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## UKRAINIAN AUTOFICTIONAL NOVEL OF THE 1990S AND EARLY 2000S

*The article is devoted to the Ukrainian autofictional novel of the 1990s and early 2000s as a special kind of autobiographical writing that organically combines fiction and non-fiction. In this regard, the author analyses the novels “Moskoviada” by Yurii Andrukhovych, “Field Studies of Ukrainian Sex” by Oksana Zabuzhko, and “Rivne/Rovne” by Oleksandr Irvanets. These novels were the first Ukrainian autofictional novels that laid the foundations for a new kind of autobiographical writing. In this article, we rely on the theory of autofiction developed by French scholars (primarily Serge Doubrovsky, Gerard Genette, Philippe Lejeune, Jacques Lecarme, Vincent Colonna, Philippe Gasparini, Thierry Guichard, and others), since it was in France that this type of autobiographical literature was born. The autofictional novel has many features in common with traditional autobiography (first-person narration of an episode from one’s own life, maximum merging of the images of the author, narrator and protagonist, the presence of verifiable autobiographies in the text, etc). However, in the autofictional novel, at the level of the preface (or the initial positions of the text), the reader is not entering into an “autobiographical agreement” (“le pacte autobiographique” in Philippe Lejeune’s terminology), but into a “novel agreement” (“le pacte romanesque” in Philippe Lejeune’s terminology), according to which the fictionalisation of the subsequent story and the failure to comply with the criterion of truthfulness of the narrative are indicated. The Ukrainian autofictional novel of the 1990s and early 2000s focused on creating an author’s myth, primarily at the level of intimacy, because this is the most difficult aspect of human life to verify. The protagonists of Ukrainian autofictional novels of this period are placed in imaginary time-spaces, can act in fictional storylines, while openly fictional elements freely interact with plausible details from the life of a real author, who is identical in many respects to the image of the protagonist.*

**Key words:** *autobiographical literature, autofictional novel, Ukrainian literature, Yurii Andrukhovych, Oksana Zabuzhko, Oleksandr Irvanets.*

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## УКРАЇНСЬКИЙ АВТОФІКЦІЙНИЙ РОМАН 1990-Х – ПОЧАТКУ 2000-Х РОКІВ

*Статтю присвячено розглядові українського автофікційного роману 1990-х-початку 2000-х років як особливого виду автобіографічного письма, в якому органічно поєднано фікційність і нефікційність. З цього приводу аналізуються романи «Московіада» Юрія Андруховича, «Польові дослідження з українського сексу» Оксани Забужко, «Рівне/Ровно» Олександра Ірванця. Ці романи стали першими українськими автофікційними романами, які заклали підвалини нового різновиду автобіографічного письма. У статті ми спираємося на теорію автофікції, вироблену французькими науковцями (передусім Сержем Дубровські, Жераром Женеттом, Філіппом Леженом, Жаком Лекармом, Вінсеном Колонна, Філіппом Гаспаріні, Тьєрі Гішаром та іншими), оскільки саме у Франції зародився цей вид автобіографічної літератури. Автофікційний роман має чимало рис спільних з традиційною автобіографією (оповідь від першої особи про епізод з власного життя, максимальне зрошення образів автора, наратора і головного персонажа, наявність у тексті автобіографем, які піддаються верифікації та інші), однак в автофікційному романі на рівні передмови (або початкових позицій тексту) з читачем укладається не «автобіографічна угода» («le pacte autobiographique» за термінологією Філіппа Лежена), а «романна угода» («le pacte romanesque» за термінологією Філіппа Лежена), згідно з якою йде вказівка на вигаданість подальшої історії та неотримання критерію правдивості оповіді. Український автофікційний роман 1990-х-початку 2000-х років орієнтувався на створення авторського міфу, передусім, на рівні інтимістики, адже саме цей аспект людського життя найважче піддається верифікації. Головні персонажі українських автофікційних романів цього періоду уміщуються в уявні часопростори, можуть діяти у вигаданих сюжетних лініях, при цьому відверто фікційні*

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 елементи вільно взаємодіють з правдоподібними деталями з життя реального автора, який за багатьма характеристиками тотожний образіві головного персонажа.

