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Limonov's
"It's Me, Eddie"
and the
Autobiographical
Mode

REES

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Introduction

The publication of Èduard Limonov's *It's Me, Eddie* (*Èto ia — Èdichka*) in 1980¹ aroused impassioned polemics that have not been entirely quelled after more than a decade. Critical discourse on the book tends to superlatives and hyperbole; it has been lauded as "the quintessential novel of the third wave emigration" and reviled as pornographic slander.² Limonov's heavy use of *mat*, his inclusion of numerous explicitly erotic scenes and his avowal of leftist political tendencies all contributed to establishing *It's Me, Eddie's* infamy.

Any discussion of this text is complicated by what may be called the phenomenon of Limonov. Intentionally obscuring the line between art and life, between his *Ich-Erzählung* narrator Èdichka and himself, Limonov has created and cultivated an iconoclastic authorial persona. He firmly rejects the "depressing literary ghetto" of émigré literature that is, he insists, manipulated by Western politics and distorted by commercial censorship.³ Moreover, Limonov denies knowing or being influenced by Russian literary tradition and asserts that he is better acquainted with American literature.⁴ Like the Futurists, the *Oberiuty* and other avant-garde artists of the twentieth century, he rejects categorization by nationality and aspires to transcend traditional literary classification schemes. His public statements seem calculated to be outrageous and offensive,⁵ and he appears to thrive on the controversy that surrounds him.

Although Limonov's talent was first recognized in the literary bohemia of Kharkov and Moscow on the basis of his poetry, he is far better known in the West as a prose writer. Since making his prose debut with *It's Me, Eddie*, he has written five more "autobiographical novels"⁶ and a number of his shorter works have appeared in literary journals and miscellanies. However, the critical response to Limonov's later pieces has been relatively muted. He is, of course, quite young and it is far too early to judge the corpus of his writing as a whole. Yet in his attempts to recast his autobiographical hero in the time frame following that of *It's Me, Eddie* (in *His Butler's Story*) and prior to it (in *Adolescent Savenko* [*Podrostok Savenko*] and

and *Young Rascal* [*Molodoi negodiai*]), there is much that strikes the reader as artificial and forced. The remarks made by the émigré critics Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis in 1982 are germane:

Лимонов написал талантливую исповедальную прозу с отчаянной попытке довести до крайнего предела материальное, телесное познание самого себя. Такая проза пишется раз в жизни, ни повторить, ни переписать не выйдет: только и опыт, а не вымысел и фантазия, дают вдохновение вседозволенности. А поэтому – еще неизвестно, писатель ли Эдуард Лимонов, но его книга – конечно, литература.

Limonov has written talented confessional prose in a desperate attempt to take physical, bodily cognition of oneself to the extreme limit. Such prose is written once in life and can neither be repeated nor rewritten. Only knowledge and experience, not invention or fantasy, give inspiration to such writing in which "everything is permitted." And therefore it is still not clear whether Édouard Limonov is a writer; but his book, of course, is literature.⁷

With the advent of *glasnost*', publication of Limonov's works in the Soviet Union became possible. A lengthy and sympathetic interview with Limonov appeared in *Moskovskie novosti* in August of 1989, signalling the obviation of his persona non grata status in his homeland. His *povest'* "...*U nas byla velikaia épokha*" ("...Ours Was a Great Epoch") which recounts growing up in Kharkov as the son of an NKVD officer, was printed in *Znamia* in November 1989 and occasioned a positive review in *Literaturnaia gazeta* the following month.⁸ His short story "*Krasavitsa, vdokhnovliavshaia poëta*" ("The Beautiful Woman Who Inspired the Poet"), a satiric deflation of the cultural icon Osip Mandel'shtam, appeared in *Iunost'* in 1991. Most significant has been the publication of *It's Me, Eddie* in November 1991 by two separate Moscow publishers. The appearance of the novel, together with the publication of several polemical articles by Limonov, occasioned considerable debate in the Russian media. Limonov returned for a brief visit and was interviewed by

Russian television, but was adamant in his resistance to being drawn into the fold of Soviet literature; the image of the Soviet writer for him is that of "some fat old bourgeois guy who makes a career in literature."⁹

"Truth" in Autobiography

It's Me, Eddie purports to be autobiographical. Thus Limonov engages certain of the expectations that we bring to autobiography and challenges us to apply them to his work. He offers us what Philippe Lejeune calls "the autobiographical pact," encouraging us to read the book as "a retrospective account in prose that a real person makes of his own existence when it stresses the individual life, in particular, the story of his personality."¹⁰ Elizabeth Bruss, in her book *Autobiographical Acts*, suggests a definition of autobiography that is also relevant to Limonov's text. Bruss' "rules" include three major assumptions: 1) the autobiographer is himself the subject of the text; 2) what is described in the autobiography is "true" and subject to verification; and 3) the autobiographer believes in the truth of what he writes.¹¹

Now in considering the *autos* of autobiography, it is certainly not the case that the selves of the author and the autobiographical narrator are usually identical. But the relationship between Limonov and his narrative persona Èdichka is an especially convoluted one. Not only time, space and the vagaries of memory separate the two; in *It's Me, Eddie*, the very assumption that the author is the subject of his own autobiography is dubious. Limonov creates what Roy Pascal calls an "arbitrary standpoint" from which to narrate the story of his autobiographical hero's new life in New York.¹² Èdichka is not a great man, a public figure whose accomplishments are well known, but an obscure Russian émigré poet whose wife has abandoned him. Èdichka's obscurity is central to Limonov's satiric reworking of the autobiographical mode: Èdichka is eminently worthy of recognition and

material rewards, but Soviet, émigré and American societies unjustly deprive him of his birthright.

The "truthfulness" of the work as autobiography is extremely problematic. In a letter to the émigré critic A. Kron, Limonov insists — albeit ambiguously — on the factual basis of his writing: "If memory doesn't deceive me, all the situations are not imagined. I have only simplified many things and thrown out a lot."¹³ Indeed, the title of *It's Me, Eddie* supports our approaching the work as autobiography.¹⁴ Relying on the comfortable truism that autobiography is nonfiction, many readers and critics have treated Limonov's book as confession. Leonid Pochivalov, writing in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, asserts: "From the foreword it is clear that the work is autobiographical, that the events in it are genuine."¹⁵ Olga Matich calls the substance of Limonov's text "the unexpurgated and unedited events of his personal life and the people he has known" and claims that "his literary truth demands the uncensored representation of authentic experience."¹⁶ Aleksandr Donde offers a more cynical assessment of Limonov's veracity: "Limonov would seem to insist that he is writing the truth. Naive enthusiasm, if not semiconscious cunning."¹⁷ Whatever interest one may have in the truthfulness of Limonov's accounts, they are ultimately not verifiable. More importantly, Limonov's truth is an aesthetic one. The events and characters he describes (or invents) to illustrate his truth are valid to the extent that they accomplish his aesthetic end. All autobiography is selective, but Limonov disregards the assumption that the autobiographer writes the truth as he knows it and creates a new, artistically transcendent truth.

