

## Літературний процес:

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## Literary Process:

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<https://doi.org/10.28925/2412-2475.2021.17.4>**RETICENCE AS A STRATEGY OF WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES IN SOVIET TIMES:  
A CASE STUDY OF IVANENKO'S "ALWAYS IN LIFE" (1986)**

*The subject of the study is the system of reticence techniques in the women's autobiography of Oksana Ivanenko, the Ukrainian writer of the 20th century. Western theorists of women's autobiography (Mary Mason, Estelle Jelinek) considered relativity, fragmentation, nonlinearity to be its defining qualities. However, the concept of Leigh Gilmore, who considered autobiography as a writing strategy that constructs its object, allows us to raise the question of the potential functions of constructive techniques in this text. These and other studies analyse the autobiographies of women in the Western world, leaving aside the writings of Eastern Europeans, however, the works of those who had to live under Soviet conditions are of particular interest for various reasons. The aim of the proposed study is to show the peculiarities of the creation and functioning of the women's autobiographies (Gilmore's self-representation) in ideological societies on the example of Ivanenko's memoirs "Always in Life". The research methodology is based on women's studies and discursive analysis.*

*As a result of the study, it has been found that in Ivanenko's memoirs the theme of creative self-realization and literature in general pushes aside the narrative that Western theorists consider to be the main one for women's biography: comprehending their own female experience (first of all, love, marriage, motherhood). The relativity, embodied in the genre of the essay, allowed the author to talk about oneself, when she wanted it, and at the right moment to return to the pseudo-object. The non-linearity of the narrative helps emphasize advantageous moments and avoid coerced chronology. However, fragmentation and heterogeneity allow the woman writer not to build a holistic narrative about oneself, but to offer "flickering" content to readers. Thus, feeling ideological pressure, the author escaped memories not only of the difficult period in Ukrainian history, but also of important events in her life, ignoring her true experience. This means that an autobiographical work may be called upon not to record a true experience but to create a socially acceptable version of the writer.*

**Key words:** woman's biography, relativity, fragmentation, nonlinearity, reticence techniques.

**Introduction**

Interest in women's autobiographies arose in Western Literary Studies in the late 1970s, influenced by the revitalization of women's studies, and the starting date of research was considered the 1980s, when the collection *Women's Autobiographies: Essays in Criticism* was published. Until then, scientists (George Gusdorf, Georg Mish, Roy Pascal and others) focused on the autobiographies of prominent men, and the features of the genre were determined on the basis of their texts. In the late 1970s, researchers began to assemble an array of women's autobiographical texts, in terms of which they discussed the previous theory of autobiography. One of the first who did it was Mary Mason in the article *Another Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers*, in which the author stated that the format of the autobiographical text

is determined by the author's gender. She asserted: Gusdorf's conclusion that everyone wants to know what his life was like is true for men, but not for women. Mason, analysing English women's autobiographical texts, revealed that they are characterized by the concentrated identity of the autobiographical "Self" in connection with a certain "Other" (God, another person, mainly a man, or the collective consciousness of the group) (Mason, 2009). It gave them reason to speak of something as "not important" as their own life, and to define the boundaries of their own "Self" open and formed in their relationship with the "Other".

The distinction between men's and women's autobiographical texts was further made more expressive by Estelle Jelinek (*Women's Autobiography*). The scholar described the features of women's autobiographies at three levels: content,

narrative model and text organization. As a rule at the level of content women's autobiographies are focused on personal relationships, primarily family relations, while in men's autobiographies, the main focus is on the public and professional sphere. Women's autobiographies at the level of narrative model are distinguished by narratives of self-awareness, and at the level of the text organization women's autobiographies have such characteristics as irregularity, fragmentation, heterogeneity (unlike the men's autobiographies that outwardly have a linear structure) (Jelinek, 1980).

Important for the theory of women's autobiography is the study of Leigh Gilmore, who examined the identity of the real author as well as her chosen strategy for constructing identity in the process of writing an autobiography. According to the researcher, these strategies are formed historically and culturally by the discourses of gender and truth. Therefore, not an experience, but an autobiography constructs an autobiographical subject, which is a representation chosen by the writer (Gilmore, 1994).

