Snizhana Zhygun*

RE-WRITING A WOMAN'S BIOGRAPHY: MARCO VOVCHOK AS A CHARACTER OF LITERARY WORK

Abstract: The attitude to biographical works has changed significantly under the influence of postmodernism: the refusal to perceive the author as a single authoritative source of meaning has led to the perception of biographical fiction as a fiction biography, creating in the context of the ideology a biography of the biographer himself. The aim of the proposed study is to find out how gender and ideology form the strategies for presenting the Ukrainian woman writer as a character of a biographical novel. The proposed article will deal with 4 works of different periods: "The Silent Deity" by V.Domontovych (1930), "At Dawn" by Y. Tys (1961), "Maria" by O. Ivanenko (1983), "Like a Magnet" by I. Rozdobudko (2013). At the heart of all of them is the life of the first Ukrainian writer Marco Vovchok (Maria Vilinska), but quite different women are represented in these works. The biographical works under consideration demonstrate more attention to the events of the writer's life than to what she wanted to say in her work. The interpretation of Marco Vovchok's stories is dominated by their political (social) significance and they are presented as a basis for talking about the life of the woman (with the exception of Rozdobudko's story).

Keywords: biographical fiction; fiction biography; gender; ideology; Marco Vovchok.

The practice of rethinking the stories created earlier has a long history, as it offers new dimensions for the past, hereby making it relevant. According to Nency Wolker, to "change the story is not merely an artistic but also a social action, suggesting in narrative practice the possibility of cultural transformation" (6). Therefore, social changes and deliberation are inherently associated with the rewriting of stories, their transformation, supplementation or reduction.

In this process of reactualizing, ready-made biographical stories are no exception. This is especially true of biographies of persons who, in one way or

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^{*} Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University; Ukraine.

another were involved in the literary canon. As Rensen and Wiley have noted, "artists' biographies, which were often written in a form analogous to saints' lives – hagiographies exemplifying national virtues – were inspired by, and fed into discourses about, national character and national styles, schools and legacies. Wider spread notions of the 'creative genius' contributed to the construction of male-dominated national canons in literature" (9). On the other hand, women, representatives of colonies, national minorities, etc. were marginalized.

Initially, the appeal to women's biographies stemmed from the necessity of creating national models of acceptable female behaviour. However, women's biographies are generally favourable to transformation, given the long-term practice of treating a woman as a mirror, which has no image of its own, but receives its stamp from the face that looks into it. Thus, women's artistic biographies capture the author's idea of the gender role of women and are able to demonstrate how the historical period determines the writer's rhetoric.

Sandra Kisters points out that the representation of individuals and their lifestories affects (and even determines) their public reputation, which, in turn, affects the perception and interpretation of their works. Ann Rigney has used the term "cultural memory" – "the multiple ways in which images of the past are communicated and shared amongst members of a community" (366). To be remembered means to be recalled in media, including literary texts, however reactualisation of woman biography under the influence of an ideology could aid in "stabilising and fixing memories in a certain shape" (Rigney 382).

The purpose of this article is to show how the concept of gender role and the dominant ideology of a certain period influence the reproduction (formation) of the biography of a woman. The research material is biographical works about the first Ukrainian woman writer Marko Vovchok (real name – Maria Markovych, maiden name – Vilinska; years of life 1833–1907).

According to Vira Ageeva regarding Marko Vovchok, "there is a strong belief that the biography of this writer is almost more interesting than all her books" (29). Maria Vilinskaa was born in 1833 into an impoverished noble family near the Russian Yelets. In 1850 she married Opanas Markovych, a Ukrainian ethnologist who was exiled for political activity. This marriage was not happy one, but Maria was realized as a Ukrainian writer, taking the male name Marko Vovchok. Her first works ("Folk Stories"1857) Narodni opovidannya about the plight of serfs brought her success and popularity. She moved to St. Petersburg and then went to Europe, where she lived and worked for eight years. At that

time, she wrote works in Ukrainian and Russian, was actively engaged in translations, in particular, she received the exclusive right to translate the works by Jules Verne into Russian. In 1867 she returned to St. Petersburg. At the same time the years 1859–1868 were a period of turbulent personal life: she was ascribed to love affairs with the Ukrainian writer Panteleimon Kulish, Russian ones – Ivan Turgenev, Alexander Herzen, the lawyer Alexander Passek (who was 5 years younger), the critic Dmitry Pisarev (also younger) and the French writers Jules Verne and Pierre-Jules Etzel.

