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Writing Outside the Soviet Canon: Aleksandr Kozachinskii's "The Green Wagon" as Roman à clef and Odesa Memoir

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History, so the truism goes, is written by the victors; by analogy, the history of literature has typically been understood as the history of *literary* victors—of canonical authors and their works.[1] Left out of this category is a broad swath of forgotten and neglected texts: Franco Moretti calls them "the slaughterhouse of literature," victims of shifting tastes and market forces, while Louis Renza describes such works as "neither altogether neglected nor significant enough to merit sustained let alone sophisticated critical attention" (Moretti 63; Renza xxv).[2] This is particularly unfortunate in the case of "Zelenyi furgon" ("The Green Wagon," 1938), by the Soviet writer Aleksandr Kozachinskii (1903–1943).[3] In the present article, I demonstrate that "The Green Wagon" is a multifarious work that constitutes at once an unseasonable manifestation of the Odesa Myth; a roman à clef disguising compromising events from Kozachinskii's past while also presenting a sui generis reforging narrative; and a disquisition on the act of investigating and

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[1] I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for the *Slavic and East European Journal* for their constructive feedback on early drafts of this article. I would also like to thank Alena Iavorskaia at the Odesa Literary Museum and Mikhail Poizner for their generous assistance with sources on Kozachinskii.

[2] See also Moretti 63–68.

[3] For recent studies of Kozachinskii in Russian, see Demenok, as well as the essays contained in Kozachinskii, *Zhizn' i sud'ba*. To my knowledge, the earliest mention of Kozachinskii in published sources in English occurs in Jarrod Tanny's *City of Rogues and Schnorrers*, which briefly quotes descriptions from the novella of an Odesa bazaar and of a Jewish gangster (97) as stereotypical markers of the Odesa Myth. More recently, I analyze "The Green Wagon" as an exemplar of Soviet picaresque literature in chapter 6 of de Oliveira.

unmasking selves that was expected of common Soviet citizens and the secret police alike during the Stalinist 1930s. I will show that these dimensions of Kozachinskii's novella, disparate as they may seem, are in fact intimately connected. Thus "The Green Wagon" should be read as a modality of memoir-*cum*-roman à clef in which both protagonists (criminal and investigator) represent hypostases of the author. The result is a work whose inauspicious affiliation with middlebrow literature[4] masks an elaborate commentary on the Soviet self's relationship with the past at the height of the Stalinist Terror.

An Odesa Middlebrow Text

Kozachinskii's best-known work, "The Green Wagon," has typically been noted for its somewhat stereotypical evocation of the Odesa Myth, including an irreverent description of Odesa under occupation by opposing forces during World War I and the ensuing Civil War (Kozachinskii, *Zelenyi furgon* 57–66); the detailed and geographically accurate path taken by the protagonist as he makes his way through the city (77ff.); and the emphasis on Odesa's cosmopolitanism (97–98), colorful bazaars (27; 54), and criminal underworld (99–100). The novella echoes such canonical representatives of the Myth in the 1920s and 1930s as Isaak Babel''s *Odesskie rasskazy* (*Odesa Tales*), Iurii Olesha's short stories, and Il′ia Il′f and Evgenii Petrov's *Zolotoi telenok* (*The Golden Calf*); it predates postwar texts such as Konstantin Paustovskii's memoir *Dni bol'shikh ozhidanii* (*Days of Great Expectations*). This chronology notwithstanding, it is worth noting that the

[4] A *povest'* located between the Chekhovian short story and the modern European novel, "The Green Wagon" also resembles a "minor form" (*malaia forma*) dialectically opposed to dominant literary genres in Iurii Tynianov's scheme. See his essay "Literaturnyi fakt," in *Arkhaisty i novatory* 5–29, esp. 21ff; for an English translation, see Tynianov, "Literary Fact," in *Permanent Evolution*, 153–172.

"Southwestern school" of Russian literature which is sometimes used to group these works and authors together, including Kozachinskii and his novella,[5] is primarily a retrospective phenomenon: a loose association of writers whose main shared trait was their connection with Odesa in particular, or southern Ukraine more generally. Whereas Viktor Shklovskii was one of the first critics to regard them as a homogeneous group in his 1933 essay "Iugo-Zapad" ("South-West"), he was forced to recant his position soon after publication of the essay.[6] Renewed attempts to argue for the existence of the "Southwestern school," a heterogeneous assemblage of authors both major and minor, occurred only after the war,[7] yet Kozachinskii has been markedly left out of most in-depth studies of the movement.

A journalist by profession, Kozachinskii is more often remembered for his friendship with the literary celebrities Il′f and Petrov. Kozachinskii shared an interest in photography with the former during the 1920s and 1930s. He met the latter when both Petrov and Kozachinskii were living in Odesa in the years leading up to the October Revolution, and they remained close friends

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[5] Alena Iavorskaia labels Kozachinskii "the last of the semi-classics," referencing Sergei Bondarin's retrospective division of Odesa authors into three generations. See Iavorskaia 17–18.

[6] In the political environment of the early 1930s, Shklovskii's "Iugo-Zapad" was doomed from the start because of three interpretations of its argument: first, Shklovskii described a regional "school" (and a Russian-language school within Ukraine at that), thereby purportedly conspiring against the unity of Soviet letters and the ideal of the Soviet brotherhood of nations; second, by arguing that the authors from the "South-West" emphasized the role of plot in their works, Shklovskii was seen to be engaging in a modality of "Formalism," which had become anathema at the time; and finally, by evoking Western literary models in his article, Shklovskii was (again, purportedly) advocating for a modality of subservience to foreign, especially Western (read: capitalist) influences. For an in-depth analysis of the article and its repercussions, see Stanton 10–15.

