the aftermath of Moscow’s October revolution. “I was furious at the sight of these narrow-minded people hunting for any booty that was not protected, trying to grab anything that was not under lock and key. We had been without sleep for a week, fighting for a better and brighter future.”<sup>87</sup> Sapronov himself encouraged strict punishment for a secretary who had looted a nickel-plated ruler, and although Dune confessed in retrospect that this morality had been carried too far, he continued to contrast proletarian morality with that of the bourgeoisie and intelligentsia. He was appalled to learn in 1923 how visiting artists had helped themselves to the books and paintings of a gentry estate turned into a rest home for the intellectuals. “I do not wish at all to suggest that there are more thieves among the intelligentsia than among the workers. But we considered the things we had won as ours collectively, as the ‘people’s property’.” He contrasts the piggishness of the ballerina Ekaterina Gel’tser, devouring caviar at a Kremlin reception in 1920 while hungry party employees only stared, with workers at his Provodnik plant who preserved the idle plant in good working order rather than to sell off its equipment to feed themselves and their starving families.<sup>88</sup>

After thirty years, reading the unintelligible arguments of sociologists seeking to explain the success of the Bolsheviks and their subsequent defeat, I learned that this was a revolution carried out under the slogan “Rob the Robbers!” Possibly somewhere, at some time, someone did express themselves in this fashion, but we, the participants in this action, were certainly not guided by this slogan when we were seventeen years old, and I repudiate the charge even now. Such a “materialist” slogan could never have attracted the millions, only the scum that always forms when the sea is rough.<sup>89</sup>

The impassioned moral statements of this chapter convey the depth of Dune’s commitment to the early ideals of Bolshevism and to the power of

86. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 85–87.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 87.



this idealism that he sustained through thirty years of life and punishment. But here again, Dune may also have been engaging in a dialogue with Furmanov, for the theme of Red morality also runs through his account of the Red Army and its actions. Both authors emphasized the Red Army policy of always paying for the food and supplies that they acquired from the local inhabitants where they fought. But Furmanov's discussion of looting were even more explicit. "This was something spontaneous, difficult to struggle against and it is unthinkable to eliminate it while war still exists. This is a feature of our contemporary soldiers, part of the nature of the highly strung, specifically military destructive psychology. Wartime looting will disappear only when war does."<sup>90</sup> Nonetheless, Furmanov exercised his Bolshevik authority to fight such behavior, even contradicting Chapaev in the process. For example, Chapaev took on the assignment of explaining the anti-looting policy to his troops, but Furmanov was appalled at Chapaev's interpretation: the troops should not take anything now, because they would inherit everything when the war was over.

"Don't take anything, I tell you", said Chapaev,

[...] but gather it all in one pile and hand it over to your commander, give him everything you took from the bourgeoisie. The commander will sell it and put the money in the regimental fund. If you are wounded, you'll get a hundred rubles from the fund – if you're killed, they'll give your family a hundred for each of you. Well? Am I right or not?<sup>91</sup>

Fedor Klichkov then proceeded to control the damage left by Chapaev's version of "rob the robbers".

Fedor had to disarm Chapaev's pronouncements extremely carefully, and he was constantly dropping such asides as "our enemies would of course misinterpret Chapaev's 'good and correct ideas' about our *common* property, saying we seize, take away and divide up everything any way we like. But Comrade Chapaev and I, and you, too, of course, don't think that way."<sup>92</sup>

Such passages and many others provide substantial evidence of correspondences between Furmanov's novel and for Dune's own autobiography. Other correspondences can be found between Dune's text and other popular novels: Mikhail Sholokhov's *Tikhii Don* may have provided a reference for the rape scene Dune includes in his account.<sup>93</sup> But it cannot be proven conclusively that Furmanov served as Dune's intertextual

90. Furmanov, *Chapaev*, p. 81.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

93. I thank Boris Kolonitskii for this suggestion. An exhaustive survey of potential fictional models was not undertaken. *Molodaia gvardiia* by Aleksandr Fadeev (Moscow, 1945) is another possible template, particularly since Dune compares himself to Fadeev in his correspondence.

interlocutor. Both Furmanov's account of his hero, Vasili Chapaev, and other commanders, and Dune's description of the commanders under whom he served were drawn from "life". Their similar treatments may reflect similar experience and not narrative copying: fiery commanders like Kikvidze and Chapaev fought on many fronts during the civil war. My point is rather to emphasize that the correspondences are sufficiently striking to suggest that we must acknowledge the *possibility* that Dune described part of his experience in language and phrasing that was not his own.

Just as Thomas Lahusen has brilliantly illuminated the elements from the life of the writer, Vasili Azhaev, that underlay his socialist realist novel, *Far from Moscow*, so students who use autobiographies as sources need to consider the possibility of intertextual influences.<sup>94</sup> Having done that, even if the influences are hypothetical, we can better evaluate those elements of the autobiography that *deviate* from the corresponding texts. Dune's decision to include descriptions and moments that resonate with the Furmanov novel may have reflected the available script already prepared by Furmanov, and may have constituted Dune's dialogue with the civil war story, already so well known to readers of Furmanov's fiction. But it is the contrasts, rather than the correspondences, that validate the Dune autobiography as an autonomous narrative of self. This can be seen by returning to the larger question of Russian worker autobiography and its evaluation.