After her husband's death, she remarried Mikhail Lobach-Zhuchenko (1850-1927), secretly adopted her illegitimate grandson and moved to the province. The decline of Marko Vovchok's creative activity raised doubts in cultural circles about her authorship: the success of "Folk Stories" gradually began to be attributed to Opanas Markovych. After her death, her second husband reviewed her archive, destroying some of the documents.

The textual analysis by Vasyl Domanytsky (1908) confirmed her authorship, although it did not completely remove doubts. However, the name of Marko Vovchok has been invariably present in the canon of Ukrainian literature for more than 150 years, regardless of the concepts of its history. And all this time, her image is also present in cultural memory. However, each time it was transformed according to social needs, which can be seen in the material of 4 works about the writer from different periods: "The Silent Deity" by Victor Domontovych (1930), "At Dawn" by Yuri Tys (1961), "Maria" by Oksana Ivanenko (1983), "Like a Magnet" by Iren Rozdobudko (2013). Each of them represents quite different women.

The article focuses on three features of Maria Markovych's biography: 1) national identity; 2) violation of social norms in private life; 3) problems of authorship and the evolution of creativity.

The feature of the formation of the gender role of a woman in Ukraine in the 19th-20th centuries is the requirement of her involvement in the national cause. Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, researcher of women's participation in Ukrainian public life of the late 19th – first half of the 20th century, has pointed to the peculiarity of the women's movement in Ukraine: "its representatives, through their participation in public affairs, contributed to the defense of national separateness and the economic progress of their people" (19). And they were supported by men, in particular, women's writing attempts, but only if their work contributed to the Narodnik movement. This meant that women had

to write on rural topics, to be guided by folk art, and attempts to speak from their own voice were not perceived and were criticized (Bohachevsky-Chomiak 41). In addition, the national discourse absolutized the family as a symbol of the nation. This approach to the gender role of women has been reproduced, modified and denied, but it is decisive for the conversation about the biography of the Ukrainian woman of the 19th-20th centuries.

The works selected for the research material are artistic. Therefore, they were also influenced by traditional ways of depicting women in literature. Nancy M. Tischler has confirmed that for a long time the literature focused on "the first awakening of the young girl with her first experience of love and life" (119), but with the development of women's literature, the subject of "second awakening" plot emerges, which involved the desire for self-fulfillment (120). The works by Domontovych and Tys are also centered on the first marriage, while women's works take this topic beyond their texts, focusing on the comprehension not of the young girl, but of the writer and woman with life experience.

The first story about Marko Vovchok "A Silent Deity" (1930) by Domontovych (Victor Petrov) emerged from the author's interest in Panteleimon Kulish, who prepared for publication the works by Marko Vovchok. Subsequently, they had a quick, but emotionally complex and depressive love affair. Literary criticism of the 1920s repeatedly refers to this writer, presenting him as an example of an author who successfully combined national traditions with European culture. At the same time, the 1920s was a period of breaking of traditional gender roles under the influence of the idea of O. Kollontai's "new woman". Therefore, Domontovych's address to Marko Vovchok made it possible to look at the problems of mixed identity and emancipation from a historical perspective. The story remained unfinished, so it is impossible to say for sure how exactly the author would have considered the controversial issues.

In the written fragment, attention is more focused on the personal life of the woman writer. Domontovych did not ignore the question of identity: in his opinion, in the Kharkiv boarding house Maria not only mastered the language, but also formed the "Ukrainian character". In addition, he quotes where Maria writes: "in our way", meaning in Ukrainian. At the same time, Domontovych points to the multicultural nature of the writer's family. Referring to her testimony, the author points out that Vilinska had Polish-Lithuanian roots, but the family spoke French. Ukrainian was present in the songs: Maria's father

collected Ukrainian folklore: he wrote down the poems and put them to music. This fragmented focus on the transnational may be due to the multicultural discourse of the 1920s.

In general, this story about Marko Vovchok is marked by the influence of psychoanalysis: Domontovych seeks to show that the character and work of Maria were dependent on childhood trauma. The stepfather's wild behaviour and the mother's insecurity have formed Maria's reservedness and strong-willed rebelliousness, and at the same time the literary theme of unfairness. Domontovych focuses not on love stories, but on the desire to understand the "Silent Deity" (as Kulish called Maria), the "Unsolved Sphinx" (as Ivan Turgenev called her). Maria's secrecy, according to the author, prompted men to seek intimacy as a disclosure of the inner world, hidden from others. The text incompleteness turns into a metaphor for the impossibility of this.

The national framework is the main factor in the formation of the biography of Marko Vovchok in Tys's novel "At Dawn" (1961). Tys solves the problem of national identity by developing the hypotheses of Franko and Domanytsky, who believed that the Vilinski family was not purely Russian, but Ukrainian, Polish or Lithuanian, in Tys's novel it becomes Ukrainian.