[7] See Sicher 74–75.

when they reconnected in Moscow in the mid-1920s.[8] Kozachinskii's anonymity stems in part from his modest literary legacy, comprising a small body of short works.[9] Although "The Green Wagon" and his short stories were met with positive reviews in the Soviet press when they were first published, they were rarely mentioned afterward.[10] The timing of publication of Kozachinskii's masterwork (between the height of the Great Purges and the outbreak of World War II) and his death in 1943[11] further conspired against his literary canonization. "The Green Wagon" is safely ensconced in the category of middlebrow literature, a genre which had been most popular in the 1920s and had returned to prominence after the war.[12] In the Soviet context, middlebrow literature encompasses those works that lie outside the categories of socialist realism, the avant-garde, or the broad corpus of dissident, censored, or suppressed works. Two examples

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[8] Il′f also grew up in Odesa and had likely met Petrov while there, but there is no evidence that he met Kozachinskii before the latter arrived in Moscow.

[9] Besides "The Green Wagon," Kozachinskii left behind some short stories, a vaudeville play, fragments of a second novel, and a handful of essays published in *Literaturnaia gazeta*.

[10] "The Green Wagon" has never been translated into English, but was published in translation into languages of the Communist bloc (Estonian, Polish, and German) and served as the basis for two film adaptations: the first in 1959 and the second in 1983, both produced by the Odesa Film Studio. Any passing familiarity with Kozachinskii is most likely due to the modestly successful 1983 adaptation, which also generated a sixteen-episode television sequel in 2020, entitled *Zelenyi furgon: Prodolzhenie* and produced for Channel One (Pervyi kanal) in Russia. Set in the postwar, the Russian TV series is an assemblage of markers of Odesan *kolorit*, from views of the Black Sea to gangster activity, from Odesa's alleyways to Ukrainian words and idiomatic expressions typically associated with the Odesan Russian dialect.

[11] Kozachinskii died in Novosibirsk after a long battle with tuberculosis, having evacuated from Moscow after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union.

[12] See, respectively, Dobrenko; Dunham.

should suffice, both of which demonstrate the middlebrow aesthetic at work in the decade preceding "The Green Wagon." The first is the phenomenon of "Red Pinkertons," the most notorious example of which is Marietta Shaginian's *Mess Mend, ili Ianki v Petrograde* (*Mess-Mend*, 1923–24). On the one hand, the Red Pinkertons constitute a response to Nikolai Bukharin's political call to produce a socialist modality of capitalist petty bourgeois detective novels; on the other hand, they parodically emulate the style and themes of those capitalist works they are trying to supersede. Deemed inconsistent with Soviet artistic and literary precepts, these works were often maligned in Soviet literary criticism.[13] The second representative example is Aleksandr Grin's *Zolotaia tsep'* (*The Golden Chain*, 1925), which has been neglected by critics "because of its perceived resemblance to works traditional in the Western adventure genre" (Luker ix).[14] While the Red Pinkertons garnered critical attention because they appeared to enter into a dialogue with the period of the New Economic Policy, *The Golden Chain* eschews such a politicization of its subject matter. Nicholas Luker in fact refers to overlooked Soviet works of literature as "the twilight zone on the perimeter of what was officially approved and found favour with the authorities" (viii). Following Luker's lead, I argue that the adventure plot and politically conforming message of "The Green Wagon" set it apart from the dominant politically charged texts of the time and situate it firmly within the realm of Soviet middlebrow literature.

"The Green Wagon" updates for the Stalinist reader the mission of the Red Pinkertons and Grin's works. With *Mess-Mend*, Shaginian attempts to contribute "entertaining, uplifting, and 'enriching' literature" to "the workers' cause" (Dralyuk 105), something that Kozachinskii also

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[13] On "Red Pinkertons," see Dralyuk, especially chapter 5 (83–97) on Bukharin's vision of a Soviet detective literature.

[14] For a thorough analysis of Grin's novella, see Luker's chapter on pp. 61–78 of his edited volume.

tried to achieve with "The Green Wagon," and which he advocated in essays bearing titles such as "In Defense of Entertainment."[15] A defining trait of middlebrow literature is an emphasis on plot above matters of form or style, so the starting point of my analysis of Kozachinskii's novella will be a summary of its convoluted plot.[16]

The Plot

The core narrative of "The Green Wagon," set in Odesa in 1920, is placed within a frame narrative, set in 1931 in a Black Sea resort in Gagra, Abkhazia. The plot of the novella posits a series of correspondences between characters in the frame (which I also call the Gagra episode below) and the core, but these correspondences are then undone at the end, making for an intricate narrative. The plot construction, along with the fact that the novella is a little-known text, merits a thorough recapitulation of its plot line.

The Frame Narrative

In the winter of 1931, a group of vacationers in Gagra find themselves cut off from the rest of the world due to a snow storm that has closed off access by sea and land. Unable to leave their resort,

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[15] "V zashchitu zanimatel'nosti" was first published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* vol. 55, Sept. 29, 1940, p. 4, and is reproduced in full in *Zhizn' i sud'ba*, 217–220. The main difference between Kozachinskii's approach and that of Red Pinkerton authors from the preceding decade is that "The Green Wagon" (as argued below) appears to have been written in earnest; it lacks the Red Pinkerton's parodical traits which, as Dralyuk points out, came to be seen as "bourgeois flippancy and a tongue-in-cheek denigration of the Soviet ideal" (118).

[16] Notably, both "The Green Wagon" and *Mess-Mend* feature convoluted plots and frame narratives. On the frames within narrative frames of *Mess-Mend*, see Dralyuk 105.

they form an impromptu literary circle, led by one Vladimir Patrikeev, a professional writer from Moscow with a marked Odesa accent. The only rule for the literary circle is that the stories should be drawn from the storytellers' own lives. It is now the turn for Patrikeev's friend, the doctor Vladimir Boichenko, who lives in Leningrad but also speaks with an Odesa accent, to tell his tale.