**Ключові слова:** автобіографічна література, автофікційний роман, українська література, Юрій Андрухович, Оксана Забужко, Олександр Ірванець.

**Problem statement.** The French literary critic Thierry Guichard once noted: “The nineties [of the twentieth century] were the years of autofiction” (*Le roman français contemporain*, 2007: 84). This phrase is absolutely correlated with the Ukrainian literature of this period. At that time, fictional autobiographies, as well as fictional biographies of famous personalities, became “one of the most fruitful forms of authorial play” (Lyzlova, 2005: 173), when life became a novel “based on real events” (Begbeder, 2007: 99). Ukrainian autobiographers began to use this trend of autobiography in the late 1990s, and it became widespread in the first decades of the twenty-first century, and therefore requires a more thorough study.

**Analysis of research.** Many scholars have studied the peculiarities of autofiction literature, but in this study we will focus on the theory developed by the French school of autofiction studies, represented, in particular, in the works of Serge Doubrovsky (Doubrovsky, 1988), Gerard Genette (Genette, 1991), Philippe Lejeune (Lejeune, 1975; Lejeune, 1980; Lejeune, 2005), Jacques Lecarme (Lecarme et Éliane Lecarme-Tabone, 1997), Vincent Colonna (Colonna, 1989), Philippe Gasparini (Gasparini, 2004), Thierry Guichard (*Le roman français contemporain*, 2007) and others, primarily because the concept of “autofiction literature” originated in France. For example, Gerard Genette (Genette, 1991) and Philippe Lejeune (Lejeune, 1975; Lejeune, 1980; Lejeune, 2005) focused on the theoretical foundations of fictional autobiographies, namely, the study of narrative levels and intersubjective relations. Thierry Guichard (*Le roman français contemporain*, 2007), from the perspective of a literary historian, studied the works of C. Ango, R. Detambel, C. Laurent, E. Guibert, and others. Much later, Ukrainian studies of autofictional works began to appear. For example, Yana Lukianenko (Tymoshchuk) (Lukianenko (Tymoshchuk), 2008) analysed André Malraux’s “Antimemoirs” against the background of contemporary literary trends. Svitlana Kovpik (*Talking about Literature*, 2022) also addressed the Ukrainian context, examining, in particular, contemporary examples of Ukrainian autofictional prose.

**The purpose of the article** is to analyse the first Ukrainian autobiographical novels that appeared during the 1990s and early 2000s in order to trace the main typological features of this trend in Ukrainian

autobiographical literature, laid down by the first authors.

**Presentation of the main material.** For the first time, autofiction was discussed by the French researcher of autobiographical writing Philippe Lejeune (Lejeune, 1975), who in the early 1970s, influenced by the ideas of Gerard Genette, developed a hypothetical model of a new kind of autobiography: a fictional autobiographical story of a fictional character that passes for a true story from the author’s life. In 1977, thanks to the French writer Serge Doubrovsky, this hypothesis became a reality, and his work “The Son” (“Fils”) became a classic example of autofictional literature. Over time, autofictional writing has become widespread in the world’s literatures, especially in the postmodern period, but today, like anti-memoirs, it belongs to the realm of fiction, not documentary literature, as fiction prevails over factuality.

In Ukrainian literature, the first examples of autofictional literature began to appear at the end of the twentieth century (in particular, autofictional novels by Yurii Andrukhovych “Moskoviada” (Andrukhovych, 2000), Oksana Zabuzhko “Field Studies of Ukrainian Sex” (Zabuzhko, 1996), Oleksandr Irvanets “Rivne/Rovne: The Wall” (Irvanets, 2006), and others.)

According to Serge Dubrovsky’s definition, “autofiction” (from the Greek “autos” – “I”; French “fiction”) is “a fictional narrative in which events and facts are really real” (Autofiction). French researcher Jacques Lecarme, in turn, speaks of two meanings of the term “autofiction”. In the narrow sense of the term, “autofiction is a work in which a real story about real facts is depicted in a fictional narrative technique” (Autofiction). In this case, there is no distinction between fictional and fictional autobiography. In a broader sense, autofiction is “a mixture of memories and imagination” (Autofiction).