Limonov destabilizes our expectation of truthfulness by qualifying the sincerity and completeness of his confession within the text. Admitting that the conversation with a friend he is recounting was accompanied by heavy drinking, Èdichka insists on the rationality of his autobiographical procedure:

Если пиджачник государственный деятель побоится сказать, что он сформулировал то или иное решение государственное в промежутке между двумя стаканами водки или виски, или сидя в туалете, меня эта я к о б ы н е у м е с т н о с т ь , несвоевременность проявлений человеческого таланта и гения всегда восхищала. И скрывать я этого не собираюсь. Скрывать — значит искривлять и способствовать искривлению человеческой природы.
(74)

Although a stuffed-shirt statesman may be afraid to admit he has formulated one or another state decision in the interval between two glasses of vodka or whiskey or while sitting on the toilet, I have always been delighted by the apparent incongruity, the inopportuneness, of manifestations of human talent and genius. And I do not intend to hide it. To hide it would be to distort, or facilitate the distortion of, human nature.¹⁸ (69)

Elsewhere he tells his girlfriend Roseanne about an incident in the past when he made a pass at his best friend's wife and thus lost his friend forever. He then confides to the reader the "real" story, and we learn that this was the first time he met the woman, that she was receptive to his advances, that her husband did not care at all, and that at any rate she was accompanied at the time by her lover and not her husband. That this second version may be as fictionalized as the first is not the point; Limonov suggests that truth is a relative concept and adaptable to the needs of the moment.

The tricks that memory plays affect all autobiographical writing to some degree, but Limonov emphasizes the unreliability of his own powers of recollection. This sometimes concerns very fine points of description, as in the following account of his dress on one particular occasion:

На меня была узенькая джинсовая курточка, такие же джинсовые брюки, вправленные, нет, закатанные очень высоко, обнажая мои красивейшие сапоги на высоком каблуке, сапоги из трех цветов кожи. (76)

I was wearing a nice tight denim jacket, and jeans tucked in — no, rolled way high, to reveal my very beautiful high-heeled boots of tricolor leather. (71)

Here Limonov makes the reader privy to the process of compromise between recollection and invention that always underlies the autobiographical act. Whether Èdichka's jeans were tucked in or rolled up remains in doubt — the difference is utterly inconsequential from the point of view of the narrative — but Limonov suggests that if they were not rolled up, they certainly should have been in retrospect. At times Èdichka seems impatient with the demand of historical accuracy that the autobiographical mode would impose on him. To preface his account of going to see his ex-wife Elena, he writes:

Через некоторое время она позвонила, впрочем, я уже не помню, может, я позвонил, и такая ли была хронологическая последовательность наших встреч, в каком порядке я их перечисляю, или другая. Кажется, я позвонил, и оказалось, что она больна. (262)

After a time she called, though I no longer remember, maybe I called; nor do I remember whether our meetings were in the chronological sequence in which I've enumerated them or in some other order. I called, I think, and it turned out she was sick. (244)

What is significant for Èdichka is not the precise ordering of events, but the emotional and psychological impact they had on him. With this brief disclaimer, he asserts that the larger, aesthetic truth of his story is his primary concern.

The Idyllic Childhood and the Process of Disenchantment

Limonov makes free use of the autobiographical mode to create a "childhood" autobiography¹⁹ that examines the phenomenon of the Third Wave of emigration from within. Emigration entails isolation, the loss of prestige, the absence of contact with the Russian language and the necessity of coming to terms with a new culture and its unfamiliar values. Sundered (willingly or unwillingly) from the Soviet milieu, the émigré is cast adrift and must somehow adapt to his new homeland. The world Èdichka confronts in his first months of emigration is chaotic, formless and incomprehensible. It is, as Nataliia Gross remarks, utterly alien (*chuzhoi*).²⁰ We observe Èdichka's attempts to make this world *svoi*, to impose order on chaos. *It's Me, Eddie* is essentially the history of this second childhood. Èdichka's tale metaphorically recapitulates the experience of his generation; his extremism is validated by the fact that he writes as an insider, a witness and a survivor.

We are admitted to Èdichka's world after he has undergone a kind of "death" and we follow his efforts to return to life. As Donde remarks, "to abandon one's own cosmos means no more and no less than to die, and the subsequent task turns out to be no more and no less than to be reborn."²¹ Working as a laborer in a hotel restaurant surrounded by other immigrants, which Limonov describes in the chapter "*Ia — basboi*" ("I Am a Busboy"), turns out to be a sort of limbo. The mechanical nature of the movements he makes, the repetitiveness of the work resemble death itself, and Èdichka must escape in order to begin his quest for life in earnest. As he leaves the restaurant for the last time, he recalls "when I shag-assed (*khuiachil*) out of there the last day, I laughed like a silly baby." (43) It is at this point that he gives free rein to his libido and initiates the process of growth and self-actualization that is at the heart of *It's Me, Eddie*.

The "childhood" that Èdichka lives through as a new émigré is fraught with disappointments. By the time we are introduced to him, Èdichka's faith in the American dream has been shattered and he is bitterly contemplating its ruins. One of his émigré acquaintances expresses their mutual disillusionment eloquently when

he notes the impossibility of describing to Soviet friends back home what the West is like:

– Хуй ты ему объяснишь, что при машине и Монреале здесь можно в страшном говне находиться, это невозможно объяснить, говорит Наум. – Ебаная эмиграция! (21)

'You'll never explain it to him — that for all your car and your Montreal you can be up to your ears in shit here. It's impossible to explain,' Nahum said. 'Fucking emigration!' (16)

Èdichka's disenchantment with his former dreams of the West has also meant a loss of what Richard Coe calls the "magic" of the past remembered.²² The spirit of this magic pervades Limonov's 1974 poem "*My natsional'nyi geroi*" ("We Are the National Hero") and it is, for Èdichka, inextricably bound to his love for Elena.

Limonov's autobiography responds parodically to the nineteenth-century Russian literary childhood. Traditionally, the authors of childhoods recount gradually increasing awareness of the external world and other people.²³ Limonov's narrative persona turns sharply inward, reflecting narcissistically on himself while looking for the key to his rebirth. Indeed, awareness and acceptance of the community and integration into it — *sine qua non* of the classical childhood — are left in considerable doubt in *It's Me, Eddie*. Limonov would seem to be reacting in particular to the myth of happy childhood that is central to nineteenth-century Russian autobiographical practice.²⁴ His text refutes this myth in form and in substance, suggesting that the émigré experience represents the antipode of Tolstoi's or Aksakov's or even Nabokov's Russian idylls.

Part of Èdichka's coming to terms with his present is grasping the meaning of his past. Memories of his pre-New York life — growing up and maturing as a poet in the Soviet Union, his departure and the months immediately following his emigration — are rendered as hazy and mystical. His childhood in Kharkov is "fabulously (*basnoslovno*) distant." (230) Glimpses of his pre-emigration life take on a dreamlike quality; they suggest a preconsciousness that can only be remembered

in fragments or imaginatively recreated from an adult perspective. Èdichka's recollections of his "Great Love" are especially vague. Whatever its material privations, he remembers his marriage to Elena as edenic. He consistently elevates her in his memory to "Elena the Beautiful, Elena — the best woman in Moscow and if in Moscow, then in Russia. 'Nataliia Goncharova'."²⁵ (The latter epithet is particularly interesting in light of Elena's role in Èdichka's metaphoric death.) Their peripatetic existence in exile is described in the sketchiest terms: "...a year of tears and failures, of wanderings through Austria, Italy, and America, through luxurious capitals where we lived on potatoes and onions and got one shower a week..." (124) Èdichka's visceral reaction to the tortuous memories of his "happy days" with Elena is childlike in its intense physicality:

Нет, я не вспоминаю мои счастливые дни, ни хуя не вспоминаю, а как вспомню, то рвать тянет, вроде обожрался или что-то иное, желудочное. (128)

No, I do not remember my happy days, I don't remember a fucking thing, but when I do, I feel like vomiting, as if I'd gorged myself or something or had a stomach upset. (123)

Èdichka's descriptions of the setting of his "childhood" in New York are highly selective. Frequently he includes minutiae that serve to illuminate his inner, psychological landscape more than the external backdrop of his actions. Passages such as the following provide a window into Èdichka's emotional processes:

Ну да, так вот я проходил утром через кухню, брал столик на колесниках, покрывал его сверху белой скатертью, а две его нижние полки красными салфетками. На салфетки я ставил специальные длинные глубокие вазочки – посуду для масла, иногда немного вилок и ножей, на случай если у моих двух официантов, которых я обслуживал, не хватит посуды, или стопку чашек, или блюдец. Наверх, на белую скатерть я помещал обычно четыре под серебро сделанных кувшина, предварительно наполнив их кусочками льда и водой, и большую миску масла, стандартные кусочки – я вынимал их из холодильника и посыпал свежим тонким льдом. (30-31)

Well, every morning I walked through the kitchen, took a little table on casters, covered the top with a white tablecloth and the two lower shelves with red napkins. On the napkins I placed some special long, deep little bowls for butter, sometimes a few forks and knives or a stack of cups and saucers, in case the two waiters I served should lack dishes. On top, on the white tablecloth, I usually placed four imitation-silver pitchers, having first filled them with ice cubes and water, and a big bowl of butter pats, which I took from the refrigerator and sprinkled with fresh fine ice. (25-26)

Although seemingly trivial, the exhaustive detail of this description is expressive of Èdichka's state of mind. Stunned and bewildered by his "tragedy" (both his loss of Elena and his exile), he moves mechanically, without reflection in order to minimize his pain and to recoup his strength. His catalogue of the busboy's equipage bespeaks his effort to focus outward rather than inward. It also, of course, serves as an expose of the obtuseness and cruelty of America; the specifics of his menial task emphasize the inappropriateness of such work for a talented Russian poet.

Smells play an important role in Èdichka's recollections. The olfactory sense is, psychology tells us, extremely powerful in conjuring up images and impressions. Thus writers of childhoods often include smells in their evocations of the past. Èdichka informs us that he is very sensitive to smells and can distinguish between "the apartments of society people and bohemians" on the one hand and those of "philistines and bourgeois families" on the other hand by their scent.²⁶ (49) His intuitive class consciousness is a satiric comment on the Soviet hierarchical mindset. It also calls to mind idyllic depictions of childhood based on smell by authors like Tolstoi, Gogol' and Goncharov. Certainly parody motivates Èdichka's description of the storeroom in the hotel where he worked as a busboy:

Я любил кладовую – лювил ее запах
– чистого белья и пряностей.
Иногда я туда забегал среди работы
– сменить полотенце или быстро
сжевать кусок мяса, оставшийся в
тарелке какого-нибудь
пресыщенного посетителя, и бежал
дальше. (38)

I loved the storeroom, loved its smell
of clean linen and spices. Sometimes I
ran in there in the middle of work, to
change a towel or quickly finish
chewing a piece of meat left on the
plate of some surfeited customer, and
then ran on. (33)

The juxtaposition of the image of cleanliness and quiet with the rather nasty account of gulping down leftovers underscores the extent to which Èdichka's "childhood" departs from the pastoral myth.

Limonov's inclusion of the *curiosa* of American life, ranging from various designer brands of clothing to handcuffs and vibrators, was probably interesting from the standpoint of the émigré or Soviet reader. He is, however, less interested in satisfying the curiosity of his non-American audience than in effecting a satirical expose of a society that has elevated material values to the detriment of spiritual and intellectual values. His intentions are diametrically opposed to those of a portraitist of childhood like Nabokov. In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov uses *curiosa* to create a vision and feeling of time past, specifically prerevolutionary Russia; Limonov focuses

on the objects that surround him to illustrate the emptiness and degradation of the society they represent. Intended to accomplish the task of critical realism, his descriptions are for the most part straightforward and unadorned. Metaphor, simile and other elements of poetic language are rare in *It's Me, Eddie*, a feature that links Limonov's autobiographical prose with his poetry.²⁷

Historical accuracy aside, it is significant that Limonov chooses New York City as the locus of the action of the book. The city provides a closed space for Èdichka's search. He calls New York "my great house" (215) and indeed its streets, apartments and empty lots function in much the same way as the family home or estate of earlier childhood autobiographers. Moreover, the city is endowed with an animistic character of its own. It reveals its secrets to Èdichka, who is not afraid of it and seeks adventure in its labyrinthine depths. In fact, New York protects and comforts Èdichka; it fulfills a parental role:

За оградой парка меня подхватывает на руки Нью-Йорк, я окунаюсь в его теплоту и лето, кончающееся лето, господа, и несет меня мой Нью-Йорк мимо дверей его магазинов, мимо станций собвея, мимо автобусов и ликерных витрин. (248-49)

Beyond the park fence, New York picks me up in its arms. I sink into its warmth and summer — a summer coming to an end, gentlemen — and my New York carries me past the doors of its shops, past the subway stations, past the buses and the liquor store windows. (231)

Yet New York is also the city of nightmares and death. Before he comes to terms with the city, before he can refer to it as "My Friend New York," it is "a Babylon, God help me, a Babylon." (79) The apocalyptic nature of the city is suppressed as Èdichka recovers his inner strength, so that his relationship with his surroundings mirrors his relationship with his inner self.

Nature is almost absent as a formative influence in Èdichka's autobiography of childhood. In his book *The Battle for Childhood*, Andrew Wachtel demonstrates that nature plays a seminal role in the childhoods of most nineteenth-century Russian

autobiographers. For Tolstoi and Aksakov, the rural estate is associated with a golden age of innocence; it is contrasted with the "unnatural" city. Èdichka's émigré childhood is spent almost exclusively in the "city of the yellow devil," indeed at its very core. Limonov subverts the arcadian myth connected with the Russian childhood tradition to express forcefully the disillusionment of the émigré.

There are two important exceptions to this rule in *It's Me, Eddie* and both serve the function of contrast. When Èdichka accompanies his friend John to the Tolstoi Farm outside of New York, he finds himself holding his hosts' little girl. Recalling his impressions, he calls Katen'ka "little plant" and notes that "...at her age the little girl was closer to nature, to leaves and grass, than to people...." (211) Her touch gives him "a sense of animal comfort (*zverinyi uiut*) such as I had not felt since I slept with my arms around Elena." (211) It is interesting that Èdichka associates Katen'ka with Elena (and there is no sexual innuendo here at all). The fleeting idyllic moment of warmth he experiences with her is connected with his cultural past (the Tolstoi Farm) and his vanished innocence (the rural setting). Both of these, represented in Èdichka's mind by Elena, are irredeemably lost to him. In a second, similar passage Èdichka describes a photograph of Elena as a child:

А вот этой девочки с косой в белых чулочках, стоящей в своем саду, а сзади, как декорации в опере на пасторальную тему – березки, кусты, кусок деревянного дома, был достоин только я. (274)

Of this little girl, with her braid, in her little *white* stockings, standing in her *garden*, and behind her, like scenery in a *pastoral* opera, *birches*, shrubs, a segment of a wooden house — only I was worthy. (256-57) (my emphasis)

The edenic past of this photograph is so distant, so inaccessible to Èdichka that one is struck more forcefully by the ugliness of his present.

Èdichka's iconoclasm and his often shocking behavior are manifestations of the rebelliousness characteristic of childhood and adolescence. As an older, wiser narrator, he recognizes that his thoughts and actions were sometimes illogical in the

period he recalls. Concerning his younger self, he concedes "I did not want to be reasonable, did not want to consider assorted explanatory causes...." (27) Certainly his "badness" stems, in part, from envy and spite, and in this respect he finds his artistic prototype in Olesha's Kavalero^v.²⁸ Moreover, he consistently shifts the blame for his failures onto others. Cast into the role of a child, he exhibits childlike reflexes. In the tradition of Rousseau, Èdichka is not really bad; his shocking behavior is the product of living in a corrupt and insensitive society. The autobiographical mode, congenial as it is to revelations of nonconformism and revolt, facilitates Limonov's critique of America's treatment of Russian émigrés.