Considering autobiographic as a writing technique, Gilmore has suggested focusing on the author's position regarding autobiographical strategies, such as intentionally undermining trust, demonstrating the act of writing, refusing to reproduce the content expected from a woman, and exposing public pressure mechanisms. These and other studies analyse the autobiographies of women in the Western world, leaving aside the writings of Eastern European writers, however, the works of those who had to live under the Soviet conditions are of particular interest for various reasons. Solveiga Daugirdaite (2015) has drawn attention to the peculiarities of the women's autobiographies of Lithuanian women writers of the Soviet times, discovering that young women writers almost never narrated about their private lives (and even if they do, they told common things), although they readily talked about their origin and childhood. Paradoxically, young women authors did not go into the details of marriages, although they often recalled divorce as a turning point in their life, after which they found themselves. Moreover, if the romantic story did not end with marriage, it was not mentioned at all. Another paradox of Soviet autobiographies is that from an intimate and unobscuring genre, it turned into an official one, in which a public person prevails.

The aim of the proposed study is to show the peculiarities of creating and functioning of the women's autobiographies in ideological societies on the example of Oksana Ivanenko's memoirs *Always in Life* («Завжди в житті»). Oksana Ivanenko is a Ukrainian writer of the Soviet

period, who became popular primarily due to her literature for children, although she wrote two biographical novels about two canonical Ukrainian writers, Taras Shevchenko and Marko Vovchok. Her emergence as a children's writer took place in the early 1930s, when widespread political repressions were taking place in Ukraine, during which she was forced to prove her loyalty (since she came from a nationally conscious family, had noble status and her brother was arrested as the "enemy of the people"). She lost her husband during World War II and then she carved her own way: she worked as an editor of a children's magazine, wrote new works and raised two children.

#### Asserting the right to be a writer

The book of her memoirs *Always in Life*, awarded with the highest state honor – the Shevchenko Prize (1986), includes eighteen essays about Ukrainian and Russian writers. The book meets four requirements Philippe Lejeune has set for autobiographies: in linguistic form (1) it is a prose story, on the topic (2) of the fate of the person, in the situation (3) of the identity of the author and narrator and (4) of the narrator and the main character (with a possible retrospection) (Lejeune, 1982, 193). If the first and third conditions are explicit, then the second and fourth ones need clarification, though provided by Ivanenko herself.

In the preface, she stated: "These essays are neither literary portraits, nor literary studies, nor biographies of prominent people. These are *memories of myself, of my work*, of unforgettable meetings with people who have forever entered *my life, influenced my path, my growth, my temper*. Therefore, do not reproach that there is a lot *about myself in them*, in these essays" (italics mine. — S. Zh.) (Ivanenko, 1985, 3). Indeed, the essay about Leo Tolstoy was an occasion to talk about her own childhood, an essay about Anton Makarenko was a reason to tell about her work in his colony. Therefore, we have a classic version for women's autobiographies of telling about herself through the narrative about someone. Such relativity is ambivalent: it indicates a certain lack of independence, but at the same time can be positively regarded as the key to understanding the attempts made to speak in one's own voice. Therefore, later on, these memories will be considered as an autobiographical work of a special format, which, in fact, will be the main interest of the study.

The theme of this autobiography is non typical of women's models: Oksana Ivanenko told about her formation as a writer. Formally, the essays *My Ways of Taras, My Maria, My Fairy Tales and My Dear Teachers* (possessive pronouns in the titles

seem to be symbolic) elaborate this theme. While the essays about Mykola Makarenko, Mykola Trublaini, Alexander Kopylenko, Volodymyr Zatonsky develop the topic to the greater extent, the works about Leo Tolstoy, Olga Forsh, Pavel Bazhov, Nikolai Tikhonov, Pavlo Tychyna, or Yuriy Yanovsky shows the author as a creative person whom colleagues loved and appreciated.

