

## КОМПАРАТИВНІ СТУДІЇ: ДІАЛОГ КУЛЬТУР ТА ЕПОХ

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### UKRAINIAN POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL AS A NATIONAL NARRATIVE: “THE MUSEUM OF ABANDONED SECRETS” BY O. ZABUZHKO AND “THE BEECH LAND” BY M. MATIOS

У статті розглянуто знакові романи українських письменниць першої та другої декад ХХІ ст.: «Музей покинутих секретів» (2009) О. Забужко та «Букова земля» (2019) М. Матіос. Обрані твори досліджуються у світлі постколоніальної критики, тобто з точки зору історичного досвіду бездержавності української спільноти та його відображення у художніх текстах. Основну увагу приділено нарративним особливостям творів, а саме тяжінню до широкої оповідності, цілісності та нарративної повноти. *Мета* розвідки – висвітлити постколоніальний зміст нарративних стратегій, реалізованих в обраних романах О. Забужко та М. Матіос. Дослідження спрямоване на те, щоб висвітлити особливості художньої реалізації «постколоніальної» нарративності у постмодерному та метамодерному текстах. Важливим є також порівняння нарративної природи романів «Музей покинутих секретів» та «Букова земля».

Поставлена мета визначає необхідність застосування таких *методів* дослідження, як герменевтичний (інтерпретація художнього тексту), порівняльний (з'ясування спільних і відмінних рис обраних творів), а також метод структурного аналізу (висвітлення нарративної структури текстів).

У результаті дослідження встановлено, що постколоніалізм, характерний для прози українського постмодернізму, не втрачає актуальності й у другій декаді ХХІ ст. Постколоніальне спрямування романів «Музей покинутих секретів» та «Букова земля» виявляється у їхній настанові на утвердженні континуїтету української історії за рахунок розбудови панорамного нарративу, який охоплює різні історичні періоди та прокладає між ними спадкоємний зв'язок. У ході дослідження виявлено такі спільні для обох романів ознаки, як: переплетення родової генеалогії з національною історією; розбудова нарративу на різних поколінневих рівнях – дітей, батьків, дідів тощо; тема відвічної війни за незалежність, яка триває й досі; образ Бога як трансцендентного хранителя історії, здатного бачити переплетення людських долів у цілості.

*Ключові слова:* постколоніальний нарратив, постмодернізм, метамодернізм, метанаратив, національний нарратив.

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Literature, aimed at voicing and comprehending the historical experience of humankind, has always played a distinct and significant role for the nations that have experienced colonialism. As O. Zabuzhko pointed out, the Ukrainian nation “owes its very existence to literature”, and such a state of affairs directly stems from its colonial past: “colonial peoples do not have their own history” [Забужко, 2009, p. 25]. Certainly, Ukrainian literature has

consistently been intertwined with the anti-imperialist struggle, the epitome of which is embodied in its pivotal figure – Taras Shevchenko. Ukrainian researcher O. Pukhonska notes that literature serves as a mirror of the transformation of social consciousness in post-dependent societies [Пухонська, 2018, p. 193]. Thus, Ukrainian literature reflects the nation's transition from colonial existence to independence.

In 2015, Y. Polishchuk pointed out that the postcolonial stage, which had commenced back in the 1980s, continues to persist, as “the transition from colonial shade proved to be highly dramatic, conflictual, and protracted for Ukrainian culture” [Поліщук, 2015]. Today, after over 30 years of Ukrainian independence, in the midst of the war with the former colonizer, the artistic realization of postcolonial orientations in the works of Ukrainian writers deserves particular interest.

The tradition of postcolonial interpretation of Ukrainian literature has been shaped by the works of M. Pavlyshyn, M. Shkandriy, T. Hundorova, V. Ageyeva, Y. Polishchuk, O. Yurchuk, which span the literary landscape from Taras Shevchenko to the authors of the early 21st century. The postcolonial discourse of the intersection of the 20th and 21st centuries is predominantly associated with postmodernism – considering their simultaneous incorporation within Ukrainian culture. For instance, in a conversation with M. Pavlyshyn, N. Bilotserkivets identifies postmodernism as one of the “postcolonial features of Ukrainian culture” [Білоцерківець, 1998]. However, today the postcolonial orientation of Ukrainian literature can be traced not only in postmodernist works from the late 20th and early 21st centuries but also in the literature of the second decade of the 21st century, characterized by metamodernist features. Thus, talking about a certain propensity towards postcolonialism, it is important to take into account that it extends beyond the confines of postmodernism.