The Core Narrative

In the summer of 1920, the village of Severinovka (Severynivka), in the outskirts of Odesa, is assigned a new police chief: an eighteen-year-old boy, fresh out of high school, named Volodia. One of the first cases he investigates is that of a horse thief known as Krasavchik. Krasavchik commandeers a green truck and escapes from Volodia's grip into the steppe. Volodia assumes that Krasavchik would try to sell the horses the next day in Odesa. While walking to the market where he expects to find Krasavchik, Volodia runs into a familiar-looking grown-up man whom he had once met as a schoolboy in the past in the local soccer field. As the two soccer lovers reminisce about the past, Volodia eventually realizes that this man is Krasavchik. After some effort, Volodia manages to catch him, only to find out soon afterward that Krasavchik escaped from his armed escort. In parallel with Krasavchik's case, Volodia is also investigating a gang leader named Cherven′. One evening, accompanied by his team, Volodia besieges a den where Cherven′ and his gang are meeting. Volodia manages to arrest the entire group but finds out that Grishchenko, one of his subordinates in the police, has lost his rifle. As it turns out, Krasavchik had likewise been inside the den and taken Grishchenko's gun when the latter had broken in and was being attacked by the gang. Even though Krasavchik had had the chance to shoot Volodia during the ambush and run to his freedom, he decided not to—a clear sign that he is a thief but does not desire to be a murderer. In the end, as a result of his "*successful fight against banditry*" ("*za uspeshnuiu bor'bu*

s banditizmom," Kozachinskii, *Zelenyi furgon* 131, emphasis in the original),[17] Volodia is given a gold watch by his superiors.

The Epilogue: Back to the Frame

Boichenko concludes his tale, and the reader is brought back to Gagra in 1931. In the brief epilogue, the doctor's listeners (and with them, the novella's readers) find out that the policeman Volodia is not Vladimir Boichenko. The vacationers note that the watch mentioned at the end of the story, which Boichenko keeps in his room, bears an engraving with the writer Patrikeev's name, meaning that the young police chief Volodia and Vladimir Patrikeev (*not* Boichenko) are one and the same. Boichenko, writing about his friend rather than himself, seems to have violated the literary club's requirement: that one's stories must be based on one's own experiences. However, one detail remains unexplained: why would the watch dedicated to Patrikeev be in Boichenko's possession? Patrikeev explains that he gave it to Boichenko; he also explains that Krasavchik worked and studied hard while in prison. A strong friendship grew between the police agent and the former horse thief, as they both found a place in society under Soviet rule. The vacationers realize that doctor Boichenko is the horse thief Krasavchik, hence why he had been gifted Patrikeev's watch. The frame narrator further confirms Krasavchik's identity (albeit implicitly) by closing the story with a description of Boichenko's physical traits that match those of Krasavchik from the core narrative.

Framing the Self

[17] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

While “The Green Wagon” is based in part on events of Kozachinskii’s own life, it soon becomes evident that its memoiristic character is conveyed indirectly, namely by means of the roman à clef. The roman à clef is an inherently paradoxical genre that thrives on the ambivalence between fiction and reality: a fictional narrative on the surface, it yields an account based on real events once the key (*clef*) is discovered. The issue with “The Green Wagon” is that what has been traditionally understood to be the key to the novella is in fact a misleading interpretation of the historical events buttressing its plot. The novella has been interpreted as a fictionalized account of the events leading to the lifelong friendship between Kozachinskii and Petrov.[18] However, scholars have recently shown that this commonplace interpretation is not supported by facts of Kozachinskii’s and Petrov’s biographies. As a result, although Kozachinskii purportedly conveys the circumstances of his friendship with Petrov in the novella, the horse thief Krasavchik (typically associated with Kozachinskii) and the young police investigator Patrikeev (typically associated with Petrov) differ meaningfully from their real-life counterparts.[19] In “The Green Wagon,” Krasavchik and Patrikeev are said to have been schoolmates; the two writers actually went to different gymnasia (Panasenko 34–37). Petrov, like Patrikeev, indeed started his professional career in the police; however, Kozachinskii also joined the police in 1918, eventually being posted to the village of Severynivka near Odesa—the same village where much of the action of the novella takes place. In 1921, Kozachinskii was expelled and arrested in response to his investigation of a corruption scheme in

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[18] See Nekhamkin for a standard account of this interpretation of the novella.

[19] Kozachinskii himself may have been partly responsible for the misleading association of Krasavchik–Boichenko with himself and of Petrov with Patrikeev. Note that **Pa**t**r**i**k**ee**v**’s name resembles a portmanteau of **Pe**t**r**ov-**K**ata**ev**, Kataev being Evgenii Petrov’s real family name. Likewise, Boichenko’s nickname **K**rasav**chik** overlaps in part with **K**oza**chi**ns**k**ii.

which ten local Communist Party officials were involved. Following his release from prison, Kozachinskii joined a gang of disgruntled German colonists that engaged in various raids in the Odesa region.[20] Kozachinskii was ambushed and arrested yet again in 1922, when he was trying to sell stolen horses at an Odesa market. Assertions that the policeman Petrov was involved in Kozachinskii's arrest (much like Patrikeev in Krasavchik's arrest) are unfounded; however, he likely helped soften the punishment meted out to Kozachinskii, who served his sentence until 1925 in the Odesa *dopr* (*dom obshchestvenno-prinuditel'nykh rabot*, "house of social-compulsory labor"), one of the early Soviet experiments in alternative prison regimens.[21]