Although self-irony is always a factor in Èdichka's rhetoric, there is much that is childish in the poetic stance he assumes. He expresses his dissatisfaction with not receiving the recognition due him in absurdly simplistic terms:

Я делаю мою работу – где мои
деньги? Оба государства пиздят,
что они устроены справедливо, но
где мои деньги? (11)

I do my work — where's my money?
Both states bullshit about the justice of
their systems, but where's my money?
(7)

His preference for work that is purely creative and his idealistic vision of a society in which people will not have to work for a living are stubbornly naive. Whether we take it seriously or not, Èdichka's poetic megalomania serves an important satiric function. Because it is couched in such extreme terms, it renders farcical the traditional Russian equation of the poet and the tsar. Recounting reading his poetry to his friends Kirill and Raymond, Èdichka writes "In this business I am superior to everyone; here, only in poetry am I who I am." (63) His admiration for another poet is expressed in a paradoxical manner; he calls him "contemporary Russia's cruelest poet...a scoundrel and a villain, but magnificent." (157) Èdichka focuses on the rights and privileges that accrue to the position of the Russian poet-tsar rather than on the moral responsibilities it entails, and thus exposes the cultural tradition by

which he defines himself as illusory. This deflation is a means of transcending the past for Èdichka, of coming to terms with the reality of his new life.

The Split Persona and the Uses of Alienation

I have suggested that Limonov challenges our expectation that the author and his autobiographical narrative "I" are one and the same. The self-that-was presented to us has been shaped and altered from the raw material of *bios* by both memory and imagination. This is to some extent the practice of every autobiographer, but Limonov is exceptionally keenly aware of the double referent of his first-person "I." He implicitly acknowledges the split that exists between Èdichka's point of view and his own. Recalling his purchase of a pair of handcuffs to facilitate Elena's kidnapping, he sums up the episode as "a pitiful story, very pitiful." (31) Describing his attire on another occasion, he objectively judges his own taste: "In the end I dressed very strangely...." (49)

Although he exploits the privileged position of the insider vis-à-vis his own thoughts and actions, Èduard/Èdichka often regards himself as if from the side, from the standpoint of an observer. This type of *ostranenie* gives Limonov's irony in respect to his narrator free play. He imagines how he appears to the secretaries watching him on his balcony:

Видят, что раз в два дня человек готовит тут же на балконе в огромной кастрюле, на электрической плитке что-то варварское, испускающее дым. (7)

What they see is that every other day, on a hot plate there on the balcony, a man cooks a huge steaming pot of something barbaric. (3)

The handcuff debacle is rendered in tones of black humor: "This gruesome scene was fit for Hollywood: Limonov weeping with grief *over a pair of handcuffs for his*

beloved and filing off the safety button with a kitchen knife." (31) Describing his failed homosexual encounter with Raymond, he muses "we must have looked like Japanese wrestlers."²⁹ (61) Limonov even utilizes the distance between his narrated and narrating selves as a source of ironic humor. Having described himself rather grandiloquently as "a free personality in the free world," he proceeds to mock his own rhetoric a few sentences later:

Свободной личности надоело сидеть
на помосте. Она прыгнула вниз. (81)

The free personality got sick of sitting
on the scaffold. It jumped down. (75)

Limonov frequently shifts into third-person narration, making the relationship between the author and his hero Èdichka still more problematic.³⁰ His use of the third person formalizes what can generally be said of autobiography: that the self represented is not the same as the self writing. Because Èdichka is struggling with the reconciliation of the past (his pre-emigration life in the Soviet Union) and the present (his unbearably anonymous existence as an exile), shifts between narrative modes are amply motivated. They eloquently express, as Lejeune puts it, "the tension between impossible unity and intolerable division."³¹ Limonov manipulates the distancing effect of the third person in presenting his narrator's ruminations and moods. Èdichka's response to Raymond's assurance that he can eat avocado and shrimp salad because he is only a boy emphasizes his alienation both from the scene described and the present act of recall:

Мальчик подумал про себя, что да,
конечно, он мальчик, но если бы
продолбить в голове дыру, вынуть
ту часть мозга, которая заведует
памятью – промыть и прочистить
как следует, было бы роскошно. Вот
тогда мальчик. (59)

The boy thought to himself that yes, no
doubt he was a boy, but if you made a
hole in his head, took out the part of
the brain that controlled the memory,
washed and cleaned it properly, that
would be luxury. *Then* you'd have a
boy. (54)

Limonov complicates the situation by oscillating between the first and third (and occasionally second) persons. These shifts often occur within a single sentence. He recalls attending Elena's modelling show: "Simultaneously Eddie-baby apologized for not bringing Elena flowers, I had been in such a rush to see her that I hadn't had time." (248) The reader is sometimes drawn into the narration scheme overtly, as in the following passage that ends with the insistent query:

У Эдички чудовищные силы, как при такой структуре моей я еще держусь, как? (104)

Eddie has fantastic strength, how else would I hold on, with my constitution, how else? (98)

Narrative modes replace one another in rapid succession:

Эдичке нормальная жизнь скушна, я от нее в России шарахался, и тут меня в сон и службу не заманите. (19)

Normality is boring to little Eddie; I shied away from it in Russia, and you won't lure me into a life of sleep and work here. (14)

Limonov's usage reflects the extreme instability of the narrative persona who is incomplete in either presentation singularly and therefore uses multiple presentations to achieve unity.³²

Limonov's implied reader is as unstable as his narrative persona. It is difficult to pinpoint who Èdichka has in mind when he addresses "you," and indeed this seems to change from paragraph to paragraph. He sometimes addresses the West or America; this is clearly the case in his frequent use of the Dostoevskian "*gospoda*" ("gentlemen") in postulating a receptor. Èdichka's spiteful introduction in the first few pages of the book in particular is aimed exclusively at an American audience: He writes "I live at your expense, you pay taxes and I don't do a fucking thing," and furthermore "I want to receive your money to the end of my days." (4) He anticipates his abstract American reader's reaction and responds to it with undisguised malice:

Я Вам не нравлюсь? Вы не хотите платить? Это еще очень мало – 278 долларов в месяц. Не хотите платить. А на хуя Вы меня выманили сюда из России, вместе с толпой евреев? Предъявляйте претензии к Вашей пропаганде, она у вас слишком сильная. Это она, а не я опустошает ваши карманы. (9)

You don't like me? You don't want to pay? It's precious little — \$278 a month. You don't want to pay. Then why the fuck did you invite me, entice me here from Russia, along with a horde of Jews? Present your complaints to your own propaganda, it's too effective. That's what's emptying your pockets, not I. (5)

Ann Shukman suggests that Limonov focuses his text progressively more and more toward the émigré reader or the Soviet reader.³³ Although this may be true in roughly quantitative terms, there are still instances of addresses to the American reader late in the book. In the eighth chapter, "*Lus, Aleshka, Dzhonni i drugie*", ("Luz, Alyoshka, Johnny, and Others") Èdichka writes, "Forgive me, but though they may say that Eddie-baby knows little of America, there is less love here, gentlemen, far less...."³⁴ (146) Berating Roseanne for her stinginess in the following chapter, he acidly notes that he

...не мог отделять ее сладкую пизду от ее жадности, на мой взгляд, только на мой взгляд, господа. Для вас, может быть, это обыкновенно. (189)

...could not separate her sweet cunt from her stinginess — stinginess in my view, gentlemen, only in my view. To you, perhaps, it's the rule. (185)

As a rule, the referent of Èdichka's "you" is not clearly identifiable; his assumption of a common frame of reference in evoking his pre-emigration past and in describing his present exile suggests an intended reader who shares these experiences. In the following passage, for example, he poses his rhetorical questions to a receptor who implicitly sympathizes with the alienation of the émigré *intelligent*:

Умные очень бля американцы советуют таким людям, как мы с Алешкой, переменить профессию. А куда мне девать все мои мысли, чувства, десять лет жизни, книги стихов, куда самого себя, рафинированного Эдичку деть? Замкнуть в оболочку басбоя. Пробовал. Хуйня. Я не могу уже быть простым человеком. Я уже навсегда испорчен. Меня уже могила исправит. (154)

Fucking smart Americans, they advise men like Alyoshka and me to change professions. Where am I to hide all my thoughts, feelings, ten years of living, books of poetry? And me myself, where am I to hide refined little Eddie? Lock him up in the shell of a busboy. Bullshit. I tried it. I can no longer be an ordinary man. I am spoiled forever. Only the grave will reform me. (149)

The echo of the Russian proverb, "the grave will cure a hunchback, and the club a stubborn man," in the last line of this passage is also aimed at a reader who shares Limonov's cultural baggage. In alluding to this proverb, Limonov implicitly identifies himself as a hunchback, one who deviates from the norm. Moreover, his usage of this phrase will remind the Russo-Soviet reader of Evgenii Evtushenko's famous reply to Khrushchev following the latter's coarse verbal attack on the creative intelligentsia at a 1963 disciplinary meeting. To Khrushchev's ominous threat that "humpbacks are straightened out by the grave," Evtushenko replied "we have come a long way since the time when only the grave straightened out humpbacks."

The indeterminacy of Limonov's intended reader, like the shifting, ambiguous quality of his narrative persona, reflects the rootlessness and alienation peculiar to the exile experience. Èdichka's insecurity about who he is speaking to within the text of *It's Me, Eddie* is emblematic of the dilemma of the émigré writer. Just as Èdichka addresses by turns his Western readership, the émigré community and the Soviet reader, Russian writers living in the diaspora must continually ask themselves for whom they are writing. The question has, of course, been largely

obviated by *glasnost*', but was still a central one for third wave writers of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Narrative Disjuncture

Unlike nineteenth-century autobiographies of childhood, *It's Me, Eddie* is not chronoliner. The original Russian text consists of thirteen chapters and an epilogue.³⁵ These chapters are for the most part self-contained narrative units and could easily exist as independent stories. The narrated time of the book is from March to October of 1976; Èdichka specifies the time and place exactly, mocking his own documentary pretensions: "It was spring, 1976, twentieth century, the great city of New York at lunch hour." (59) The remembered time of Èdichka's autobiography is, however, much greater. Lengthy digressions and anecdotes from his pre-emigration past and the months following his emigration broaden the span of narrated time substantially. Moreover, Èdichka's digressions often overlap and become mutually referential. A bottle of champagne, for example, arouses his landlady's suspicion that he is squandering his welfare payments in the first chapter of the book; this same bottle reappears a hundred pages later as Èdichka recounts his liaison with Sonia and he overdetermines the connection: "I took a bottle of champagne I had laid in ahead of time, a \$10 Soviet champagne, the very bottle Mrs. Rogoff screamed about." (107) He sometimes alludes to stories to be told in more detail later. Introducing the reader to Sonia, he writes, "Sonya was the first woman, if such she can be called, the term is hardly correct in respect to her, as you will see." (104) Furthermore, he reminds us of stories already told, calling upon us to exert our memories to place the characters and incidents mentioned. Limonov employs what Edward Brown calls "tricks of juxtaposition and interference"³⁶ with memory to link his narrative and to create the sense of dislocation that informs Èdichka's life.

Frequent tense shifts emphasize the instability of the narrative point of view. Rendering long accounts of past events in the present tense lends them immediacy and poignancy. Èdichka's examination of Elena's apartment in the chapter "*Tam, gde ona delala liubov*" ("Where She Made Love") is recounted almost entirely in the present tense, heightening the anguish he experiences. At one point, Èdichka briefly considers his use of tense and concludes:

Я говорю "был", но это то же самое, что "есть". Этот период не кончился, я в нем, в этом периоде и в настоящее время. (194)

I say 'was,' but I might as well say 'am.' This period is not over, I am in it, in this period, even at the present time. (190)

Overlapping of past and present (and sometimes future) tenses supports the open-endedness of the text. Èdichka's existence in exile — his psychological, if not his physical existence — is still perilous, and he denies the reader the comfort of resolution.

It is possible to trace a linear progression toward greater maturity, harmony and assimilation in the text. Expecially in the chapter "My Friend New York" Èdichka seems to have found a niche:

Иногда через Вашингтон-сквер, он указан в путеводителях по Нью-Йорку как достопримечательность, проходят, озираясь, настоящие американцы — каунтримены и каунтри леди. Нам, аборигенам, они очень смешны....Очень много общего с советскими обывателями, детьми и в страшную континентальную жару в просторные пыльные костюмы. (238)

Washington Square is pointed out in guidebooks to New York as a place of note, and sometimes real Americans pass through, country men and country ladies, glancing over their shoulders. *To us natives* they look very funny... They have a great deal in common with Soviet philistines, dressed in their ample dusty suits in the terrible continental heat. (221) (my emphasis)

However, Limonov intentionally frustrates such a reading, for the epilogue forcefully reiterates Èdichka's bitterness and alienation.³⁷ He closes his autobiography with a purely obscene, irrational curse that expresses all his pain and dislocation:

Я ебал вас всех, ебаные в рот суки! —
говорю я и вытираю слезы кулаком.
Может быть, я адресую эти слова
билдингам вокруг. Я не знаю. (281)

'Fuck you, cocksucking bastards,' I
say, and wipe away tears with my fist.
Perhaps I'm addressing these words to
the buildings around me. I don't
know. (264)

Like all autobiography, *It's Me, Eddie* necessarily remains incomplete, but its circularity is remarkable. The open-endedness of the text is not only that imposed by the requirements of verisimilitude (i.e. the author is still alive). One can say, as James Olney does of Michel Leiris' work, that Limonov's autobiography "far from concluding or being closed, remains open-ended, turns back on itself, and in its circularity, becomes endless."³⁸ Linear progress toward peaceful accord crowned by its achievement would negate the satirical and critical force of Limonov's text; instead, our expectation of closure is subverted.

The fragmented, irregular structure of the narrative reflects the state of Èdichka's consciousness. Bruss suggests that the arrangement of an autobiography can be taken as a sample of the author's epistemology and a demonstration of his capacities.³⁹ In the case of *It's Me, Eddie*, the apparent disorder and formlessness of the text do indeed underscore the chaos of the narrator's life. Plot as such is deemphasized, and Limonov concentrates instead on Èdichka's psychological growth. This aspect of *bios* is not traceable is a straightforward way across time; it rather extends downward into the consciousness. Time is experienced "like the thickness of a palimpsest"⁴⁰ upon whose restoration the autobiographer is engaged.

It is interesting that fragmentation is a typical feature of the autobiographical texts of women writers. Among others, Estelle Jelinek has noted the frequency of disjuncture in women's autobiography. She writes:

The narratives of [women's] lives are often not chronological and progressive but disconnected, fragmentary, or organized into self-sustained units rather than connecting chapters. The multidimensionality of women's socially conditioned roles seems to have established a pattern of diffusion and diversity when they write their autobiographies as well.⁴¹

Èdichka's roles too are "multidimensional"; the fracturing of his personality into Russian poet, émigré writer, welfare recipient and busboy is expressed by the structure of his autobiographical account. Just as critical criteria need to be reexamined to approach women's autobiography, Limonov's text requires the critic to disregard genre conventions of orderliness and harmony. Most significant, in this case, is the experience that determines the structure.