However, the symbolic connection of the character is much more important: in the novel, Marko Vovchok is represented as the spiritual daughter of Taras Shevchenko, a key figure in Ukrainian national discourse. Shevchenko's authority becomes the main argument for the character to substantiate her views. This connection is ambivalent: on the one hand, it legitimizes the character's strong views on the Ukrainian issue; and on the other hand, it makes them secondary, dependent on Shevchenko, despite the fact that the character began to write her works without his influence.

The character created by Tys has no doubts about her own identity; she is not characterized by a bifurcation either between Ukrainian and Russian, or between imperial and colonial. The fact that Marko Vovchok, after Ukrainian stories, began to write and translate into Russian, Tys interprets only as a forced need to earn a living. The author explains her departure abroad by the need to develop, get acquainted with the European heritage and improve her writing skills. The writer emphasizes the cases of Marko Vovchok's appearance on the European audience with Ukrainian themes, but the influence that Marko Vovchok experienced in Europe is not emphasized.

The writer's work is presented as an evolution from the depiction of the

social oppression of serfdom to the understanding of national oppression, but for these ideas, according to Tys, no plots were found. Considering that such evolution of the writer has no documentary evidence, Tys resorts to fictional elements: he attributes to the character the ideas of Ukrainian independence from Russia, and embodied it in her numerous statements, and at the end of the novel creates an episode of her acquaintance with Mykola Mikhnovsky – the ideologue of Ukrainian independence in the early twentieth century. Actually, the title of the novel "At Dawn" prompts to consider Marko Vovchok one of those who stood at the origins of the national movement. Consciously or not, Tys does not notice the emergence of new – emancipation problems in the writer's later works, written, according to modern researchers Ageeva (2020), Chopyk (2007), with autobiographical motives, as well as the fact that most of these works are written in Russian.

The interpretation of the character's image as part of a nation-building pantheon also affected the depiction of her personal life. Nationalism has a reverence for the family, considering the nation to be a community of common origin, although not necessarily blood related. Nira Yuval-Davis identifies five roles for women in national processes:

- Biological reproduction of members of an ethnic community;
- Reproduction of the normative boundaries of ethnic groups (by demonstrating appropriate female behaviour)
 - Ideological reproduction of the community, translation of culture;
 - Symbolism of ethnic differences;
 - Participation in national, political and military battles (12-9).

Therefore, the discrepancies between the events in the novel and the real ones are due to the author's desire to subjugate the character to the "normative" role: in the novel, Maria Markovych demonstrates "proper" (in terms of patriarchy and nationalism) female behaviour, broadcast Ukrainian culture, symbolizes ethnic differences, and participates in political discussions.

In the novel, instead of the gambling stepfather, through whose drunkenness the real Maria had to live with her relatives, the character receives a wise loving father. The author then removes all extramarital affairs: with Kulish and Turgenev is treated as such, which had unrequited love, and Alexander Passek is not mentioned at all. The love affair with Pisarev is depicted (without mentioning the age difference), because it took place after her husband's death. But the figure of the second husband, Mikhail Lobach-Zhuchenko,

undergoes the largest modification. In Tys's novel, he appears in Maria's life back in the 1850s, when she and Markovych lived in Kyiv. However, the real Lobach-Zhuchenko was only born in 1850 and Tys should have known that fact, given that he called a relative of Lobach-Zhuchenko among his sources. Therefore, we interpret these changes as conscious and expedient. Tys creates a fictitious biography of a fighter for the Ukrainian cause, albeit with a very vague program for this character. He becomes a pillar and support of Mary in all difficult situations. Instead, Opanas Markovych turns from a gentle lover into a weak, unable to express feelings, prone to depression husband. Opanas loses his socially acceptable masculinity, so he loses his wife's love, but not her fidelity. The character of Tys does not violate the norms of the patriarchal world. Thus Maria turns from a person, who did not take into account social conventions, into one who meets the standards of patriarchy. The writer invariably portrays her as modest, sentimental, emotional woman, but one that conquers her emotions to social norms.

Significant differences between Tys's novel and the facts of Marko Vovchok's biography are due to the author's desire to inscribe the writer in a nation-building narrative. Tys (real surname is Krokhmalyuk) was involved in the national liberation struggle in Galicia in the 1930s and 1940s as well as in historical and cultural activities in emigration. He creates his character in accordance with his own values, striving to give clear answers, and not to raise questions. Therefore, he avoids dealing with cultural otherness and diversity, as well as with emancipation issues.