Postcolonial consciousness of today's Ukrainian community significantly affects the features of Ukrainian literature enriching the “traditional” postmodern and metamodern paradigms with distinctive characteristics. For instance, the post-dependent nation's longing for the integrity of national history is manifested in literature as a pursuit of broad narrative scope and coherence. *The purpose* of this research is to highlight the nuances of this narrative strategy. Also, the research is aimed at comparing the realization of this strategy in significant literature pieces that represent the first and the second decades of the 21st century: “The Museum of Abandoned Secrets” («Музей покинутих секретів», 2009) by Oksana Zabuzhko and “The Beech Land” («Букова земля», 2019) by M. Matios. These novels are considered particularly illustrative in the context of postcolonialism as they depict various stages of the establishment of Ukrainian independent statehood, encompassing both historical and contemporary periods.

The formulated purpose requires applying a set of research *methods* such as hermeneutical (interpretation of literary texts), comparative (highlighting key differences and similarities in the selected novels), and structural analysis (examining the narrative structure of the texts).

When discussing the tradition of postcolonialism in Ukrainian literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is pertinent to begin with postmodernism. As Y. Polishchuk noted in his monograph “In Search of Eastern Europe: Shadows of the Past, Mirage of the Future”, “the postcolonial state of society, which accompanied the liberation of significant cultural potential and its redirection, largely shaped the character of the realization of postmodern discourse in Ukraine and Belarus” [Поліщук, 2020, p. 154]. The realization of postmodern discourse in Ukrainian literature has numerous peculiarities. In the context of our research, it is essential to point out that such emblematic postmodernist features as fragmented and collage-like narrative, subjectivity, heterogeneity, and contradiction, coexisted with the search for the sense of wholeness and unity, for the universal coherence and cohesive narrative forms. T. Hundorova highlights the pursuit of integrity as a distinctive feature of Ukrainian postmodernism, stating that “The unfolding of postmodernism in Ukraine can be characterized by the attempt to achieve and maintain an ‘ideal’, non-hierarchical cultural coherence, in contrast to the Western trend of cultural museumification that gave rise to postmodern techniques of citation” [Гундорова, 2005, p. 34]. This attempt can be interpreted as one of the outcomes stemming from the post-totalitarian demand for reconstruction of the disrupted historical process.

At the formal level, the postcolonial narrative is primarily manifested in the genre of a monumental novel. “The Museum of Abandoned Secrets” by O. Zabuzhko stands as one of the piv-

total “great novels” in Ukrainian literature of recent decades. Its complex structure includes textual fragments of various genres: interviews, archival documents, a page from a catalogue of antiques, photographs, extended ekphrases, dreams, and even a scene from a film. This accumulation of heterogeneous elements does not, however, create postmodern chaos; on the contrary, it is perceived as an organized museum exhibition.

In an interview with the Ukrainian Journal on the occasion of the first edition of the novel, O. Zabuzhko emphasized the significance of the museum model in it: “...I would like the novel to be associated with a museum immediately, as soon as it is picked up, and even the chapters should be perceived by the reader’s imagination as museum halls” [Шаповальська, 2008, pp. 48–49]. The idea of the museum defines the architectonics of the novel: the grand-scale multidirectional narrative is arranged into chapters that are called *rooms*.

The convergence of literature and museum discourses appears natural within the framework of the poststructuralist modelling of the world as a (hyper)text, a library, an encyclopaedia, a labyrinth, or, again, a museum. On the one hand, O. Zabuzhko’s novel demonstrates the conceptualization of the world as a repository – an archive or a museum, a collection of trinkets and *stories*. It is noteworthy though that O. Zabuzhko’s “museum” is a museum of postcolonial history. Its halls are connected by postcolonial motifs: the history of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Holodomor, collective memory and its loss, generational trauma, etc. It is not without reason that one of the most notable reviews of this piece, authored by V. Ageieva, is titled “Oksana Zabuzhko in the UPA Museum” [Агеєва, 2010].