A fateful episode during Kozachinskii's term in the *dopr* came to shape the subsequent interpretations of the factual basis of the novella. In his reminiscences, the writer Sergei Bondarin describes a visit, in the company of the poet Eduard Bagritskii and others, to the Odesa *dopr*. Bagritskii asks to meet one of the reeducated prisoners, and the administrator calls for Kozachinskii, who has just scored a goal in a prison soccer match. In Bondarin's account, Kozachinskii's answer about his criminal activity ("The devil knows what I was doing, that's just how it happened," Bondarin 136) foreshadows the plot of "The Green Wagon," where "he described the scene of the meeting between Krasavchik, the young elusive bandit, and the criminal investigator who was pursuing him" (Bondarin 136). Also hailing from Odesa, Bondarin was instrumental in the association of Kozachinskii and Petrov, respectively, with Volodia Boichenko–

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[20] At one point, the gang's leader was one Gennadii Orlov, a former White officer in Admiral Kolchak's army who claimed to be planning an anti-Soviet uprising, posing a much greater risk of a harshest sentence, if not capital punishment, for Kozachinskii were he to be charged with anti-Soviet activities.

[21] Petrov himself was also investigated for police misconduct in 1923. For a thorough account of Kozachinskii's life in Odesa that makes extensive use of archival sources, see Panasenko.

Krasavchik and Volodia Patrikeev. Bondarin projects retrospectively into his reminiscence the plot of Kozachinskii's novella, written more than a decade after these events (and decades before the publication of Bondarin's memoirs).

In his study of the roman à clef in modernist British literature, Sean Latham contends that the genre exploits an "aesthetics of detail," yet it deploys this aesthetics to opposite purposes from the genre of the (fictional) novel: the roman à clef employs detail not in order to make fictional characters lifelike, but in order to emphasize the link between real life and the world of literature.[22] An example of such an aesthetics of detail occurs in the parallel between the description of the *dopr* in "The Green Wagon" and its corresponding description in Bondarin's reminiscences.[23] Bondarin recalls a poster that states "You are not in prison: the *dopr* does not punish, it reforms" ("Ty ne v tiur′me: DOPR ne nakazyvaet, a perevospityvaet," Bondarin 134). In Kozachinskii's frame narrative, Krasavchik has left behind his criminal past with the help of Patrikeev and Soviet society at large, including the *dopr*, where Patrikeev recalls a similar message: "The *dopr* is not a prison. Don't grieve, ye who enter" ("Dopr ne tiur′ma, ne grusti, vkhodiashchii," Kozachinskii, *Zelenyi furgon* 132). Kozachinskii's version of the slogan, with its irreverent allusion to Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* ("Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate"), draws attention to the literariness of the text; yet those readers familiar with Civil War-era Odesa (directly or mediated by a text such as Bondarin's) would also read in it an allusion, not to the literary world, but to the real life on which the text is purportedly based.

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[22] Conversely, fiction uses detail in order to create a reality which is essentially distinct from real life despite often emulating it; see Latham 27.

[23] Incidentally, in 1926 (more than a decade before "The Green Wagon" came to light), a sketch published in Odesa by the journalist Al. Svetlov also references Kozachinskii's reforging in the *dopr* (quoted in Iavorskaia 19).

This aesthetics of detail also encompasses the relationship between the core and frame narratives of "The Green Wagon," whereby the core comes to resemble a roman à clef narrated by the frame character Boichenko. Through a play with names and identities, the reader, as well as the audience at the Gagra resort, are led to believe that Boichenko is the youthful police investigator. Both Patrikeev and Boichenko are named Vladimir, after all, and the family names of their core narrative correspondents are omitted until the very end of the novella. Once the club members realize that the writer Patrikeev is in fact the police investigator Volodia, they ask then who Boichenko is. The answer is only indirectly provided: the frame narrative concludes with Boichenko, "his lanky figure, firm tanned cheekbones and joyful ale-colored eyes" ("ego dolgoviazuiu figuru, tverdye bronzovye skuly i veselye glaza tsveta iachmennogo piva," Kozachinskii, *Zelenyi furgon* 135), sitting by the fireplace; this description echoes Krasavchik's "tanned firm cheekbone" ("bronzovaia tverdaia skula," 78), "ale-colored eyes" ("glaza tsveta iachmennogo piva," 91), and "lanky figure" ("dolgoviazaia figura," 119) in the core narrative. Notably, whereas *both* Krasavchik *and* doctor Boichenko are ostensibly fictional characters, the correspondence between them is asserted, much as in the roman à clef, "in a sleuthlike effort to decode the identity of the historical antecedents for the constructs on the page" (Latham 27). Echoing detective novels and other forms of entertainment literature, "The Green Wagon" asks readers to rely on textual evidence to draw correspondences between characters; yet its aesthetics of detail also reminds readers, if ever so subtly, of the stories of Kozachinskii's own real life that lurk beyond the boundaries of the novella.

Stalinist Self-Fashioning

While the frame narrative enables Kozachinskii to assert several possible correspondences between Krasavchik, Boichenko, and himself, early reviewers of "The Green Wagon" were not fond of that section of the novella. In a letter to Kozachinskii, the writer Lev Slavin (his friend and another member of the "Southwestern school"), expresses the opinion that the Gagra episode is "of a lower level than the novella itself" ("nizhe po urovniu, chem samaia povest′," reproduced in Kozachinskii, *Zhizn' i sud'ba* 181), excessively long, and marked by "superfluous irony" ("izlishnei ironichnost′iu," 182). Other readers argue that the novella's structure, described as "heavy-handed" (*tiazhelovesnoi*) (German 3) or "unconvincing" (*neubeditel'noi*) (Ragozin 9), distracts the reader from the more pressing process of reforging. A defining trope of 1930s Soviet literature, reforging consisted of the transformation of common criminals into model Soviet citizens integrated into society through (forced) labor. The argument went that labor would not only ensure that the former criminals would find a place in society, but it would also inculcate in them the appropriate ideological values of the Soviet collective.[24] Indeed, one way to interpret the core narrative of "The Green Wagon" is to see it as doctor Boichenko's gesture of gratitude to Patrikeev, the professional writer who, as a young detective manifesting distinctly Soviet values, helped him find a footing in life. By adopting the perspective of the young police investigator Patrikeev, the core narrative offers a message very much in synchrony with Soviet ideology: Patrikeev believes it is his mission "to help the toiling peasants shed from themselves the last