Oksana Ivanenko's novel "Maria" was written in the late Soviet period and incorporated Soviet ideological concepts. In Soviet times, writers who lived before 1917 were not sufficiently appreciated. To preserve them for readers, it was necessary to write about them as liberal, better revolutionary democrats. That is why Maria Markovych has international liberal-democratic views with a tendency to socialism in this novel. The novel depicts her among Russian and Polish democrats and revolutionaries, and the story of her trip to Italy is not only about love and art, but also about the struggle of Italians for freedom and participation of Russians and Ukrainians in this struggle.

Shevchenko does not have an exceptional role in the spiritual development of the character, although he is shown as a dear and close person. The role of authority was transferred to the Russian Alexander Herzen, respected in Soviet society as a forerunner of Bolshevism. The connection of the depicted material

with Soviet ideology is also emphasized in the images of Dobrolyubov and Pisarev (for example, it is said about the latter that Lenin and Krupskaya loved to read his books). The depiction of Maria's ties with the Russians has a certain colonial component: Soviet ideology systematically imposed the dominance of Russians in all spheres, insisting on the dependence of representatives of national republics on them.

The portrayal of the character's ethnic identity is more complex and uncertain in this novel. This portrayal takes place in contrast: the character's husband, Opanas Markovych, reproaches her for switching to the Russian language, which he perceives as work in favour of Russian culture. She replies to him: "... the writer must fight against slavery, captivity, injustice, darkness wherever he sees it, because captivity and slavery are the same everywhere <...> what does it matter then in what language? In addition, you know, I like Ukrainian more, I say this frankly, maybe it's strange for someone, but it's closer to me - maybe because I started to write in it, but think for yourself, where can I publish in Ukrainian everything I write now?" (Ivanenko 177) "For me, native people are an enslaved people" (Ivanenko 179). At the same time, when Opanas Markovych says "my people" (it means "Ukrainian people"), she corrects "ours". Thus, the issue of ethnic identity remains unresolved neither for the character, nor for the author (although Ivanenko always calls her only the Ukrainian writer and gives all her remarks, even letters to Russian recipients in Ukrainian). However, it should be noted that the problem of ethnicity in the novel is framed not as a choice between Russian and Ukrainian, but as a choice between ethnic and trans-ethnic. The latter, first of all, is embodied in the problem of social enslavement. This prompts the author to expand the context: the novel unexpectedly incorporates the storyline of the Polish uprising of 1863-1864 in Ukraine. The author considers the reason for its defeat to be an underestimation of social issues. Marko Vovchok had nothing to do with the uprising and was abroad at that time, but in the novel, the defeat of the uprising brought her closer to the Polish diaspora and even more: the attitude towards the Polish liberation struggle became "a measure of a person" for her.

At the same time, the novel contains, albeit discretely, a gender deconstruction of political discourse. For example, "Her house is where Bogdas, Sasha and her desk with her manuscripts" (Ivanenko 443), that is, where she is realized as a mother, beloved and writer.

In addition to ethnic uncertainty, the novel also demonstrates the

ambiguity of an acceptable gender role. The decisive character of Ivanenko's novel finds herself in a situation of contradiction between the social norm and the implementation of her own will. The novel has many considerations about the need to change the position of women in society and in family, which is thought of as the basis of radical change in the social order. However, describing the personal life of the character, the author adheres to patriarchal norms. Maria does not think "about the right to free love, happiness, even new forms of family" (243), the author endows her with the consciousness of guilt to society and even before her lover: "She felt that she was responsible for this boy's life, because she broke his calm, normal, orderly life, and now she wanted to do everything to make him happy" (Ivanenko 243-4). Ivanenko does not give her character the right to be happy in a socially unacceptable way and formulates her state in an aphorism: "If happiness is not destined, let sweet sorrow be" (Ivanenko 243). The author's moralizing is softened by the context: Ivanenko did not avoid the difficult relationships in the families of Herzen and Ogarev, Turgenev and Viardo.

The text of Ivanenko's memoir "My Maria" contains a valuable indication of the author's attitude to her character and work: "the image of a smart, charming woman, an independent woman with a tragic destiny, with such a difficult personal life was revealing more and more vividly for me" (Ivanenko 51-2), as well as empathy: "And I fell in love with her" (Ivanenko 52). "In my opinion, she was sincere in everything, as in her feelings, so in her actions. And although one of my literary friends wrote me a whole "Don Juan's list" <...>, I knew that I would figure it out, because I believed her" (Ivanenko 53). This female empathy encourages Ivanenko to perform a selection of love affairs, plotting a romantic story, according to which Maria Vilinska got married early to become independent from relatives, but although she had respect and affection for her husband, love did not arise. The author motivates her great success with men by the fact that men felt her "thirst for a still unknown female life" (Ivanenko, 153), but the character did not reciprocate to their feelings. The affair with Alexander Passek is depicted as being platonic for a long time, and only his heavy illness, before which conventions did not matter, prompted the character to betray her husband. The second affair in this novel is with Pisarev, whose death ends the novel.