Therefore, the accumulation of heterogeneous textual “exhibits” at the structural level of the novel is subordinated to the general intention of creating a comprehensive historical panorama – a “museum” that the Ukrainian community lacks. Such a museum is not merely “a collection of texts, topoi, topograms, quotes, discourses, fables, plots, names, canons” [Gundorova, 2005, p. 8]; it *assembles* these fragments into a single narrative which would legitimise Ukrainian anti-colonial struggle.

The postmodernist, as I. Hassan states, only disconnects; fragments are all he pretends to trust [Hassan, 1987, p. 168]. In postcolonial perspective though, fragments emerge as remnants of lost wholeness, that is, the historical continuity which is perceived as a coherent narrative. As argued by the French historian and philosopher P. Nora, the past “speaks to us only through the traces it has left behind – the enigmatic traces whose meanings we must interrogate because they conceal the secret of who we are, our ‘identity’” [Nora, 2005]. Therefore, even though Western postmodernism strives at all costs to avoid synthesis [Hassan, 1987, p. 168], in postcolonial culture, the synthesis of fragmented details becomes a path towards the formation or restoration of identity.

The novel “The Museum of Abandoned Secrets” by O. Zabuzhko depicts the exploration of the scarce traces of the past that have been overlooked by totalitarian mechanisms of oblivion. Unravelling the secrets of the past is interpreted as a transformative journey towards reconstructing Ukrainian history and rediscovering national identity. The protagonist, journalist Daryna Hoshchynska, follows this path in search of the truth about the insurgent Olena Dovhanivna, ultimately uncovering revelations about her own ancestors.

The desire “to achieve and maintain coherence” (Hundorova) is evident on different levels of the novel, including the portrayal of the main character. Daryna’s professional activity involves “putting together” fragmented and disjointed pieces of human stories, essentially creating a coherent narrative. Describing the journalist “kitchen”, she mentions that her “culinary” talent lies in preparing stories, “*that we cut, squeeze, condense, spice up, and serve to the public in a neat thirty-minute package*” [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 19]. The focus on investigation, interrogation, and reconstruction is underlined by the fact that Darina consistently compares herself to the detective Columbo, who, based on various fragmented clues, would reconstruct a coherent picture of events: “*I believe in remembered mannerisms and scribbles in books, accidental scowls caught by a friend’s camera, and strange tooth marks on cigarette holders. I am the detective Columbo of the new century*” [Zabuzhko, 2012, pp. 34–35]. Daryna’s lover Adrian acknowledges her special talent for piecing together fragmented memories: “*And it was all gradually coming together – all the disconnected facts I remembered from what Granny and Grandpa told me, fragments of recollections, episodes unattached to dates, people who had died long ago or were scattered around*

*the world – all this was settling, piece by piece, into a chronological order, into bins sequentially ordered by year*” [Zabuzhko, 2012, pp. 311–312]. As we can see, the main heroine’s mission lies in assembling fragmented facts into a chronological sequence, creating a kind of meta-narrative. Her function is one of synthesis, which stands in contrast to postmodern program fragmentation.

Correspondingly, after the death of her friend Vladyslava, Daryna is preoccupied with “finding a story” in her tragically cut short life: “*shouldn’t someone make it her work to find a story in Vlada’s life? You can’t just let it break and scatter like a string of pearls from a torn thread, can you? No human life should scatter like that, because it would mean that no life was worth anything, not anyone’s*” [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 45]. The quoted passage illustrates the philosophical significance of the concept of *story* which is one of the key categories in the novel. A *story* is a cohesive narrative where beads of memories are strung together on the continuous thread of time. The ability to find such a narrative in human life determines its meaning and value.

