

Autobiographic Narrative of Modern Women Prose: Theoretical Aspect

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Abstract

The autobiographical beginning is one of the typological features of women's literature. For Russian women's prose of the 19th century *autobiography* was relevant as a non-fiction strategy. In the 20th century, “*autobiographizm*” was actively developed, which, thanks to its mythologization, becomes a fiction strategy, then in the 21st century the leading narrative strategy became an *autobiographical narrative*, potentially allowing to realize the entire range of fiction / non-fiction. Since the autobiographical narrative in women's literature can be realized directly and indirectly, the authors of the article suggest using two terms to distinguish between two different types of its representation in the text. We propose to update the term autobiographical narrative (in the narrow sense) when we find that the facts of the biography of a particular author are reflected to a greater or lesser extent in the narrator. The term autogynographic narrative we are introducing allows us to shift the view of the researcher from the autobiographical narrator to the act of narration itself and the narrative strategies that construct female subjectivity in the work. Autobiographical narrative in modern women's prose represents individual subjectivity, then autogynographic narrative is one of the ways of constructing female subjectivity. In the course of the study, it was found that the main method of narrativizing the Other and representing female subjectivity is quite naturally two similar but identical strategies – the strategy of “double voice” and the strategy of polyphonism.

Keywords: Modern Russian literature, women's prose, women's subjectivity, autobiographical narrative, autogynographic narrative.

1. Introduction

Back in the 19th century two main lines of Russian women's literature were formed, which determined, on the one hand, the specificity of its relationship with the Big Literature, and on the other, the originality of its own genre system. A number of women writers and poetesses (A.P. Bunina, E.P. Rostopchina, K.K. Pavlova, E.A. Gan, Z.A. Volkonskaya, M.S. literature, filling them with “women” content (as noted by M.P. Abasheva and N.V. Vorobyova, the following «genre and plot paradigms were the most demanded in the work of women writers: story”, “romantic story” » (Abasheva & Vorobieva, 2007)). Representatives of the second main line (E.R. Dashkova, N.A. Durova, A.P. Kern, N.B. Dolgorukaya, A.E. Labzina etc.) actualized autobiographical/documentary genres (notes, diaries, memoirs) that were marginal for their time, outside of Big Literature, thereby “legitimizing” them as “women” genres proper.

Thus, all three centuries of Russian women's literature can be linked together precisely with the help of the category of “autobiography”. If for the 19th century autobiography was relevant as a non-fiction strategy, in the 20th century autobiography was actively developed, which, thanks to its mythologization, becomes a fiction strategy, then in the 21st century autobiographical narrative became the leading narrative strategy, potentially allowing to realize the entire range of fiction/non-fiction. In this article, we will try to theoretically comprehend the specifics of the functioning and features of the representation of this narrative in modern women's prose.

2. Methods

For the study of autobiographical narrative, we were interested in works devoted to the analysis of literary reputation, in the formation of which the biography of the writer occupies one of the central places (Krylov, 2019). References to literary works on traumatic discourse in women's literature (Khabibullina, 2021; Khabibullina, 2020) allowed us to discover the specifics of the narrative organization of women's prose. We took into account literary works, where the subject of research attention was the poetics of women's prose (Krylov, 2017; Aina et al., 2021; Ajah, 2022).

3. Results and Discussion

Autobiographical narrative (in the broad sense of its understanding and use of words) can be realized in modern women's prose directly and indirectly. In this regard, we will use two terms to distinguish between two different types of its representation in the text.

We propose to update the term *autobiographical narrative* (in the narrow sense)¹ when we find that the facts of the biography of a particular author are reflected to a greater or lesser extent in the narrator. Undoubtedly, the narrative of modern women's autobiographical novels/binovels in general terms correlates with the narrative of diaries, notes, memoirs of female authors of the 19th century, but it is not possible to equate the phenomena of different ages.

Firstly, this is due to the fact that the confessionality, intimacy, openness to the reader and to oneself, characteristic of autobiographies of the 19th century, is replaced in the modern autobiographical narrative by the setting on:

a) mythologizing one's own personality, building it according to a certain socio-cultural model (for example, the Cinderella model),

b) quasi-confessionality, when an autobiographical narrative not only exists as an independent type of narration but acts as one of the ways to create the image of the Other, mythologize the era, construct identity (gender, national, cultural), that is, it becomes a functionally significant formation.

Secondly, a distinctive feature of modern women's autobiographical narrative is its active inclusion in artistic discourse. It is realized through interaction with genre models of fiction, non-veiled intertextuality, stylization according to the canon of Great Literature. The very fact of a conscious conceptual movement from autobiography to artistry is realized in women's prose through the strategy of *faction*.