Clashing Styles and the Exile's Sensibility

Limonov has employed a wide variety of stylistic levels, including obscenities, and many anglicized terms in composing his autobiography. His mixing of registers is regarded as weakness or simple sloppiness by some critics. Konstantin Kustanovich, for example, is outraged by his joining words or phrases from distinct stylistic levels "not only within a single page or paragraph, but within a single sentence."⁴² Kustanovich also sharply criticizes what he perceives as non-Russian syntax and grammatical mistakes. The stylistic hash that Limonov has concocted in *It's Me, Eddie* is, however, a wonderfully appropriate medium to express the narrator's estrangement and insecurity. In the present of the text he is detached from both Russian and American cultures and his linguistic usage reflects his rootlessness.

Flowery or elaborate imagery is notably rare in Limonov's stylistic blend. Limonov aims at a realistic rendering of Èdichka's world through language; metaphorical elements are not a significant part of the experience he recounts in *It's Me, Eddie*. On the infrequent occasions when Èdichka is moved to employ an

expressive metaphor or simile, he includes mocking disclaimers. Èdichka's description of Luz is accompanied by an apology for his attempt at eloquence:

Она очень любит улыбаться мне,
изгибаясь при этом, да простят мне
пошлейшее и истертое сравнение, но
это именно так, как стебелек розы.

(146)

She very much liked to smile at me,
arching like — forgive me this very
vulgar and trite simile, but she arched
like the stem of a rose. (141)

He surrenders unwillingly to the temptation to write lyrically in his descriptions of Candida's children: "I shall allow myself a flourish: they were like coffee beans, like spices, her children were." (142) In a third passage, he chides himself for his triteness even as he writes: "I feel like saying the banal, and I will: 'girls with the eyes of little young lambs'." (201) Instances of beauty that inspire Èdichka to express himself in elaborate images are uncommon in the gritty, bleak world of third wave emigration. In occasionally giving voice to his lyrical impulses, Limonov underscores the rule to which they are the exception.

The intrusion of a large number of barbarisms — especially anglicisms — in Limonov's text is amply motivated by verisimilitude. These have been enumerated elsewhere.⁴³ Limonov's use of calques is frequently justified by semantics; there are no good Russian equivalents of *velfer*, *boi-frend/gerl-frend* and *basboi*. His employment of these terms reflects the strangeness of his environment for him and for his Russian readers. That Limonov often uses anglicisms or macaronic combinations when adequate Russian equivalents do exist complicates the issue; he chooses *parti*, *sobvei* and *rummeit* over *vecher* or *vecherinka*, *metro* and *tovarishch po komnate*. Such usage is not limited to the speech of third wave émigrés; in Limonov's case, it may have its origins in the Moscow hippie movement of the 1970s.⁴⁴ In any case, it implies a rejection of the Russian tradition of retaining the purity of the literary language.

Limonov's anglicisms have the effect of distancing the work from the Russian reader. Shukman suggests that they induce both visual and phonic shock, since they appear impossible and absurd to the Russian eye and ear.⁴⁵ However, Limonov's attitude toward English is far from completely positive. Felix Dreizin concludes from his analysis of Limonov's style that he abhors the English language and the American culture it represents. His syntax is made mechanical, according to Dreizin, to reflect the rigidity of the American character. "From the author's point of view, the repulsive content deserves an adequately ugly linguistic form."⁴⁶ Indeed there is some evidence for this in Èdichka's paean to Spanish (of which he claims to know about two dozen words:

Вообще я куда охотнее учил бы испанский. Он сочнее и ближе мне, как и все испаноязычные люди куда ближе мне зятянутых в галстуки клерков или вышеколенных сухопарых секретарш. (151)

I would much rather study Spanish, on the whole. It is richer and more congenial to me, just as all Spanish-speaking people are more congenial to me than buttoned-up clerks in neckties, or disciplined, skinny secretaries. (146)

He concludes his threats to the silent "gentlemen" (bourgeois businessmen in vulgar plaid pants) with the advice, "pray God to keep me from mastering correct English as long as possible." (5)

Although he finds English uncongenial, Èdichka associates knowledge of it with the power to which he aspires. As in many works of childhood autobiography, callings things by their proper names constitutes a kind of possession of them. As the child's horizons broaden, his vocabulary and his control of his environment increase. Thus Èdichka's struggle with English recapitulates the archetypal child's gradual mastery of language, a sometimes alienating and confusing, but necessary step in his development.⁴⁷ The ironic twist in Èdichka's case is that as a poet, he has an extraordinary command of his native language; that no one values his prior knowledge is an indictment of the conditions of emigration.

In order to describe more evocatively the experience of his first years of emigration, his second childhood, Limonov sometimes resorts to infantile language. He consistently uses the terms *popka* and *pipka* to refer to his and others' anatomy and he employs the childish expression *delat' pi-pi* ("make pee-pee") for urination. With few exceptions, autobiographers of childhood have traditionally been compelled to convey the experience of the child in the language of adults.⁴⁸ Èdichka's reversions to infantile language emphasize the uncomfortable closeness of the narrated self and the narrating self, the self-that-was and the self-that-is. His grip of "adulthood," here the security of belonging within a culture, is tenuous and continually threatens to loosen, throwing him back into chaos.

The presence of obscenities (*mat*) in *It's Me, Eddie* has been the focus of a great deal of controversy within the émigré community and more recently, in the former Soviet Union. Readers' and critics' reactions to his liberally sprinkling his text with taboo words have been extreme. Leonid Geller charges him with using *mat* in a heavy-handed, unimaginative way:

Великий могучий русский мат заслужил мировую известность. Но Эдичка почему-то выражается крайне убого – не по количеству, а по качеству.

The great, powerful Russian *mat* has earned worldwide renown. But Èdichka for some reason expresses himself extremely poorly — not in terms of quantity, but in terms of quality.⁴⁹

Others see Limonov's text as a linguistic *tour de force*. Dreizin applauds his breaking of taboos, asserting that he employs *mat* like a virtuoso. His obscenities, to the extent that they are peculiarly Russian, are "an oasis of the author's national identity."⁵⁰

Quite apart from issues of Limonov's skill in reproducing spoken *mat* and the appropriateness of non-normative elements in literature, Èdichka's language is most effective as a means of expressing his childhood/émigré experience. Obscenities are essential to Limonov's art in that they permit Èdichka to describe not

only what his world looks like, but what it *feels* like. In this respect too, *It's Me, Eddie* parodies the conventions of childhood autobiography. Traditionally, language conveys the magic and wonder associated with the author's budding consciousness. Limonov subverts this convention by employing obscenities to express his ineffectuality, his helplessness and his frustration. Moreover, he often uses them impressionistically or inexactly⁵¹ to reflect his irrational, angry response to the conditions of life in exile. Èdichka's friend John speaks "viciously" (*zlobno*) in discussing class inequities in America:

' – Как называется этот кар? – спросил я. – Мерседес бенц! – ответил он и прибавил, глядя на кар, – Факен шит!' (229)	'What's the name of that car?' I asked. 'Mercedes-Benz!' he replied. Staring at the car, he added, 'Fuckin' shit!' (212)
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This is, perhaps, as forceful an indictment of capitalist inequality as any penned by Upton Sinclair. At any rate, it is linguistically and psychologically true to the milieu Limonov describes. As Shukman notes, Limonov's obscenities are "words used in an emotive function and without referential content: signifiers without signifieds."⁵² Thus Limonov superimposes the language of his first, Kharkov childhood on a reminiscence of his second, New York childhood.