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[24] Reforging was epitomized in the *Belomorkanal* (1934), the collectively authored volume about the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal using forced labor. The *Belomorkanal* volume had been suppressed by the time when Kozachinskii was working on his novella in 1938, but he would certainly have been aware of it: both Valentin Kataev and Lev Slavin, writers in Kozachinskii's circle, are listed as co-authors of the volume, and Il′f and Petrov were part of the larger writers' brigade that toured the Belomorkanal site.

yoke—the yoke of banditry" ("pomoch′ trudovym selianam sbrosit′ s sebia poslednee igo—igo banditizma," Kozachinskii, *Zelenyi furgon* 99). His fight against criminality is directly associated with the egalitarian goals of the Bolshevik revolution. Furthermore, at the end of the frame narrative, before revealing that Krasavchik is the doctor Boichenko, the writer Patrikeev explains that the horse thief "seldom remembers his adventures on the steppe […] Nowadays you can safely entrust him with a pair of your best horses" ("redko vspominaet o svoikh stepnykh pokhozhdeniiakh […] Teper′ vy mozhete sovershenno spokoino doverit′ emu paru luchshikh svoikh loshadei," Kozachinskii, *Zelenyi furgon* 133). Patrikeev portrays Boichenko as a poster-boy of socialist reforging.

Kozachinskii's attempt to align his protagonists' activities with revolutionary goals raises the question of why he would have adopted the form of the roman à clef in order to screen his true identity from readers. The answer lies in the fact that Kozachinskii employed his novella not only as a vehicle for recollecting an episode from his life, but also, amidst the politically charged era of the Stalinist Terror and its aftermath, as an instrument of self-fashioning as a Soviet writer (more so than as a reforged citizen). With "The Green Wagon," Kozachinskii establishes himself as a writer while manifesting his gratitude to Petrov for his mentorship, a gesture that implies an attempt to share in his mentor's cultural capital and literary lineage. Yet this lineage is founded on a novella set during the Civil War in Odesa, and thus reminiscent of Odesan pseudo-autobiographies and memoirs. "The Green Wagon" can be read as another manifestation of a modality of self-invention characteristic of Odesa modernist literature.[25] In such works as Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky's autobiographical novel *Piatero* (*The Five*), Babel′'s childhood tales, or

[25] See Stanton.

Paustovskii's memoirs, the author's evocation of life in Odesa is closely intertwined with his or her attempt at literary self-fashioning. For instance, these narratives abound with references to the city's famed gangsters and tricksters, who are markers of an Odesan *kolorit* (given Odesa's fame as a center of criminal activity) but also of the potentialities of self-fashioning attempted by the author.[26]

In like fashion, "The Green Wagon" relies on the investigation of its author's own past, even when the connection between author and hero is not as explicit as in a conventional memoir. Hence the need for the Gagra episode, which, by turning the core narrative into a coded retelling of an episode in the lives of its fictional characters, primes the reader to interpret the novella itself as a roman à clef about the real-life Kozachinskii and Petrov. The frame also places the theme of memoir front and center in ways that suggest a more complex relationship between the writing self and his embodiment in the text. Soviet individuals in the Stalinist era were being called upon to affirm and shape discursively their selves vis-à-vis the Soviet state; this process often took place through autobiographical and memoiristic forms of writing such as diaries, documentation for Party membership certification or recertification, and, in more sinister ways, confessions and accusations as part of criminal proceedings.[27] In a similar fashion, "The Green Wagon" resembles a sort of "autobiography on trial" (Igal Halfin's term): Kozachinskii's attempt to come clean to the

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[26] *Kolorit* "can be glossed as colour, character, carnivalesque, or an exotic quality" (Richardson 107). The markers of Odesa's local color became particularly prominent in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras; for studies on the topic, see, for instance, Richardson; and Tanny.

[27] For detailed studies of such modalities of self-fashioning, see, e.g., Hellbeck; Halfin. On writers' diaries in the Stalinist 1930s, see Hellbeck chapter 7 (on playwright Aleksandr Afinogenov's diaries) and Wolfson (on Olesha's diary entries from that decade in *No Day Without a Line* (*Ni dnia bez stroki*)).

reader about his past as gang member while, paradoxically, concealing the important fact that this past belongs to his own self. In the frame narrative of "The Green Wagon," Patrikeev, now a famous writer, argues that "In every life there is at least one plot of interest" ("V kazhdoi zhizni est′ po krainei mere odin interesnyi siuzhet," Kozachinskii, *Zelenyi furgon* 11); while this maxim—which becomes the literary club's motto—is convincingly demonstrated in the novella, Kozachinskii hides in plain sight the fact that the plot of interest that he develops is his own.