In the process of Oksana Ivanenko's formation as a writer, one can observe several periods: authors who inspired and influenced (in general or at certain stages); history of writing works (design, collecting of material that Oksana Ivanenko did very carefully, first readers' reviews and publication and reprint; creative principles and beliefs (careful study of the material, immersion in it, scholarly basis of representation, justification of fiction only in depicting of the action background). Some other writers follow this pattern, yet the following fragment attracts attention: "Often I thought, even *reproached* myself: maybe I have *no right to write* about such a great, brilliant man [Taras Shevchenko. — S. Zh.] by my *weak woman's* hand? Can a woman children's writer handle it? But at the same time I thought: he loved children so much, who else in the world literature wrote about women, girls, mothers with such burning pain and sympathy? And I *justified* my desire to write about him by the thought that perhaps he himself, Father Taras, would *not be very displeased* to learn that *it was the woman* who told children and youth about him" (Ivanenko, 1985, 32) (my italic. — S. Zh.). The reason of her self-doubt is striking — the author is not concerned about the power of her talent or the depth of her understanding, but the fact, that she is a woman! To justify her audacity, the woman biographer told how much she worked on the topic: "I tried to visit as many places associated with Taras Shevchenko as possible" (Ivanenko, 1985, 26), "I re-read all the memoirs of his contemporaries available and was glad when I suddenly found a line on hundreds of pages that covered what I needed. I wanted to supplement the story with features and details not yet known in Shevchenko Studies, I had to re-read the original sources myself, to turn over the old yellowed pages, and not only to get acquainted with what the literary critics had printed in their studies... I tried to get acquainted with everything that came out in Shevchenko studies, I visited all Shevchenko conferences..." (Ivanenko, 1985, 32). The biographer also consulted such outstanding specialists in Shevchenko Studies as Alexander Biletsky, Pavlo Popov, Yuriy Mezhenko, Yevhen Shabliovsky, Yevhen Kyryluk. All this should justify the audacity of a woman to create her representation of Shevchenko, whose childhood image she wrote in 1938 from Taras

Bozhko — the son of her friend Natalia Zabila. The theme of "women's incompetence" in literature emerges in other essays and forms. For example, the poet Igor Muratov and Oksana's brother Dmytro (Doctor of Physical and Mathematical Sciences) were convincing her to give up her writing and to open an "underground café", and the writer commented this joke quite seriously: "I told that both of them treat my literary work with far less respect than to my culinary abilities. Nevertheless, there was some truth in this" (Ivanenko 1985, 255). It seems that she felt inferiority complex since her childhood, at least in one of her memoirs one can read: "Unlike my brother — 'professor' (he was only two years older — S. Zh.) I was a common girl, I was not given much attention to, nobody bothered what and how I read..." (Ivanenko, 1985, 12). Perhaps this is the reason that the writer, the author of successful novels, seems to assert her right to be literature writer, thanks in particular to others — canonical authors or recognized colleagues. It is interesting, that the main characters of her seventeen literary portraits are men and only one among them is Olga Forsh, a Russian fiction writer, popular in Soviet times.

#### Private life reticence

The theme of creative self-realization and literature in general pushes aside the narrative that Western theorists consider to be the main one for women's biography: comprehending their own female experience (first of all, love, marriage, motherhood). For example, let us take the autobiography of another Ukrainian writer of the same period, Tetyana Kardynalovska, *The Ever-Presentpast* (2017) written outside the Soviet Union. The woman recalled her childhood and youth, relations between her parents, her first sympathies and the found in the book quote that defined her understanding of love, marriage with the Minister of the Ukrainian People's Republic Vsevolod Golubovych, birth and death of her daughter, break with her husband and attempts to save him from Bolshevik terror, relations with the writer Sergiy Pylypenko, and later his arrest, the birth of their two daughters, the death of her son, even an abortion. The experience of a writer is only an episode in the multifaceted life of a daughter, sister, wife, mother, woman, personality. While telling, she accepts her life with all her difficult decisions, losses and disasters and she experiences the dearest moments once again.

It is not the case with Oksana Ivanenko's private life. The author did not devote a separate essay to her husband, perhaps for the same reason as to her brother and friend Natalia Zabila — "the most difficult thing is to write about the beloved

ones" (Ivanenko 1985, 241), and she also told very little about him in her works. From essay to essay the phrase is repeated: "My husband Volodymyr (or contracted "V. P." — S. Zh.) Tatarynov was killed at the front" or "My husband, a political instructor, died in the forty-first", but there are three detailed references about him: for some time, he taught Ukrainian literature at Kharkiv University (Essay on the poet Igor Muratov), he was an editor at the publishing house «Molodyi Bilshovyk» (*My Ways of Taras, Evening at the People's Commissar*) and a consultant at the Kyiv Film Studio (*My Fairy Tales and My Dear Teachers*). She warmly recalled the time with him: "We lived so happily with him that all my friends not that envied me, but our family (my husband, my eldest daughter Volechka, who was a common favorite), was like a standard of family life for many of them" (Ivanenko, 1985, 241). However, what kind of person was Ivanenko's husband? We can only state the correctness of Solveiga Daugirdaitė's observations, that in the autobiographies "for publishing" "a public identity (that of a female writer) is highlighted while a private identity (that of man, woman) is pushed into the background, especially since the Soviet society the person has always been considered of secondary importance" (Daugirdaitė, 2015, 63).