Conclusion

Among the motivations that may underlie the writing of autobiography, at least three apply to Limonov's text. In the first place, *It's Me, Eddie* is an assertion of the author's personality, of his existence in the face of chaos and extinction. Anxiety about the validity of the self may be the primary impetus for much of modern autobiography, but Limonov's concerns are not chiefly metaphysical. Exile — specifically, the exile of the third wave Russian poet — threatens actual oblivion. It

is noteworthy that critics who stress this aspect of the book are themselves émigrés. Even Viktor Perel'man, who is far from well disposed toward Limonov, writes that one option for the desperately unhappy émigré is

...подобно персонажу...романа,
задыхаясь, в ужасе и отчаянии
кричи: "Я еще не распался, я еще
жив, смотрите, это Я!"

...like the hero of the...novel, choking
in terror and despair, [to] cry 'I haven't
yet disintegrated, I'm still alive, look
— it's Me!'⁵³

The loneliness and isolation of the émigré approximate death, and *It's Me, Eddie* is an attempt to grasp life.

Secondly, writing autobiography may actualize the self. It is, as Barrett Mandel notes, "one of the strategies human beings have developed to make life matter."⁵⁴ Megalomania is a central feature of Èdichka's persona; he is an unabashed exhibitionist and egoist. This urge toward self-advertisement extends to his autobiography. Èduard/Èdichka (here the distinction between author and narrator blurs to identity) is eager to create scandal if it will call attention to him. In admitting this, indeed trumpeting it, Limonov defies the perception that a real writer does not create with the intention of producing a bestseller.⁵⁵ If autobiography may actualize the self, a scandalous and provocative autobiography may bring the self fame and fortune; both considerations were probably operative in Limonov's case.

Aside from asserting the value of the ego, the act of writing autobiography can be cathartic and therapeutic. Distancing and objectivizing the autobiographical "I" is a means of coping with loss and emotional pain. This strategy would indeed seem to suit Limonov's needs. Retrospectively imposing design on his life allows him to take control over it. Thus we see Èdichka initially at his lowest point of debasement and humiliation; as he grows and develops and as he recounts this growth, he assumes increasing power over his own fate. From his present standpoint, Èdichka can apply the wisdom he has attained to the past experiences he

relates. His progression toward a greater knowledge of the self and a firmer hold on life is ratified by the autobiographical act.

Finally, the distancing of the narrated self from the narrating self that occurs in autobiographical writing facilitates irony and satire. Recalling and creating Èdichka, Limonov comments satirically on the image of the Russian poet, calling into question the national tradition of deification. Digressive excursions into his distant past allow him to target the bohemia of underground literature in the Soviet Union. More recent reminiscences focus on the hermetic world of émigré literature. In addition, Èdichka satirizes American culture as he recounts his attempts to adapt to exile. What keeps the book from being merely irritating in its caustic criticism of Russian, émigré and American mores is Limonov's ironic stance vis-à-vis his autobiographical persona. In this respect, a direct line can be traced from Nabokov's *Lolita* to Limonov's *It's Me, Eddie*.⁵⁶ Like Nabokov, Limonov directs his irony toward the praxis of autobiography itself to complement and reinforce irony directed toward other aspects of his hero Èdichka's second, metaphorical childhood.

Notes

1. Limonov completed *Èto ia — Èdichka* and submitted the manuscript for publication in 1977. The first chapter appeared in 1977 in the Israeli émigré journal *Nedelia* and an abridged version of the book was published in *Kovcheg* in 1979. The manuscript was rejected, by Limonov's account, by about 35 American publishing houses before it finally appeared in book form in France in 1980. It was printed in full in the original Russian by Index Publishers of New York only in 1982; an English translation by Random House followed the next year. The book was issued in Moscow by two publishers in 1991. It appeared as a separate issue of the journal *Glagol* and as a supplement to the almanac *Konets veka*.
2. The quotation is taken from Patricia Carden, "Edward Limonov's Coming Out," in *The Third Wave: Russian Literature in Emigration*, ed. Olga Matich and Michael Heim (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1984), 221.
For the opposing view, see Konstantin Kustanovich, "Golyi korol'. Èdichka Limonov kak literaturnyi fenomen," *Novyi amerikanets*, 19-25 December 1981, 32-34. Also of interest in this regard is Edward Brown's assertion that after the publication of *It's Me, Eddie*, "a commission was formed (I assume on paper only) 'for the annihilation of Limonov' (*po unichtozheniiu Limonova*)." See "Russian Literature Beyond the Pale," in *Forum: The Third Wave, Part I, Slavic and East European Journal* 30 (1986): 381.
3. Édouard Limonov, "*Limonov o sebe*," in *The Third Wave: Russian Literature in Emigration*, 220.
4. Édouard Limonov, "Russian Writers on Literature and Society," *Humanities in Society*, nos. 3-4 (Summer-Fall 1984), 229-30.
5. Examples are legion, but see especially Limonov's replies to Matich's questions in "Russian Writers on Literature and Society." (221-31) See also his remarks in John Glad, ed., *Literature in Exile* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), *passim*.

6. These include *Dnevnik neudachnika ili sekretnaia tetrad'* (New York: Index, 1982); *Podrostok Savenko* (Paris: Sintaksis, 1983); *His Butler's Story* (New York: Grove Press, 1986); *Molodoi negodiai* (Paris: Sintaksis, 1986); *Palach* (Jerusalem: Chameleon, 1986).

7. Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis, *Sovremennaia russkaia proza* (Ann Arbor: Hermitage, 1982), 168. Translation is mine.
 Vail' and Genis' use of the term "vsedozvolennost'" ("everything is permitted") is an allusion to Dostoevskii's frightening vision of a world devoid of moral strictures and faith in Christ. This theme is developed in his novels *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

8. Anatolii Karpov, "Po techeniiu...Chitaia povesti È. Limonova '...U nas byla velikaia èpokha' i S. Dovlatova 'Filial'," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 20 December 1989, 4.

9. Cited from Dmitrii Iakushkin's interview with Limonov, "Èto on, Èdichka," *Moskovskie novosti*, 6 August 1989, 16. Translation is mine.

10. Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975), 14.

11. Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts. The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 10-11.

12. Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 10.

13. A. Kron, "Pro babochku poètinogo serdtsa," *Kovcheg*, no. 3 (1979), 89. Translation is mine.

14. To the English translation of the Russian title *Èto ia — Èdichka* as *It's Me, Eddie* is added the curious subtitle "a fictional memoir." Also interesting in this respect is the English rendering of *Podrostok Savenko* as *Memoirs of a Russian Punk*.

15. Leonid Pochivalov, "*Chelovek na dne. Pokinuvshii rodinu — o sebe*," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 10 September 1980, 14. Translation is mine.
16. Olga Matich, "Unofficial Russian Fiction and Its Politics," *Humanities in Society*, nos. 3-4 (Summer-Fall 1984), 120.
17. Aleksandr Donde, "*Èduard, Èdik i Èdichka*," *Al'manakh Panorama*, no. 94 (January 28-February 4, 1983), 12. Translation is mine.
18. This and all other Russian citations from *Èto ia — Èdichka* are taken from the second edition (New York: Index Publishers, 1982). Translated citations are taken from *It's Me, Eddie*, trans. S. L. Campbell (New York: Grove Press, 1983). Page numbers from both will hereafter be indicated in parentheses.
19. For a definition of the childhood as a distinct subgenre of autobiography, I am indebted to Richard N. Coe's formulation (*When the Grass Was Taller. Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984], 8-9):

...an extended piece of writing, a conscious, deliberately executed literary artifact, usually in prose (and thus intimately related to the novel) but not excluding occasional experiments in verse, in which the most substantial portion of the material is directly autobiographical, and whose structure reflects step by step the development of the writer's self; beginning often, but not invariably, with the first light of consciousness, and concluding, quite specifically, with the attainment of a precise degree of maturity.
20. Nataliia Gross, "*Shramy rossiiskogo Odisseia*," *Vremia i my*, no. 55 (1980), 192-96.
21. Aleksandr Donde, "*Èduard, Èdik i Èdichka*," *Al'manakh Panorama*, no. 93 (January 21-28), 17. Translation is mine.
22. Coe, *When the Grass Was Taller*, 104-38.
23. Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, 85.