As you know, this term, which goes back to New Journalism, came about by merging two words – “fact” and “fiction” – and began in its most general form to mean “a work based on verified facts, but presented in the form of a fictional story” (Fedotova, 2013). Undoubtedly, the strategy we have noted can be found in earlier works of women's literature (for example, in the novel by E. Ginzburg "The Steep Route" (1967)), but it is for modern women's prose that this strategy becomes one of the most productive. The specificity of its functioning in women's prose lies in the fact that it is the *faction* strategy that can be viewed as a transitional link from autobiographical narrative to “artistic” one, when the fact of one's own biography remains only material with its obligatory non-fiction processing.

Enveloping the narration of biographical facts and the necessarily accompanying historical context in the genre and stylistic form of Great Literature, the writers, on the one hand, destroy the female autobiographical narrative that has been taking shape for centuries, on the other hand, this is how the gender marking of the autobiographical narrative takes place in modern women's prose, its difference is fixed. from the male autobiographical “I”. Representative texts in which we find this strategy are novels by Maria Arbatova “I'm 40 years old” (1998), “The Life of a Soviet Girl” (2014) by Tatyana Moskvina, “A City Written from

¹ In what follows, we will use the term “autobiographical narrative” only in a narrow sense.

Memory” (2019) by Elena Chizhova and, for example, Nina Gorlanova's story “Penitential Days, or Waiting for the End light” (1990).

The term *autogynographic narrative* we are introducing allows us to shift the view of the researcher from the autobiographical narrator to the act of narration itself and the narrative strategies that construct female subjectivity in the work.

The term “autogynography” was first introduced into scientific circulation by Domna Stanton in the mid-1970s. Dealing with the issues of women's autobiography (it is the term “autobiography” in the works of the researcher that is replaced by the term “autogynography”), D. Stanton shifts his research attention from biographical content to the very act of writing-narrative. According to the scientist, in a woman's biography, techniques / mechanisms / strategies can be found that allow the author to “constitute a female subject in the phallogocentric system, which defines it as an object, as an insignificant other <highlighted by the author – A.A., T.B., Y.D.> men. <...> An authorized letter about oneself, the creation of Oneself (oneself) in the act of writing (“graphing of the auto”) was an act of self-affirmation, which at the same time rejected and retained the female status” (Quoted from: (Savkina, 2007)). The statement can be interpreted as follows: entering the world of Great literature, a woman writing encroaches on the territory of a man; she realizes this, and therefore her story is both justifiable and exciting. Therefore, the discourse of a woman's utterance is determined by “disunity and duality” (Savkina, 2007). We will somewhat clarify the interpretation of the term “autogynography”, mainly excluding from it the connotations of the feminist sense.

4. Summary

Let's start with the fact that the writing woman reveals herself not only in autobiographical genres, so this term can be extended to the field of literary texts. They may completely lack an autobiographical beginning, indicating, among other things, female authorship, but the story itself will still be defined as feminine, primarily through an uninterrupted process of gender self-identification. The key concept through which it was proposed to identify the female self both in post-structuralist constructions and in feminist criticism was the concept of the Other: a woman was perceived in patriarchal culture as the Other and tried to present herself as the Other. In addition, according to Suzanne Friedman, in patriarchal culture, women are characterized by a collective identity that helps any marginal group to exist within the absolute majority. As the researcher notes, “in a woman's autobiography, the I is constructed on the basis of group consciousness <...> – on the awareness of the cultural category of a *woman* <highlighted by the author - A.A., T.B., Y.D.> for models of women's individual fate” (Quoted from: (Savkina, 2007)). In other words, the function of female images appearing on the pages of works is not in the individualization of their history, psychology, thinking and language, but in the process of creating a cultural image of a Woman, a priori polycode and dynamic in its development. No matter what relations the female characters have with each other, being relatives, friends, or not at all familiar with each other, no matter what

views they hold, no matter what social status they are in, individual female images will be constructed precisely by the collective I. emphasize that this construction occurs primarily at the narrative level.