Still, the book *Always in Life* became the source for writing biographical essays on the author (see, for example: Bratus, 1999; Skorsky, 2001). The main problem, with which the person wishing to reconstruct the life description of Oksana Ivanenko according to her memoirs meets, is the fragmented nature of the text. For this reason, this person has to reproduce the chronological sequence of events himself. It is quite expected that the author's life in war and post-war years is described in more detail than the 1920s and 1930s, which were the days of her youth, because it was the period of ideological confrontation and repression. Obviously, for reasons of safety, the author mentioned only politically reliable colleagues. However, many of repressed writers were already rehabilitated at the time of the memories writing and Yuriy Smolych and Teren Masenko published the memoirs about them in the books. However, something else attracts attention: the author hushed up two events: the birth of a daughter and marriage. Actually, they are not hushed up, but they are taken for granted: there is a husband, therefore there was a marriage, there is a daughter, therefore... Nevertheless, absence of this information in the general context worries.

Volodymyr Tatarynov is mentioned in the text when it came to the events of the 1930s. In 1932, Oksana Ivanenko started working at the publishing house «Molodyi Bilshovyk» in Kharkiv (Ivanenko,

1985, 262), where she probably met Tatarynov, whom she married. It is difficult to say based on the text, when it was exactly. She wrote about her hardest years (1933–34), when she was fired for the ideological reasons and deprived of her livelihood: "However, two years were very difficult — without work... I did not give up anything. My former professor, my head of postgraduate studies and the head of my thesis was getting some technical scientific translations from German for me, but I persistently was thinking about literature for children..." (Ivanenko, 1985, 141). This snippet reproduces the voice of a woman, who, experiencing adversity can only rely on her own self. Nevertheless, there is another essay on the events of 1934 (*Evening at the People's Commissar*), from which it is clear that Tatarynov was living in Kyiv at that time, where the writer came to ask for intercession: "It was already dark, I was rushing home, our temporary 'home' in Kyiv. The «Molodyi Bilshovyk» hired rooms for its employees in the house of the Arsenal workers ... Volodya — my husband — got a room in the apartment of an old veteran ..." (Ivanenko, 1985, 271). The text thus creates a situation of uncertainty. Its nonlinearity and lacunae do not allow the reader to reproduce the whole picture, yet the attention is driven only to the fragments defined by the author. It can be traced even clearer in the story about the writer's daughter.

According to the reference books, Volia (Valeria) Ivanenko (not Tatarynova as her brother) was born in Kharkiv on December 25, 1926. In the spring of that year, twenty-year-old Ivanenko graduated from the Faculty of Social Education of the Kharkiv Institute of Public Education and since the summer, as her essay testifies, she worked in the Gorky colony under the leadership of Makarenko, and later in the Administration of children's institutions in the Kharkiv region. This is all the information she presented for that year of her life. She noted that working in the Administration "gave me the richest material for my literary work" (Ivanenko, 1985, 92), but she hid her experience of motherhood! Very little is told about Volia's childhood in the essay *My Fairy Tales and My Dear Teachers* from which one can learn about the fictional animal "Pashmipul" that usually remained with Volia when her mother went to the Research Institute of Pedagogy, where she was completing her postgraduate studies (1930–31). Also little is told about the sickness of the child and the nickname "Old Volik", which Korney Chukovsky, originally used signing his book for the girl.

Not much, considering how Oksana Ivanenko wrote about adult Volia, a successful scientist and writer whose career was broken by an incurable

disease. The story of the disease and the struggle against it, the creative successes of Volia, death and memory constituted a significant element of the essay *And There Were Letters* about Tikhonov. “For a long time I could not sit down to work — but I should (Oksana Ivanenko wrote after the death of her daughter. — S. Zh.). I wanted to erect a monument. For this purpose, it was necessary to finish *Maria*. I had to finish *Maria* by all means — I always promised this to Volechka, who sometimes grieved that because of her illness I could not work, but became a nurse. Yet I was proud that the old academician Mankivsky said that I was an unsurpassed nurse. I had to finish the novel of mine, half of which I had already read to her and listened to her subtle, always fair remarks, advice. Otherwise, I would not have fulfilled her wish. I also wanted to publish all Volechka’s stories in one book — after all, Chukovsky himself praised them. I should have done it” (Ivanenko, 1985, 339). This fragment proves how dear the daughter was to the writer (which, incidentally, Tikhonov noted), what she meant in Oksana Ivanenko’s life. Therefore, the question of why her birth was ignored is quite logical (for example, the birth of a son, although not described separately, is mentioned in essays on evacuation). And there is no answer to this question in the text on the contrary it seems that silencing this event was her strategy.