Synonymous with the French term “autofiction” are the English concepts of “faction” (a compound word formed from “fact” and “fiction”) and autobiographical novel (i.e., “autobiographical novel”). Faction is “all texts written on the basis of real facts that borrow narrative techniques from fiction” (Autofiction), while autobiographical novel is a term for “a story as close as possible to the author’s life, but built according to the laws of the autobiographical pact” (Autofiction).

Both autobiographical and autofictional novels are an organic synthesis of truth and fiction, using fictional

writing techniques, but with different degrees of documentation and fictionality. An autobiographical novel is a true story from the author's life described in the form of a fictional work. An autofictional novel, on the other hand, presents a fictional story that allegedly took place in the author's life as a true story. Thus, an autobiographical novel is part of the system of fiction and non-fiction literature, as it has a real factual basis, while an autofictional novel is part of fiction, as fiction in it significantly prevails over the documentary element.

Fictional autobiographies, or autofictions, correspond to most of the typological features inherent in traditional fictional autobiographies, namely: a highly artistic first-person narrative of one's own life story, psychologisation of the narrative, retrospectivity, etc. However, one of the leading features of autofictional literature is the optional identity of the three textual instances: author, narrator, and protagonist. Usually, the narrator is opposed to the author by a number of characteristics, often has a different name, but there are many common characteristics in the text that make it easy to identify the author.

In autofictional works, the author and the reader conclude not an autobiographical but a romantic contract (in Philippe Lejeune's terminology, "le pacte romanesque"), typical of fiction, at the level of the preface or in the main text, which emphasises the opposition of the author, narrator and protagonist or directly indicates the fictional nature of the subsequent narrative.

Due to the blurred lines between traditional and fictional autobiographies, it becomes problematic to distinguish between non-fictional and fictional autobiographies, since, as critics note, firstly, the terms of the autobiographical contract are not always respected; secondly, any autobiography tends to be fictional, because every person is essentially a myth for himself, and therefore any autobiography tends to be an idea that a person creates about himself. Most scholars of autobiographical writing say that perhaps the criterion for distinction lies in the author's intentions, since in a traditional autobiography the author aims to reconstruct his past as it was and to return the past self to its truth. In a fictional autobiography, the goal is no longer to copy life, but to explain it. While generally agreeing with this thesis, we should add that in most cases it is still about the author's modelling of his own life story, i.e. in an autobiography, wishful thinking is presented as real, as it happened in Yuriy Andrukhovych's autobiographical novel "Moskoviada", published in the early 1990s.

The peculiarity of this autofictional work is that real events from the author's life were introduced into the fictional plot.

The protagonist, Otto von F., or Otto Wilhelmovych, is an aspiring writer who is studying at a literary course in Moscow. Over the course of one day, a series of events occur to him that allow the author to identify the work as a horror novel.

From time to time, in his delusions, the protagonist makes excursions into his own past and recounts certain details of his life, including those of an intimate nature.

In order to convince the readers that the story is about him, the writer uses identity markers of the author, narrator, and protagonist (such as gender, age, profession, the fact that the writer attended the Higher Literary Courses at the then Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow in 1991, certain details of his life in Moscow at the time, etc.). At the same time, some of the facts can be easily verified. In particular, according to the French researcher Philippe Gasparini, it is easiest to confirm the name, surname (which in this text are different from the real ones), date and place of birth, and address, because they appear in passport data; it is much more difficult to reliably establish the author's personal characteristics, for example, personal beliefs, tastes, lifestyle, etc. (Gasparini, 2004: 45). And the sphere of the writer's intimate life is precisely the group of biographical facts that are very difficult to verify.

Unlike in his later fictional autobiography "The Secret" (Andrukhovych, 2007), the writer does not aim to reflect his true life story of those years, but rather to model it, i.e. in this case, wishful thinking is passed off as real, as the author himself later recalls, referring to the story of a black woman in a dormitory shower: "Of course, sex in the shower, trespassing and trespassing in a forbidden area. There was none of that. Of course, there was that black girl, I couldn't help but notice her, but I doubt she was from Madagascar, there's a different type there, no, this one was more likely from Equatorial Guinea. I wonder what she wrote? Poetry, prose? I think some fairy tales about the sex life of animals. Sometimes we crossed paths in the lift or at the payphone. I wanted to be an elephant for a little while, with a trunk so long that I could get under her clothes and touch her between the legs. But what was the point?" (Andrukhovych, 2000: 317–318).