Kozachinskii's identity is concealed from the reader of "The Green Wagon," yet those readers holding the key to the novella could easily see through the altered names and plot, stylized yet stubbornly transparent. For instance, Petrov is said to have often asked his Moscow acquaintances if they knew that the elegantly dressed Kozachinskii "wandered on a cart around the Ukrainian steppe with Makhno's group" ("nosilsia na tachanke po ukrainskim stepiam s bandoi Makhno," quoted in Il′f, "Neskol′ko slov" 155). Petrov is obviously being facetious, yet the effect of this anecdote is to draw unwanted attention to Kozachinskii's criminal activities during the Civil War period. Kozachinskii himself was indirectly affected by purges within the staff of the Moscow railroad workers' newspaper *Gudok* in 1930. An article in the newspaper implicates him in a series of "mistakes" (*oshibki*) (Alan 4) committed by a staff member named Tat′iana Petrova, who is accused of defending "one Kozachinskii, an individual with a criminal past who had wormed his way into *Gudok*" ("nekoego Kozachinskogo, cheloveka s ugolovnym proshlym, zatesavshegosia

v 'Gudok,'" Alan 4).[28] Yet critics ignored the memoiristic character of the novella,[29] an omission that can be attributed to the structure of the roman à clef. In his study of the genre, Latham argues that the roman à clef was used by fin-de-siècle English authors in order to avoid charges of libel that might arise if they were to name their heroes after their real-life counterparts. Scandal and innuendo, he shows, are recurrent features of romans à clef. In the case of "The Green Wagon" in particular, it would have been in Kozachinskii's interest to distance his identity from the potentially "scandalous" criminal activity in which his fictional counterpart engages in the novella, which could trigger reminiscences (and, more importantly, denunciations) of his own past.

While critics failed to recognize "The Green Wagon" as a disguised memoir, they were also unmoved by the implication that "The Green Wagon" should be read as an earnest recantation of one's mistakes. Both Patrikeev's police activity and Krasavchik's activities as horse thief were said to be nothing but "chance episodes" (*sluchainye epizody*) (Ragozin 9), while "The Green Wagon" turned out to be more stimulating as a story of a "life event" (*zhiznennyi sluchai*) (Usievich 204) than of a teleological act of reforging.[30] If "The Green Wagon" does not really convince as a reforging narrative, the reason may also reside in the fact that Kozachinskii—

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[28] It is unknown whether Kozachinskii suffered any immediate professional setbacks from this public (albeit vague) exposé, but he continued writing for a number of outlets in Moscow for the rest of the decade, including *Ogonek* and *Ekonomicheskaia zhizn'*.

[29] An exception is Elena Usievich, one of the main contributors to the journal *Literaturnyi kritik* (the well-known venue where many of Georg Lukács' essays and articles were first published in Russian). See Usievich 206. See also Kozachinskii, *Zhizn' i sud'ba* 302–315 for excerpts of other reviews.

[30] In fact, to the displeasure of critics such as Ragozin, reforging is left out of the plot of "The Green Wagon" altogether, since the core narrative ends precisely at the moment of Krasavchik's arrest, while Boichenko, in the frame narrative, is already a fully reforged Soviet citizen.

Boichenko's prototype—does not regard himself as an innate criminal fundamentally reforged into an honorable Soviet citizen through the beneficent efforts of Petrov–Patrikeev. In fact, Boichenko–Krasavchik, the narrator and horse thief, is neither the only nor the main manifestation of the writer Kozachinskii in the text.

A Double Memoir

The novella's perfunctory engagement with the theme of reforging is symptomatic of its middlebrow character more generally. "The Green Wagon" acknowledges Soviet power as a fait accompli, of little relevance to the actual plot. The novella is not primarily concerned with world-historical events as reflected in the lives of its protagonists; against the teleology of Communism, which surmises a purification of the self and the collective toward a common goal, Kozachinskii seems to offer only—in critics' words—chance (*sluchai*, *sluchainyi*).[31] The memoirist-*cum*-protagonist of this roman à clef comes into being primarily as a result of personal, rather than political, relations.

Which protagonist are we talking about? Although at face value the narrator Boichenko, (and, consequently, the horse thief Krasavchik) would seem the protagonist, Kozachinskii himself thought otherwise. In a letter to Petrov discussing the editorial work that his manuscript underwent,

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[31] In this regard, the text is also markedly distinct from the genre of the intelligentsia memoir, a defining trait of which is the connection between individual lives and major events of the twentieth century. Irina Paperno demonstrates that the Soviet interwar intelligentsia, in constituting itself, looked back to forms of historical consciousness of the generation of the 1840s–1860s such as the use of memoir and the formation of *kruzhki* or social circles of intellectual discussion (see Paperno 9–15). "The Green Wagon" lacks such a world-historical consciousness.

Kozachinskii argues that one episode is "so important, that for its sake I am ready to sacrifice any other passage of the novella" ("nastol′ko vazhnym, chto radi nego gotov pozhertvovat′ liubym drugim mestom povesti," Kozachinskii, *Zhizn′ i sud′ba* 112). In this episode, the narrator explains why the young policeman Patrikeev enjoyed riding through the villages and farmland under his jurisdiction: "He liked the very process of going: responsible workers went around on *britchkas*" ("Emu nravilsia samyi protsess ezdy: v brichkakh ezdili otvetstvennye rabotniki," Kozachinskii, *Zelenyi furgon* 53). Despite the seeming provinciality of the district under his jurisdiction, Patrikeev feels himself part of something bigger, a "responsible worker" and a representative of Soviet power.

The fact that Kozachinskii attaches so much importance to this episode, from which the horse thief Boichenko–Krasavchik is pointedly absent, should give us pause. After all, the standard interpretation of the novella assumes a series of parallels that tie together the different narrative levels. In this reading, the friendship between Kozachinskii and Petrov is reproduced, at the level of the frame narrative, in the friendship between the doctor Boichenko and the writer Patrikeev; the origins of this friendship are in turn recounted in the core narrative, which pits the horse thief Krasavchik against the young detective Patrikeev. Therefore, in order for the novella to be read as a memoir (and specifically as an autobiography), and given what is commonly known about Kozachinskii and Petrov, the correspondences would have to be as follows: Kozachinskii–Boichenko–Krasavchik, and Petrov–Patrikeev. Yet judging from Kozachinskii's own assertions, it is Patrikeev who offers the main narrative point of view into the events of the plot, laying to rest the hypothesis that the focus of the narrative would have been Boichenko–Krasavchik. Kozachinskii goes even further in another letter to Petrov by insisting that Patrikeev (*not* Krasavchik) is the sole protagonist of the novella (Kozachinskii, *Zhizn′ i sud′ba* 127–129). This

raises the question of the extent to which "The Green Wagon" should truly be interpreted as a memoiristic tale, i.e. one in which Kozachinskii recalls a life-changing episode of his own life. If this is a novella about Patrikeev's exploits (presumably a thinly disguised Petrov), to what extent is "The Green Wagon" truly a memoir?