Hryhoriy Kostyuk’s memoirs also mention Ivanenko, with whom the literary critic worked at the «Molodyi Bilshovyk» publishing house: “As for her family life... I knew almost nothing. We never talked about that. I only know by hearsay that she was married to a once outstanding politician in the days of the (national — S. Zh.) revolution of 1917–1920 in Poltava (even, it seems, he was the head of the city), in this marriage they had a daughter born in 1926. However, at the time of our acquaintance her married life, it seems, has completely crumbled. Oksana lived with her daughter, whom she often recalled and named

Volia. I also knew that it was at that time that she had an affair with language editor Volodymyr Tatarynov. I do not know how their personal relationships developed in the future” (Kostyuk, 1987, 440).

Now it is difficult to confirm or refute Kostyuk’s words, and I do not set such a task, but one should pay attention to how the woman’s text of the memoirs, instead of the expected authenticity, makes reticence possible. The ideological accusations that could be made at any time against anyone in the Soviet Union even after Stalin’s times forced the author of the memoirs to cut them down even in the aspect of her personal life. Therefore, the real women’s experience of those times is slipping away and now the modern reader may have a limited and abstract idea of how the Soviet “country-wide experiment” affected women regarding changes in the status of women in society, marriage, and child-rearing.

### Conclusion

The woman author achieves reticence and concealment precisely with the qualities of the texts that were considered ontological for women’s autobiographies: nonlinearity, fragmentation, heterogeneity and relativity. Pseudo-shifting attention from oneself to another person allows author to talk about herself whenever the author wants and to return to the pseudo-object at the relevant time. The narrative nonlinearity helps emphasize advantageous moments and avoid forced chronology. However, fragmentation and heterogeneity allow the woman writer not to build a holistic narrative about herself, but to offer “flickering” content to readers. Therefore, the social factor should be recognized as an important factor in the autobiographical strategy. In the case of women from totalitarian societies, this means that an autobiographical work may be called upon not to record a true experience but to create a socially acceptable version of the writer.

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## ЗАМОВЧУВАННЯ ЯК СТРАТЕГІЯ ЖІНОЧИХ АВТОБІОГРАФІЧНИХ ТЕКСТІВ РАДЯНСЬКОГО ЧАСУ: НА МАТЕРІАЛІ СПОГАДІВ ОКСАНИ ІВАНЕНКО «ЗАВЖДИ В ЖИТТІ» (1986)

Предметом дослідження є система прийомів замовчування в автобіографії Оксани Іваненко, української письменниці ХХ ст. Західні теоретики жіночої автобіографії (М. Мейсон, Е. Єлінек) визначили її характерними якостями релятивність, фрагментарність, нелінійність. Проте концепція Л. Гілмор, яка вважала автобіографію письменницькою стратегією, що конструює об'єкт, дає змогу поставити питання про потенційні функції конструктивних технік у цьому тексті. Згадані студії, як і багато інших, аналізують автобіографії жінок західного світу, залишаючи без уваги твори авторок Східної Європи, але автобіографії тих, кому довелося жити у радянських умовах, цікаві по-своєму. Мета пропонованої статті — показати особливості творення і функціонування жіночої автобіографії в ідеологізованих суспільствах на прикладі спогадів Оксани Іваненко «Завжди в житті». Методологія дослідження охоплює жіночі студії та дискурсивний аналіз.

У результаті дослідження з'ясовано, що у спогадах Іваненко тема творчої самореалізації та літератури загалом витісняє наратив, який західні теоретики вважали основним у жіночій біографії: кохання, одруження, материнство. Релятивність нарисів дозволила авторці говорити про себе тоді, коли вона цього хоче, і повертатися до псевдооб'єкта у потрібний момент. Нелінійність наративу допомагає підкреслити вигідні моменти і уникнути примусу хронології. Фрагментарність та гетерогенність дає змогу письменниці не вибудовувати цілісний наратив про себе, а пропонувати читачам мерехтливий зміст.



*Під дією ідеологічного тиску авторка уникає спогадів не лише про складні періоди української історії, але й про важливі події свого життя, ігноруючи свій справжній досвід. Це означає, що автобіографічні твори можуть бути покликані не фіксувати правдивий досвід, а створювати соціально прийнятну версію письменниці.*

**Ключові слова:** жіноча біографія, релятивність, фрагментарність, нелінійність, замовчування.

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