Through the lens of a *story* as an existential category, O. Zabuzhko portrays the previous generation of Ukrainians: Daryna’s parents, Vladyslava’s mother, the former KGB agent Boozarov, and the representatives of the Kyiv Sixtiers. One of the key motifs here is the tragic loss of the *story* as a result of the colonial existence of the community under the grip of the Soviet regime. Not all of the previous generation managed to keep and pass on the integrated *story*. Some let the regime reshape their *stories*, replacing them with false testimonies and denunciations, resulting in the erasure of their true memory of the past. The concept of *story* points to the narrative nature of memory and the significance of its verbalization. The connection between cohesive narrative and memory is illustrated by the figure of the once-recruited KGB art historian, whom Daryna calls “Baldy” in her thoughts. Baldy would write reports on the people from the artistic circle to which he belonged; he would attend their meetings and then “*worked everything he’d heard into a story for his captain*” [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 376]. The fate of the former “secret associate” of KGB illustrates the situation of totalitarian oppression, where one’s *story* can cost a person their life: “*He had his story taken from him, taken away. It was done with his consent, with his own hands, and there isn’t anyone to blame now. Maybe he really would have died if he hadn’t agreed—it was those who didn’t agree that died*” [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 377].

“Rewriting” the *story* under the supervision of the KGB disrupts the intergenerational link within a community since those who survived – those who collaborated with the regime – are unable to transmit their *story* further: “*he’s already described all those people – in his reports. He’s already made a story out of it – the one others demanded of him. And this story has stayed with him, has short-circuited his memory*” [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 377]. O. Zabuzhko describes the process of memory loss as a loss of the original, truthful text: “*you can’t make a different story from the same material, zero out the first one, new text over the old. The material’s burned. Burned, charred, turned to ash, leaving but one trace – the bitter taste of resentment, the eternal sense of having been robbed of your due*” [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 377]. Understanding memory and history as textual material correlates with the general postmodern hypertextuality, the conceptualisation of the world as text. From a postcolonial perspective, the central issue pertains to the loss of text, of the truth, of the *story* i.e. the deconstruction of the narrative.

Another feature that links “The Museum of Abandoned Secrets” to the universal postmodern paradigm is intertextuality. In postmodern literature, intertextuality usually functions as a parody or pastiche that incorporates social criticism, ironic commentary, etc. In O. Zabuzhko’s novel, intertextuality functions as an element of postcolonial discourse.

From the postcolonial perspective, the most eloquent is the reference to the Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov, specifically to his famous phrase “*Manuscripts do not burn*” from the novel “The Master and Margarita”. Daryna Hoshchynska does not mention the writer’s name; her reference is disdainful and openly incriminating: “*Who was that clown who once quipped ‘manuscripts don’t burn’? And somebody else picked it up and now people keep repeating it like they’ve all drunk the purple Kool-Aid – as if precisely to cover up for the burning brigades*” [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 602]. The quote from “The Master and Margarita”, which belongs to Russian literary canon, represents a fragment of the imperial narrative that had permeated into Ukrainian cultural space – through education, propaganda and other ways of cultural colonization (the heroine recalls that she had indeed *been taught* that manuscripts did not burn). Daryna, the personification of Ukrainian intellectual anti-imperial struggle, starkly contradicts it: “*Oh, but they do burn.*”

*And cannot be restored*" [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 604]. Her statement is illustrated with the episodes of Ukrainian archives being burnt and exported to Moscow. The author shows how, in the situation of colonialism, texts, records, and stories are fragmented, lost, annihilated. Thus, the intertextual "dialogue" in "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets" serves as a space to express postcolonial resentment over lost history, burned archives, and the fragmented memory of previous generations – "...those who had their mouths gagged, their throats slashed, their manuscripts burned" [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 604].

In the context of postcolonial thinking, the fragmentary nature of historical memory stems from silencing, censorship, rewriting and other manipulations of history. There is a need to overcome the fragmentation as well as to construct a cohesive narrative from fragmented recollections. O. Zabuzhko highlighted this need in the interview for "The Ukrainians", comparing fragmentary memory to "shattered glass": "When the 'purge' takes place and a coherent story cannot be pieced together, the mind is really like 'shattered glass'. An unstable, unsystematic memory, a memory that cannot tell a coherent story but only remembers separate episodes, can be easily manipulated" [Неборак, 2022]. The challenges of the 21st century make episodic memory not only insufficient but also dangerous in terms of the risk of political manipulation. In a postcolonial situation, the existence of a coherent narrative – a "connected story" – is a matter of existential truth and identity.