As it turns out, whereas members of Kozachinskii's circle and their successors have tended to read the novella as an episode of its author's life as a criminal (in Krasavchik) and of Petrov's as a police investigator (in Patrikeev), archival evidence suggests that the young Patrikeev should likewise be read as a literary iteration of Kozachinskii. For instance, members of Kozachinskii's team during his stint as policeman in Severynivka included Comrade Shestakov and Grishchenko—the names of Patrikeev's police partners in the novella (Panasenko 57); both Patrikeev and Kozachinskii (judging from his mother's memoirs) suffered from a phobia of animals (dogs in Patrikeev's case); and Patrikeev's appointment to the police takes place through the intercession of a friend of his father's, just as Kozachinskii's stepfather was a police assistant in the Severynivka district and likely helped him get his job in the police force (37).[32] These factual details suggest that, whereas there is very little of Petrov in Patrikeev, there is in fact a lot of Kozachinskii in that character. Rather than a memoir of his friendship with Petrov, "The Green Wagon" resembles instead a double memoir disguised as a roman à clef: that of the police investigator with a knack for literature, and that of the horse thief in search of redemption. The key to the memoir opens two different doors.

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[32] It was in Kozachinskii's interest to hide his relationship to Krasnikov, his mother's second husband; at that time, relatives were prohibited from serving together in the police (Panasenko 37).

"The Green Wagon" reasserts the writer Patrikeev's maxim that in every life there is at least one interesting plot worth recounting—in this case, that of its own author. Whereas critics saw in the novella a failed narrative of the horse thief Krasavchik's reforging, Kozachinskii himself appears to have intended it to be the coming-of-age narrative of the writer, i.e. Patrikeev and, ultimately, Kozachinskii himself. It may well be both plots at once. Yet, from the point of view of memoir, the emphasis on one or the other is important in the context of the formation of the Stalinist subjectivity in the 1930s. Kozachinskii, against reader expectations, constitutes himself as a police investigator (not a criminal) turned writer; in this respect, he echoes the Purge-era emphasis on the figure of the police interrogator who shapes and edits the confessional narrative of the accused. Describing the painstaking process of drafting and redrafting confessions, Cristina Vatulescu has drawn attention to the role of the secret police in reproducing, within the confines of Soviet law enforcement, the same structures of self-formation that were present in Stalinist society at large. A well-known case is that of Babel''s confessions and interrogation protocols following his arrest during the Purges. Babel′ was said to have worked as an interpreter for the Cheka during the Civil War, and in the 1930s he enjoyed a friendship with the wife of Nikolai Ezhov, then head of the NKVD. During his interrogation, Babel′ discloses his plans to write a novel about Chekists (Povartsov 29ff) amidst questioning of his lack of significant publications since the early 1930s. Possibly based on his prior knowledge of and curiosity about the inner workings of the secret police, he engages in "the work of reinterpreting and translating his own vision of his shortcomings—his inability to write—into the incriminating language of the police, so that writer's block turns into sabotage in the space of a sentence" (Vatulescu 43). Babel′ attempts to refashion his biography and writerly activity (or lack thereof) into a criminal confession that would be satisfactory to the secret police, only for the interrogator to press further and start

"getting the kinds of answers he was looking for," such as the commonplace insinuations of connections with Trotskyist and foreign elements (43). It was to be Babel''s last attempt at the kind of self-invention that defined his literary oeuvre.

We can read "The Green Wagon" as an experiment in self-fashioning by a writer whose life and work, like Babel''s, were closely entwined with Odesa and its myths on the one hand, and with law enforcement on the other.[33] Like a secret police protocol, Kozachinskii's novella also moves seamlessly from memoir to confession; both of these genres are screened by the roman à clef and the mediating layer of the frame narrative. Furthermore, Kozachinskii's privileging of Patrikeev as the novella's protagonist, and his reference to Patrikeev's ride through the countryside as an untouchable episode in the text, suggest that the confession (and the corresponding emphasis on reforging) are of lesser importance than the very act of policing that triggers these processes in the first place. A pointed example of Kozachinskii's inclinations occurs when the young Patrikeev is said to delight in the "extreme level of emptiness" (*tu kraniuiu stepen' opustoshennosti*) (Kozachinskii, *Zelenyi furgon* 54) reached by an accused at the end of the interrogation. At that point, he is "weakened, shaking, having revealed all his dark secrets, overwhelmed by the implacable logic of the investigator" ("obessilennyi, drozhashchii, otkryvshii vse svoi mrachnye tainy, razdavlennyi neumolimoi logikoi sledovatelia," 54). In praising the clarity achieved by the investigator, Kozachinskii hints at the covert memoiristic traits of his own text; remarkably, he

[33] Given the tendency in scholarship to view socialist realism as the most evident heir to the legacy of Symbolist life-creation (*zhiznetvorchestvo*), Kozachinskii's self-fashioning through "The Green Wagon" also shows other means through which that concept manifested itself in Soviet culture of the Stalinist era. On the Soviet use of life-creation, see Gutkin.

emphasizes the investigator's skill rather than the confession itself, siding with the police rather than the accused.[34]