#### SELFHOOD AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES

Dune's autobiography falls squarely within the model of the political narrative. Like Furmanov (and unlike other more episodic civil war novels, such as Isaak Babel's *Red Cavalry* and Boris Pil'niak's *Naked Year*), Dune's life course is recollected as a journey along an important road. (Compare this sense of direction with Klichkov's criticism of Chapaev: "Chapaev at this time – was like an eagle with his eyes bound – his heart was trembling, his blood heated, with wondrous and passionate fits, with an indomitable will, but – he had no path in life, he did not know it, make it out, see it."<sup>95</sup>) The plot of Dune's narrative is the success of the Bolshevik revolution, the victory by 1921 over the bourgeoisie, the Whites, and national separatism. Causality is provided by the concept of class struggle, consisting of the moral superiority of work and workers, guaranteeing the rightness of the Bolshevik cause. The referential portion of his narrative consists of the chronological ordering of events: the autobiography begins

94. Thomas Lahusen, *How Life Writes the Book: Real Socialism and Socialist Realism in Stalin's Russia* (Ithaca, NY, 1997).

95. Furmanov, *Chapaev*, p. 96.

when Dune is a schoolboy of fourteen in Riga, and ends when he is twenty-one, a mature and battle-hardened commissar, supervising the implementation of Soviet power in Dagestan in 1921. Within this plot, Dune embeds his story in that of the collective but also as self; he is both “I” and “we” in ways that are distinctive of working-class autobiography.

The evaluative and subjective aspects of this autobiography, however, give the memoir its special appeal and importance, both in its own right and as a particular example of Russian worker autobiography. In choosing to engage certain discourses about the revolution, possibly such as Furmanov’s, and yet presenting his own story, Dune inserts a very personal self into the collective narrative of the revolutionary movement. The uniqueness of Dune’s account of the grand story of revolution and civil war depends directly on the conditions of the production of this work, and this is why it is so important to understand these conditions. Dune in Paris was free to select his own script in a way that was not possible in Moscow; but he was also constrained by the sources of his support and by his ideal readers: the Ford Foundation, Columbia University, his Menshevik friends in the emigré community, the potential purchasers of a German or an American edition. Within these constraints, like all autobiographers within their particular constraints, Dune endeavored to reflect, to order, and to evaluate his life. Once we understand these conditions of production, and the ways in which models and archetypes shaped and influenced the autobiographical effort, we may then be able to control for these external factors – whether markets or collective memory projects – and to search for the author’s subjectivity.

This autobiography, written far from home and in the knowledge that he had not long to live, reveals Dune’s attempts to answer the canonical autobiographical questions: “Who am I?”, and “Where do I belong?”. Reading closely, we can conclude that Dune located his subjectivity in the formative experiences of childhood and youth. He makes numerous references to lessons taught by his family as he was growing up in Riga, to key encounters (such as with Saprionov), and most significantly, to his youth, his status as an adolescent in these formative years both for himself and for the revolution. In the midst of his narrative of revolution, for example, he harkens back to his mother’s teaching about justice and honor. “What is theft? My mother taught me as a child that a thief who stole a piece of bread to satisfy hunger was not a criminal, but a poor person too ashamed to beg.”<sup>96</sup> He was taught, as a ten-year old boy, that it was shameful for a skilled worker’s wife to be employed outside the home, and that it was the son’s duty to earn for the family if the father was unemployed.<sup>97</sup>

96. Dune, *Red Guard*, p. 82.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

His comment on his first meeting with Sapronov, leading to a “friendship that was greatly to determine the course of my future life”,<sup>98</sup> is corroborated only in part in Dune’s account of his activities as a Bolshevik in 1917. In fact, he is reading back into the meeting his lifetime of political opposition, party expulsions, and prison terms. He strikes a note of wonder at the high responsibility he had acquired as an adolescent: his ability to read technical drawings led to his rapid promotion at the Provodnik factory. “This led to my being promoted, as a fifteen-to-sixteen year old youth, into the ranks of the skilled, highly paid workers. I began to earn twice as much as my father.”<sup>99</sup> He was not guided by the slogan “Rob the robbers” when he “was seventeen years old, and I repudiate the charge even now”. Upon receiving his first assignment as a political commissar, Dune did not ask questions: “they must have known best, to assign an eighteen-year old kid to conduct political work”.<sup>100</sup> These early moments of revolutionary necessity imposing itself on a raw youth decisively shaped his morality as well as his sense of identity.