Resisting fragmentation clearly contradicts Jean-François Lyotard's stated scepticism towards metanarratives. Therefore, although the era of postmodernism has generally refuted the modern standards of metanarration, in a postcolonial situation, the grand narrative has not lost its role as a legitimizing mechanism [Lyotard, 1984]. Polish scholar Andrzej Mencwel made an interesting observation establishing a connection between the relevance of not only "grand" but also "medium-sized" and "small" historical narratives, and the experience of statelessness. The researcher notes: "Without regret or dispute, we can agree that the 'grand narratives' have fallen, including those previously referred to as 'ideologies'. However, it is untrue that all we are left with are scattered, individual deconstructions. Here, in this part of Europe referred to as the younger, middle, or central, we also need 'medium-sized' and 'small' narratives that relate to historical states and stateless nations, regions and countries, and even districts and villages" [Mencwel, 2006, p. 217]. Expanding on Mencwel's thought, it is worth noting that the fall of the grand narrative of communist ideology in post-Soviet Europe meant the liberation of suppressed national voices. The space for the realization of these voices is found in literary fiction, which has become filled with themes of collective memory and traumatic historical past, silenced and distorted history, liberation struggle and rediscovery of national identity.

An example of a "local narrative" in Ukrainian literature is Maria Matios' novel "The Beech Land" («Букова земля»). It can be considered "local" due to its dedication to a particular Ukrainian region, Bukovyna. However, given its volume and panoramic storytelling, this narrative cannot be called "small". The author's own genre definition as a "225-year-long panoramic novel" emphasizes the intention to create an integral and all-encompassing picture of the last two centuries in Bukovyna.

Published in 2019, "The Beech Land" is marked by such features of metamodern poetics as a yearning for utopia, a tendency towards expansive, broad narration, and a transcendent position [Turner, 2015]. Utopian is the portrayal of Bukovyna as a paradisiacal haven where, akin to animals in the biblical Eden, people of various nationalities and customs coexist peacefully. Then, M. Matios depicts the devastating consequences of Russian aggression that reached Bukovyna in 1940. The destruction of the multinational yet harmonious Bukovynian world, which serves as a prototype for the entire Ukraine, is understood as part of the same historical continuum with the tragic events of Ukrainian recent history – Russian invasion of Crimea and Donbas. The linear narrative of "The Beech Land" covers events from the German colonization of Bukovyna in the late 18th century to the year 2014, when the descendants of an old Bukovynian family, Berehivchuks, perish in the war.

American scholar Seth Abramson points out that one of the key principles of metamodernism is "an optimistic response to tragedy by returning, albeit cautiously, to metanarratives" [Abramson, 2015]. In accordance with this principle, the tragic resolution of the novel is not perceived as a final defeat, but rather as a part of a significantly longer story where each life and



death constitute a segment in national history. The “optimistic response to the tragedy” is articulated in one of the epigraphs to the novel, in a Bukovinian proverb that can be translated as “*Whom God was supposed to save, He saved*” [Matioc, 2019, p. 8]. This proverb expresses the idea of accepting the natural course of life and death as correct, in alignment with the divine plan.

At the same time, “The Beech Land” is characterized by a distinct postcolonial orientation which lets us draw a parallel between it and O. Zabuzhko’s “The Museum of Abandoned Secrets”. Ukrainian scholar I. Nabytovych has noticed a common socio-philosophical tendency among prominent novels in contemporary Ukrainian literature: “Contemporary Ukrainian monumental literary narratives (...) express one of the key tendencies of today’s Ukrainian society – the search for answers to philosophical, historical, and existential questions: ‘Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?’” [Nabytovyč, 2021, pp. 55–56]. According to I. Nabytovych, three decades after the restoration of Ukraine’s independence, attempts to rewrite Ukrainian history, to say goodbye to historical and cultural narratives imposed by colonial rulers, and to present the historical experiences of the 20th and previous centuries in a new light, the renewal and formation of Ukrainian national identity are at the forefront of the literary process [ibid]. In the light of the Russian-Ukrainian war that began in 2014, the relevance of a national postcolonial narrative is even more acute than in previous years.