The author's empathy for the character and common gender identity result in the fact that the text of the novel contains many reflections on the peculiarities

of women's art. Ivanenko discusses the peculiarities of the perception of a woman writer by society, in particular, the request to be beautiful, the priority of evaluating a woman rather than art, and excessive demands on her behavior.

Nevertheless, despite considerable attention to the topic of self-realization of women writers in general, Ivanenko portrays her character as a progressive woman in the field of politics, ideology, but not in the sphere of defending gender freedom. Ivanenko does not accept to interpret the gender issues raised by Marko Vovchok in her works. And she tends to consider her not as a woman ahead of her time, but as a victim of her time.

Irene Rozdobudko's story "Like a Magnet" is devoid of political ideology and is completely focused on comprehending the fate of the woman writer. The main focus is on the thorough public interest in writer's personal life. Fatigue from literary and ordinary fame takes away the creative powers of Maria Markovych and she refuses literature, gets married and settles in the periphery. Gossip and condemnation become "punishment for her too independent character, for her desperate striving for freedom, for her extraordinary, unfeminine courage, and finally, for her talent ..." (Rozdobudko 228).

The authoress selects several episodes from the life of Marko Vovchok, combining them not chronologically but associatively – Pisarev's death, marriage for the sake of independence from the family, her debut as a writer and relationship with Kulish, going abroad as an escape from him, connection with Passek, his death and relationship with Pisarev as treatment after loss. Mary's life story is seen as an attempt to realize her right to love and happiness. Therefore, relations with Passek are no longer "sweet sorrow" (like in Ivanenko's novel), but an ideal marriage, "which any emancipated woman can only desire" (Rozdobudko 247).

The focus on Marko Vovchok's personal life pushes the issue of identity to the periphery. This problem is very discrete in the text. Rozdobudko suggests that Maria learned Ukrainian while studying at the Kharkiv boarding school. But her identity is not in question. When Passek hopes "that soon they will return to their homeland, which she missed so much" (Rozdobudko 247), there is no clarification, what he means: Russia or Ukraine.

The analysis of these four biographies of Marko Vovchok leads to the following conclusions. Despite the fact that the plot of the text is determined by the real events of Marko Vovchok's biography, the authors are able to create quite different images of the characters. The texts provide information not so

much about the biography of the writer (which events they can manipulate), but more about the idea of proper gender behavior of the woman in the author's time. In texts with a strong ideological principle (Tys, Ivanenko), the female image does not have the ability to have the status of self-reflecting subject. Instead, this image reflects the ideological concepts to which the authors adapt it. They avoid dealing with ambiguity, but seek to portray her as a "positive" character, that is, one who meets the requirements of the ideology relevant to them. Thus the character is transformed into a symbolic figure belonging to a group of people who share the value system of the ideology. So instead of a rebellious woman, as Maria Markovych was, a woman appears, submissive to the norm (even if she becomes its victim). Less ideological texts, in which the character is not included in the symbolic collective, reproduce the alienation of the character (this is embodied in the lack of understanding by relatives in Domontovych's work and the escape from the world in the work by Rozdobudko).

In addition to certain ideological concepts, the reproduction of a woman's biography is also influenced by the tradition of focusing on the interpretation of the relationship of this woman with men. Therefore, the central plot of all texts is not the formation of the writer, but love stories. Male texts focus on the depiction of the so-called the first awakening and pay a lot of attention to the first husband Opanas Markovych, while women authors pay little attention to this marriage, focusing on the drama of extramarital experiences, treating them as meaningful choice (second awakening) and emphasizing the right to personal happiness. But constant for both male and female texts is the portrayal of woman as one who has been defeated. The biographical works under consideration demonstrate more attention to the events of the writer's life than to what she wanted to say in her work.

The interpretation of Marco Vovchok's stories is dominated by their political (social) significance and they are presented as a basis for talking about the life of the woman (with the exception of Rozdobudko's story). They are interpreted as a protest against social oppression (and potentially-national oppression in Tys's novel). But the authors ignore the theme of emancipation in her works.

The writers' focus on affirming or debunking socially acceptable gender roles through Maria Markovych's biography undermines the opportunity to comprehend her individual experience of both creativity and trans-ethnicity.

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