In the self-centered roman à clef of "The Green Wagon," the author places a series of hypostases of the self in conversation with one another. In the same passage in which he considers the investigator's role during the police interrogation, Patrikeev, promising writer that he is, remembers the pleasure he derives from the officialese of the closing sentence of interrogation protocols: "Having no further evidence to introduce, I hereby enter my signature" ("Bol′she nichego pokazat′ ne imeio, v chem i raspisyvaius′," Kozachinskii, *Zelenyi furgon* 54). In Kozachinskii's most daring act of simultaneous self-effacement and self-fashioning, we can imagine that the young Patrikeev's signature would be identical with Boichenko–Krasavchik's, since both characters are autobiographical counterparts of the author himself.[35] This episode brings together the three facets of Kozachinskii developed in "The Green Wagon": as policeman, criminal, and writer. The epitome of his individual development occurs in the final episode of the frame narrative, when the stranded tourists silently observe Boichenko sitting by the fireplace, as

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[34] Kozachinskii is not that far from Babel′'s attempt to upend the investigator's work by taking on the kind of editorial and interpretive effort expected of the interrogator. His descriptions of young Patrikeev's investigative methods are also tinged with self-disarming irony. Thus, whereas "The Green Wagon" is Kozachinskii's covert confession, it can also be read as an irreverent ode to the Soviet police as guarantors of order and as literary authors in their own right.

[35] Tynianov's emphasis on the importance of names in literature is apposite here: not only are characters' names relevant and meaningful, but so are authorial pseudonyms and anonymous authors (the latter due to the glaring *absence* of a name with all the social, historical, etc. connotations that it may carry). See Tynianov, *Arkhaisty i novatory* 27–28; *Permanent Evolution* 170–171. By playfully engaging with questions of authorship and onomastics, Kozachinskii points to the legal and symbolic centrality of names and authorial selves in the Stalinist period.

they arrive at the realization of who his counterpart within the core narrative truly is. This moment, depicted from the standpoint of the omniscient frame narrator, sets the former horse thief apart from his companions. In the figure of the narrator, Kozachinskii finds a means for himself to observe, investigator-like, the character of Boichenko. Kozachinskii's separation from his criminal past, usefully obscured by the structure of the roman à clef and the frame narrative, constitutes the foremost evidence of his socialist refashioning in the Stalinist 1930s.

Conclusion: Middlebrow Literature and the Construction of the Writing Self

Kozachinskii was so successful at concealing his past that "naïve" readers have overlooked the memoiristic connotations of "The Green Wagon" and have read it primarily as entertainment literature. Conversely, those that have noticed the aspect of memoir lurking behind Kozachinskii's roman à clef saw in it only a parasitic relationship with historical reality, and not the kind of artistic self-invention that characterizes the work of so many Odesa authors. Furthermore, Kozachinskii's conformist political stance meant that, in the postwar era, "The Green Wagon" remained out of bounds to Western readers, whose interest in Soviet letters was dominated by the avant-garde and by dissident works; conversely, in the Soviet Union "The Green Wagon" appears to have been relegated to the category of young adult literature, likely as a result of Patrikeev's young age within the core narrative.[36] The reception history of "The Green Wagon" is thus the history of how

[36] This indicates that critics and readers eventually got around to accepting Patrikeev's role as protagonist. "The Green Wagon" met a fate similar to that of Aleksandra Brushtein's autobiographical trilogy *Doroga ukhodit v dal'*, which "for a half century […] remained a book for family reading. In other words, it existed outside school curricula and was very rarely included in recommended-reading lists" (Gelfond 202). Brushtein was a friend of

Kozachinskii's text was confined, perhaps not to a Morettian slaughterhouse of literature, but to the anteroom of Soviet canons, bound never to enter any of them.

The fame of "The Green Wagon" is due, almost entirely, to its inclusion in a body of work associated with Odesa and predicated on a set of consecrated texts that eclipse its lesser-known counterparts; its other claim to notoriety hinges on its subject matter, with the (mostly misguided) assumption that it revolves to no small degree around a canonical author—Evgenii Petrov. The fact that "The Green Wagon" is *less* about Petrov than generally believed situates the text even more firmly into the territory of neglected and middlebrow literature. Yet this network of apparent interpretive dead ends also reveals that "The Green Wagon" is in fact a highly sophisticated literary work. On the one hand, Kozachinskii eschews any overt association of "The Green Wagon" with the genre of the memoir; on the other hand, he places two iterations of his own self—thief and young cop—in contact with one another in the form of distinct, ostensibly fictional characters. The entertainment value of "The Green Wagon," which connects with its status as an exemplar of Soviet middlebrow literature, is epitomized in Kozachinskii's supremely inventive sleight of hand: effacing himself from the plot of his novella while simultaneously placing himself in disguise front and center.

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Abstract

This essay analyzes Aleksandr Kozachinskii's 1938 Russian-language novella "The Green Wagon" as a roman à clef and exemplar of the Odesa Myth that has been unjustly neglected in literary scholarship. Reasons for the neglect of "The Green Wagon" include the historical context of its publication, between the Great Purges of 1936–1938 and the outbreak of World War II; Kozachinskii's untimely death; and the conventional interpretation of the novella that reduces it to a fictionalized account of Kozachinskii's friendship with Evgenii Petrov in Odesa during the early Soviet period. Against such a reductionist reading, and on the basis of recent archival-based scholarship on Kozachinskii's biography, I argue that "The Green Wagon" should instead be

understood as a double memoir, disguised as a roman à clef, of distinct episodes of Kozachinskii's past as both criminal element and police investigator. The essay explores the ways in which Kozachinskii simultaneously discloses and conceals the memoiristic character of his text against the background of Stalin-era practices of self-fashioning and police-supervised confessions during the time of the Great Purges.