Likewise, the story of the hero's personal life presented in "Moskoviada" is at odds with the author's official biography and the autobiographical "The Secret".

According to the official biography of Yuriy Andrukhovych on the Wikipedia website, the

writer's family consists of "Father Ihor Marianovych (1930–1997); mother Hanna Stepanivna (1940); wife Nina Mykolaivna (1959); daughter Sofia (1982) and son Taras (1986)" (Andrukhovych), "On 10 March 2008, daughter Sofia (writer, translator and publicist), whose husband is the famous Ukrainian poet Andrii Bondar, gave birth to a girl who was named Varvara" (Andrukhovych).

The fictional autobiography "The Secret" recreates the writer's first school hobbies, an unhappy "love story" with a Lviv girl, and the story of his acquaintance, marriage, and subsequent married life with his wife Nina.

Instead, the protagonist of "Moskoviada" models a completely different story of his own personal life, which he conditionally divided into pre-Moscow and Moscow periods.

While the pages of "The Secret" show a touching picture of the author saying goodbye to his wife and son on his flight to Moscow, the protagonist of "Moskoviada" says that "my trouble is that I didn't get married in time. Or that I got divorced at the wrong time. But this happened in another life, in those blessed times, as one of my poet friends says, when I was a chronic alcoholic" (Andrukhovych, 2000: 48).

Just as in the case of the Lviv woman in "The Secret", when the author's beloved was four years older than him and this caused him considerable psychological discomfort, the author's pre-Moscow love stories are also marked by the problem of the age difference between the lovers. As the author writes, "one of those women who scurry around the windowsills of sobering-up centres and pick up the poor people thrown out on the pavement to their liking, chose me as her capricious choice <...>. She really stole my heart in a strange way. What depressed me the least was that she was ten years older. At night, when we were getting to know each other deeply and feeling each other out, there was no age difference. In addition, at about the same time, I took a tenth-grader, Vika, who was ten years younger than me, to the studio of my artist friend, so nature itself established a wise balance in everything. Personally, I was very happy that the age range of my lovers was equal to a whole generation" (Andrukhovych, 2000: 48). Both stories ended in nothing, and, as the author goes on to write, "I finally chose to escape to Moscow" (Andrukhovych, 2000: 50).

Unlike the classic autobiography "The Secret", which mentions only one woman's name, the name of Yurii Andrukhovych's wife Nina, and does not mention others for moral and ethical reasons, although they are guessed by people from the

writer's environment based on certain characteristics and situations described, the autofictional work "Moskoviada" does not avoid naming the names of the author's beloved women.

Recalling his Moscow love stories, the author paints a vivid palette of different types of women that were typical of bohemian Moscow at the time. As the author recalls, "Moscow slipped me a few more loves. First, a critic who appeared twice a year and with whom we watched almost all of Fellini. It was a rather interesting case of verbal sex. Our sexual relations consisted of conversations" (Andrukhovych, 2000: 50).

The next, according to the author, was Oleksandra's religious fan, with whom he became close on the basis of Catholicism: "She was quite inventive and impetuous in love. She was a Joan of Arc! Or St Teresa! I could not even imagine something like this" (Andrukhovych, 2000: 51), but, as the author writes, "having become convinced of the naivety of my previous intentions to gradually corrupt her, I eventually cooled down unexpectedly for myself and recorded my own sensual decline with the complete indifference of an outsider" (Andrukhovych, 2000: 51).

It is difficult to imagine Moscow of that period without underground currency life, and thus Astrid appears among the protagonist's beloved women: "Half Polish, half Swedish, but an American citizen. Accredited in Moscow by some news agency <...>. She opened for me a whole continent of previously unknown Moscow – a currency Moscow, with hotels and bars <...>. Next to her, I learnt all the wisdom of Zen, as well as the old communist wisdom about 'two worlds – two ways of life'" (Andrukhovych, 2000: 52).