24. For a treatment of the myth of happy childhood and its links to the pastoral tradition in Russian literature, see Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood. Creation of a Russian Myth* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 88-92.

25. The translation in this case is mine. The first epithet is a collocation of the titles of two Russian folktales, "*Elena Premudraia*" and "*Vasilisa Prekrasnaia*." By alluding to these mythical feminine personae, Limonov stresses Elena's Russianness, her belonging to the Russian cultural tradition.

Nataliia Goncharova is the name of Pushkin's young wife, a famous beauty whose putative affair with a French officer led to the poet's death in a duel of honor.

26. The term Limonov uses, "*гнездо*" (literally "nest"), may be an allusion to Turgenev's novel *Dvorianskoe гнездо*, often translated as *A Nest of Gentlefolk*.

27. For a characterization of Limonov's poetry, see Patricia Carden, "The New Russian Literature," in *Russian Literature and American Critics. In Honor of Deming Brown*, ed. Kenneth N. Brostrom, *Papers in Slavic Philology* 4 (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, 1984), 13-20.

28. Iakov Ashkenazi, "*Èdichka Limonov i drugie*," *Dvadtsat' dva*, no. 8 (1979), 197.

29. The Russian original stresses the narrator's detached viewpoint with the phrase "*so storony*," literally "from the side."

30. Shifts from the *Ich-Erzählung* of the traditional autobiographical mode to the third person are seen by some critics as evidence of the destruction of genre boundaries. Writing of Andre Gorz's autobiography, Pascal notes that the author "speaks of himself as an object, in the third person, almost disdainfully," and that with this development "the frontiers of autobiography are reached." (160) Pascal's objection to the third person in autobiography is that it misrepresents the nature of the relationship between the author and the narrator. It can never be as objective as third-person narration would suggest, so that there will inevitably be "contradiction between form and view-point." (165) Pascal's critical stance is, however, a

conservative one and practice has long outstripped theory in this regard. See Philippe Lejeune, "Autobiography in the Third Person," *New Literary History* 9 (1977): 27-50.

31. Lejeune, "Autobiography in the Third Person," 32.

32. This technique of shifting viewpoint has been used previously by Limonov in his verse, which is also essentially autobiographical. An instance examined by A. K. Zholkovskii in his article "*Grafomanstvo kak priem: Lebiadkin, Khlebnikov, Limonov i drugie*" (in *Amsterdam Symposium on the Centenary of Velimir Chlebnikov*, ed. Willem G. Weststein, [Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986], 581-82) is the following stanza from a 1979 poem:

Зато я никому не должен
Никто поутру не кричит
И два часа и в пол-другого
Зайдет ли кто а я — лежит.

In such extreme cases, Zholkovskii notes, grammatical lapsus occurs.

Mikhail Volin, in a review of a poetry reading by Limonov published in *Novoe russkoe slovo* (24 October 1975, 3), cites the same example as evidence of "некий свободный стиль, своеобразные поиски чего-то нового, где иногда даже нарочито искажается грамматика."

33. Ann Shukman, "Taboos, Splits and Signifiers: Limonov's *Eto ya — Edichka*," *Essays in Poetics*, no. 2 (1983), 7.

34. This example is particularly interesting in that it may be read as a mixture of addresses or as an address to multiple readers. Although *Edichka* formally speaks to "*gospoda*," he implicitly refers to a plural entity, "they," by using the third-person imperative "*pust' skazhut*." By eliding the pronoun "*oni*," however, he leaves the identity of "they" — American readers? Soviet readers? *Émigré* readers? — completely ambiguous.

35. The English translation has twelve chapters and an epilogue; the tenth chapter of the Russian version entitled "*Leopol'd Sengor i Benzhamen*" is omitted. A comparison of the

Russian and English texts reveals numerous other cuts in the translated version, but this is the most substantial change. In all cases, the basis for these omissions would seem to be editorial rather than censorial.

36. Edward Brown, "The Exile Experience," in *The Third Wave: Russian Literature in Emigration*, 57.

37. Shukman, in her essay "Taboos, Splits and Signifiers," notes that the epilogue appears to have been added precisely to subvert the linearity of the text. (5)

Igor' Smirnov suggests that *It's Me, Eddie* is structured as a narcissistic text, with the end mirroring the beginning in respect to the narrator's rage and frustration. See his article "*O nartsissisticheskom tekste (diakhroniia i psikhoanaliz)*" in *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* 12 (1983): 21-46.

38. James Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 26.

39. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts*, 13.

40. Janet Varner Gunn, *Autobiography. Toward a Poetics of Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 14.

41. Estelle C. Jelinek, *Women's Autobiography. Essays in Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 17.

42. Kustanovich, "*Golyi korol'*," 32. Translation is mine.

43. See, for example, Il'ia Levin, "*Ob èvoliutsii literaturnogo iazyka v èmigratsii*," in Matich and Heim, eds., *The Third Wave: Russian Literature in Emigration*, 263-78; Felix Dreizin, "Russian Style in Emigration: Edward Limonov's Anglicisms," *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* 22 (1988): 55-67.

44. I am indebted to Professor Vladimir Padunov for his suggestion of the Moscow hippie movement as a source of Limonov's anglicisms.
45. Shukman, "Taboos, Splits and Signifiers," 10.
46. Dreizin, "Russian Style in Emigration," 62.
47. See Coe, *When the Grass Was Taller*, 253-66.
48. *Ibid.*, 83-84.
49. Leonid Geller, "Prigotovitel'nye zametki k teorii skandalov, avangarda i èrotiki v literature na materiale sochineniia È. Limonova 'Èto ia — Èdichka'," *Kovcheg*, no. 5 (1980), 85.
50. Dreizin, "Russian Style in Emigration," 65.
51. See Coe, *When the Grass Was Taller*, 253.
52. Shukman, "Taboos, Splits and Signifiers," 11.
53. Viktor Perel'man, "Vremia svobody," *Novoe russkoe slovo*, 3 May 1979, 3. Translation is mine.
54. Barrett J. Mandel, "Full of Life Now," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, 64.
55. In a statement made at an émigré writers' conference in Vienna in 1987 (see Glad, *Literature in Exile*, 79), the opinions expressed by Limonov (Èdichka?) on this point were certainly calculated to be controversial:
Can I make a bold proposal? Let's talk business; we are all professionals, not beginners, and this is not a writers' workshop. All this droning on about language doesn't interest

me at all. Let's talk about money, about the publishing possibilities, let's ask if we are of any interest to the foreign reader. Let's talk about critics, about what we do, and not have another boring academic conference.

56. Bruss' analysis of *Lolita* as autobiography in her book *Autobiographical Acts* is eminently relevant to Limonov's work:

For Nabokov, autobiography is viable only when one recognizes that it creates truth as much as expresses it; thus his burlesque of autobiography in *Lolita* exposes the delusions of sincerity and the narcissistic indulgence of the confessional tradition. Not only does his own autobiography flaunt its artificiality, but achieves an almost Olympian impersonality as well, suggesting that no autobiographer ought to depict himself without first becoming aware of how much fiction is implicit in the idea of a "self."

In the course of a 1988 roundtable discussion on Nabokov's works that had recently appeared in the Soviet press, Olga Matich suggested that *It's Me, Eddie* can be regarded as "a post-Soviet, or émigré *Lolita*" in its treatment of the hero's search for lost love and lost paradise. ("*Vladimir Nabokov: mezh dvukh beregov*," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 17 August 1988, 5.)