If the autobiographical narrative in modern women's prose represents individual subjectivity, then autogynographic narrative is one of the ways of constructing female subjectivity. As we have already noted above, autogynographic narrative is realized in the very act of narration through the process of gender identification, most often with the help of the category of the Other, which is involved in building a collective female identity. Traditionally this category is realized at the figurative level (this is why, in gender literary studies, one of the urgent problems is the consideration of a man as Another, a woman as Another, a child as Another etc.), but it can also be represented at the level of narration we are considering. In the course of the study, it was found that the main method of narrativizing the Other and representing female subjectivity is quite naturally two similar but identical strategies – the strategy of “double voice” and the strategy of polyphonism. The strategy of “double voice” goes back to the provisions of literary feminist criticism (in particular, H. Sixous, E. Showalter), which offers a category of duality to describe the female storytelling, the content of which boils down to the fact that “on the one hand, writers had to adapt androcentric discourse, and on the other – to express their own individuality” (Pavlova, 2013). E. Showalter proposes to designate such a strategy as “double-voiced discourse” (Showalter, 2004), and R. Warhol – to distinguish between “the engaging narrator” and “the distancing narrator” (“a distant narrator”) (Warhol, 1986). N.I. Pavlova, in our opinion, very accurately formulates the essence of this strategy: “the phenomenon of a “double voice” creates a specific hermeticism of women's texts, interpreting them as a kind of “writing for oneself”, when the most significant is narratively “hidden”, while on the surface the text is “released” mainly socially obvious or socially demanded” (Pavlova, 2013). At the same time, we must clearly realize that these conclusions were made by the researcher based on the material of foreign women's prose of the 18th – early 20th centuries, and they can be projected onto Russian women's literature of the late 20th – early 21st centuries. with certain clarifications and adjustments.

Let's start with the fact that in the works of modern women's prose the opposition of the female and male (and more broadly, patriarchal) narrative can be preserved and discovered (perhaps this structural level of the text among modern writers remains the only one where this binary opposition remains. At all other levels (including figurative) the noted dichotomy ceases to be relevant). This antithesis gets its explication primarily in the narrative construction of women subjectivity. The general tendency is as follows: female images are described within the framework of patriarchal discourse and are passed in this regard through the essentialist concept of the feminine, as a result of which they appear before the reader as fragmented, incomplete, conventional; that is, there is a clear deconstruction of the patriarchal description of the women. In contrast to this a *different* narrative is built, which is based on the plot of the acquisition of a female language. The

otherness of the female narrative here is determined by the performative nature of the language itself as the language of the emerging “women body”. The genuine acquisition of the language of the “women body” as a way to overcome the male narrative becomes possible through the experience and resolution of female trauma (the situation of female trauma in the analyzed phenomenon is almost always obligatory, since, as I. Zhrebkina justly remarked, “any types of *narrative* or linguistic *deconstruction* are perceived as a *traumatic experience* <our italics – A.A., T.N., Y.V.> loss of essential women integrity” (Zhrebkina, 2003)). At the level of narrative instances, the phenomenon of metaleptic rapprochement of the narrator (both non-diegetic and diegetic) with an abstract female author is observed, which, on the one hand, leads to its explication in the text, and on the other (taking into account the “carnival” use of patriarchal discourse), creates the effect of “literary transvestism”. The novels “F20” (2017) by Anna Kozlova and “Sincerely yours Shurik” (2003) by Lyudmila Ulitskaya can be mentioned as representative texts of the “double voice” strategy.

The second narrative strategy mentioned by us – the strategy of polyphonism – also has two main variants. The novels by Svetlana Bogdanova “The Dream of Jocasta” (2000) and Elena Chizhova “The Time of Women” (2009), which we have already examined, turn out to be representative texts that make it possible to clearly demonstrate its functioning.

From the very beginning, it should be noted that Svetlana Bogdanova's “The Dream of Jocasta” minimizes the opposition of feminist criticism, declared in feminist criticism, between women's writing and patriarchal discourse – the feminine discourse taking shape by the beginning of the 21st century allows this to be done. Therefore, the strategy of “double voice” is replaced here by the strategy of polyphonism and becomes a proper narrative strategy, realized through a system of “involved” narrators, whose voices have an overall equal weight, and the “distanced” narrator – an abstract narrative instance, the “secret voice” of a specific author Svetlana Bogdanova, as if bursting from modern reality into the mythological narrative and revealing itself in it. Simultaneous/parallel sounding of voices of all narrators allows to represent the concept of collective female subjectivity at the narrative level.

We can find a slightly different version of the narrative strategy of polyphonism in Elena Chizhova's novel “The Time of Women”, which won the Russian Booker Prize. This type of polyphonism is close to the concept developed by M.M. Bakhtin regarding the novelistic work of F.M. Dostoevsky. The author's voice (in the terminology of M.M. Bakhtin, from a narrative point of view, here you can hear both the voice of a specific author (through the epigraph) and a non-dietary narrator) in the work sounds on a par with all other voices and participates in the implementation of the concept of collective female identity. At the same time, Elena Chizhova completes the narrative polyphonism by using various discursive practices - in this case, we are talking about fairytale and fairytale discourse.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, we note that when the division is made, both narratives do not exist completely in parallel: the autobiographical narrative constantly strives for an autogynographic narrative, trying to “throw off” the memory of the autobiographical genre and “expropriating” the ways of representing the autobiographical principle in fiction.

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