However, the main focus of the love story of the protagonist of the fictional "Moskoviada" is on the snake-headed Galya, who at the end of the novel turns out to be a KGB officer. It was with her, according to the protagonist, that he experienced some of the brightest moments of his love affairs: "One of your loves. A play of passions and subtle psychological nuances. Sadomasochistic sketches. Scenes from the lives of perverts. The battle of egos. The school of new love. Ugh!.." (Andrukhovych, 2000: 45). Thus, "Moskoviada" is more about typifying female artistic images than about recreating the writer's real love story.

Thus, it can be said that different types of autobiographical writing have different degrees of truthfulness in reproducing events from the author's life. While classical reference autobiography focuses on the authenticity of the events described, which can

be verified by other documentary or fictional sources, autofictional works may turn to a free, and sometimes completely fictional, interpretation of certain facts from the writer's biography.

Automythologisation at the level of intimacy was also typical of other Ukrainian autofictional novels of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, in particular, the works of Oksana Zabuzhko (Zabuzhko, 1996; Zabuzhko, 2003), Artem Chekh (Chekh, 2008; Chekh, 2009), and others.

Most often, authors reproduced their own inner world, their thoughts, feelings, and emotions in detail. A characteristic feature was the use of fictional descriptions of everyday life stories, which could be witnessed or witnessed by only a small group of people, and thus it is difficult to verify the reality of what is depicted, since everyday, insignificant stories are usually left out of autobiographers' and memoirists' attention, and it is impossible to verify them from other, non-personal sources. That is, it was mainly about the artistic reproduction of those spheres of human existence that are usually not verifiable.

One of the main features of autofictional prose, according to Philippe Gasparini, is its literary nature. That is why most of the characters in Ukrainian autofictional novels exist within fictional storylines and imaginary time-spaces.

But at the same time, an indispensable element of autofictional novels was the creation of the effect of narrative plausibility, which was achieved through the placement of markers of the author's, narrator's, and protagonist's identity; by introducing into the fictional work the real socio-historical and cultural background of the described period, which is correlated in time with the author's real biographical time; detailed description of place names; artistic depiction of typical realities of life that really took place during the author's lifetime; use of (sometimes slightly modified, but quite recognisable) names of real people, etc.

The peculiarity of an autofictional novel is that plausible details can freely coexist with openly fictional moments, for example, the adventures of the protagonist of "Moskoviada" (Andrukhovych, 2000) in a Moscow dungeon at the end of the novel, or the imaginary division of the city of Rivne by a wall that

does not exist in reality and the focus on the city's life in two radically opposite planes, similar to Berlin at the time of the Berlin Wall in the novel "Rivne/Rovne" (Irvanets, 2006).

This type of novel is characterised by literary games with the reader and numerous literary mystifications. For example, in the novel "Rivne/Rovne", the author's imagination divides the city of Rivne into two parts – western and eastern, each of which lives its own separate life. To assure the readers of the truthfulness of his words, the author cites an allegedly real documentary source – an article from the "Short Reference Guide to the Economic Geography of the Socialist Republic of Ukraine", published in 2002 by the Kyiv publishing house "Polityvydav" (Irvanets, 2006: 5). However, this reference book never actually existed, nor did the facts contained in the reference article. Neither did "Polityvydav" exist at that time.

Thus, autofictional prose becomes a kind of fictional pseudo-documentary writing and combines not only the features of artistry and documentary, but also outright fiction with a small percentage of truthfulness.

Similarly to autobiographical novels, autofictional works cover a short period of the author's life (from one day, for example, in Yurii Andrukhovych's "Moskoviada", to several months). As a result, the space of action is limited. In most cases, it encompasses the private space of the protagonist, who identifies with the author, and a part of his or her public space, in which the protagonist interacts with society. The cultural and historical space is defined through indirect authorial references and socio- and linguistic cultures contained in the text.

**Conclusions.** To summarise, we can state that Ukrainian autofictional prose of the 1990s and early 2000s laid the foundations for a new trend in Ukrainian autobiographical writing of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Autobiographical novels appeared at the intersection of fiction (with its tendency to fiction) and nonfiction (through the inclusion of real autobiographies). In the twenty-first century, the autofictional trend of autobiographical literature has become widespread in Ukrainian prose, and thus it is promising to study contemporary ego-texts that tend to be autofictional.

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