The attachment to successive primary groups also constitutes a crucial element in Dune’s developing identity, and therefore in his choices for his presentation of self. His joy at joining a work collective – producing an exhilarating tension between achieving independence and being part of a cohesive collective with a world historical mission – provides one of the most vivid accounts of the meaning of work in the worker autobiographical literature anywhere. Recalling his first days on the job, he wrote, “We worked happily, singing as we went along, and whenever we went up or down a hill we would sing the ‘Dubinushka’ [...] even now, in old age, I remember with warmth our ‘Dubinushka’ and those who led the singing.”<sup>101</sup> We would not expect that the Ford Foundation or Columbia University’s Russian Archive was as interested in working-class experience as much as in politics and ideology. None of the other autobiographies in the Russian Archive provides as full an account of work values and shopfloor experiences. Nor do the typical autobiographies of workers published in the Soviet Union dwell on the inner life of the workplace. We can surmise, then, that Dune was writing his own script when he recalled his years in the Provodnik factory.

Dune’s second primary group, the Red Army, occupied chronologically more of his life than his work experience, and yet, I would argue that this experience contributed relatively less to his identity. Dune, in fact, appeared most often in the Red Army portion of his autobiography to be a man on his own, never quite at home. His first encounter with staff

98. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

headquarters produced in him an alienation from the businesslike and unfriendly culture of professional officers; his first assignment as political commissar took him to a unit of drafted Nizhegorod peasants, whose ranks had recently been decimated by punitive disciplinary executions. Dune felt himself a stranger, a “white crow”, in this army, and he spent a few nervous nights overhearing the peasants plan to shoot him in retaliation for what Trotsky had done to their fellow villagers.<sup>102</sup> He nearly died from typhus, a fate that was a common experience of Red Army men but nearly ignored in the heroic account of Furmanov. He was further isolated from a Red Army identity when captured by the Green partisans and then sent to a White prison hospital in Novorossiisk. He also wrote of his bewilderment and alienation from Red Army nationality policies in the Caucasus, where he served his final assignment.

Perhaps his lack of attachment explains why this second half of his autobiography relies more heavily on other documented sources, and, as I have hypothesized, on the “scripts” available from Furmanov’s or other novels. On his own, Dune could not make sense of this period in his political life. For Eduard Dune, then, despite spending the free years of his adult life as a scientist, as a member of the Soviet technical intelligentsia, his working-class identity emerges strongly in his autobiographical writings. His pride in maintaining a loyalty to the collective, and in the nobility of work, dominates his autobiographical account. Whether contrasting the selfish behavior of the intellectuals, who looted their rest-home, with that of workers, who would not touch an iota of property at the Arkhangel’skoe estate, or in his negative views of peasants, class and class identity structure Dune’s conception of himself.

It is also worthwhile to point out that national identity most decidedly did not constitute an element of Dune’s identity. Although a Latvian by birth, he clearly and happily shed his Latvian identity with his move to Moscow, to the metropole, in 1915. He rejoiced at Russian cooking methods: “there is no better food than that cooked in a Russian stove”.<sup>103</sup> His Latvian identity emerged only once more in his autobiography, when to prove to a local peasant that Latvians were not a race of seven-foot tall monsters with an eye in the middle of their foreheads, he admitted that he was a Latvian himself – in other words, a normal human being.<sup>104</sup> And when he was urged in 1949 to apply to emigrate to the US under its quota for Latvian immigration, he wrote that he could hardly be counted as a Latvian, when he had left there in 1915 and had read nothing since in his “native language”. His birth in Latvia made him no more a Latvian, he wrote to Rafael Abramovich, than being born Jewish made Abramovich a

102. *Ibid.*, pp. 129–130.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

Zionist:<sup>105</sup> national origin did not translate into nationalism for these veteran socialists.

For Eduard Dune, like many others in his generation, class trumped nationality. The power of class identity, which emerges so strongly in working-class autobiographies across geographic boundaries, should remind historians to continue to pay attention to such identities, especially as events at the end of the twentieth century have placed national identities in so prominent a place on the public intellectuals' agenda.

Social historians, who study the history of societies rather than individuals, have always looked to aggregate their objects of study. Their field of view is one of social atoms – individuals seen always in the plural, and they have developed methodologies and conceptual tools to analyze and understand behaviors, life experiences, attitudes, and circumstances of aggregates of individuals in societies. Historians of the working class belong to a subset of social historians, and they too have employed these approaches and methods, even more because of the centrality of class analysis to their work. The study of autobiography, by contrast, focuses on individuals, on how individual authors elaborate their sense of self, their identity, their particular fit with the larger world. By accepting the notion that individual autobiographers narrated their life histories according to discourses, conventions, and codes prevailing in their wider society, we can evaluate individual autobiographies in terms of the degree of correspondence between the individual's narrative and the scripts and models available to the authors. We can locate points of collective identity as well as locations of individual selfhood. Whether we examine an individual autobiography, as I have done here, or apply these tools of autobiographical analysis to a collection of autobiographies, by understanding the conventions of the genre and the elements of their production, historians can more carefully and completely utilize these key documents as sources of Russian historical experience.

105. Nicolaevsky Collection, box 235, folder 1, letter from Dune to Abramovich, 15 May 1949.