Among the postcolonial features common to “The Museum of Abandoned Secrets” and “The Beech Land” is asserting the continuity of Ukrainian history. The idea of inheritance is declared on the formal level of “The Museum of Abandoned Secrets”. At the very beginning of the book, O. Zabuzhko presents detailed genealogies of Daryna and Adrian, highlighting the characters’ inclusion into a broader familial continuum. The family trees are a comprehensive illustration of the novel. It is unfortunate, however, that the English edition of the book does not include the birth and death dates of Daryna’s and Adrian’s relatives, which are present in the Ukrainian edition. The dates serve as markers of the historical trials faced by Ukrainians, such as, for instance, Daryna’s uncle Fedir’s years of life: 1930–1933 [Забужко, 2020, p. 8], which signify the tragedy of Holodomor – one of central themes of the novel. Introducing the family trees at the beginning of the book “announces” one of its essential motifs – exploring familial and intergenerational connections.

Likewise, the motif of the family tree is evident in “The Beech Land”. A Bukovynian aristocrat, baron Jordakii von Vasylko, creates a family tree on the wall of his hunting lodge. To do this, he meticulously studies documents from the family archive, because “*Vasylko’s future grandchildren and great-grandchildren must know everything about their lineage in order to continue its power and unquestionable glory*” [Matioc, 2019, p. 71]. The motif of reconstructing the lineage aligns with the general postcolonial idea of affirming the continuity of history. It shapes the specificity of the narrative, imparting both novels with the features of a family saga.

“The Beech Land” can be called a *family* narrative (as defined, for example, by literary scholar Natalia Likhomanova [Ліхоманова, 2020]), for the history of the region unfolds through the familial ties of its inhabitants, through their births, marriages, deaths, and the change of generations. At the same time, the family lines intertwine with the historical background: detailed descriptions of family genealogies interweave with contemporaries’ testimonies and archival sources concerning events of the First and Second World Wars. Family stories interlace with descriptions of protests, upheavals, and historical liberation struggles. A significant feature of M. Matios’s narrative strategy is the multiplicity of perspectives through which the artistic reality is portrayed. The author gives voice to different characters: aristocrats, peasants, politicians, and soldiers. This enhances the completeness and comprehensiveness of the historical narrative about Bukovyna.

Notably, in O. Zabuzhko’s family saga we encounter a postmodern rejection of linearity: we observe a non-linear sequence of episodes from recent history (early 2000s) and the past (the period after the end of the Second World War) that permeates the present through the dreams of the main characters. In the scene where Daryna and Adrian “introduce” each other to the dead of their families, their deceased relatives “gaze” at them from black-and-white photographs – an image of the past gazing into the present. According to V. Ageieva, O. Zabuzhko’s novel is a novel about Time that fails to become history, about “the past that returns and affects

the present” [Ареєва, 2010]. The characters of “The Museum of Abandoned Secrets” look back at the history of their lineages from the perspective of the present: they tread in the footsteps of their predecessors like detectives trying to reconstruct the *story*.

M. Matios, on the other hand, adopts a transcendental position in relation to time: the 225 years of Ukrainian history are depicted through the succession of generations. Each human life here represents a segment of a single linearity. That is why the chapters of the novel are titled with the names of the characters, each title containing their birth dates (and sometimes death dates), such as “*Elsa Wagner (born 1751)*”. Except for the prologue, the author constructs the narrative according to chronological sequence: from 1789 to 2014. At the same time, in the framing narrative, M. Matios portrays a situation of metamodern mythological “timelessness”, whose temporal boundaries are defined as “*Always*”.

An essential element of the Ukrainian postcolonial discourse is the determination of the UPA’s place in the struggle for national independence. The theme of the insurgent legacy appears as one of the “abandoned secrets”, a gap in the historical narrative of the Ukrainian community in “The Museum of Abandoned Secrets”. O. Zabuzhko pointed out in an interview with the “Ukrainian Journal”: “The whole twentieth century of unwritten and unspoken history lies behind us under siege” [Шарговська, 2008, p. 48]. Episodes from the “unspoken history” of the 20th century are incorporated into the novel through a montage technique. The narrative from the early 2000s in Kyiv is interrupted by Adrian Vatamanyuk’s dreams about the life of the Ukrainian insurgent Adrian Ortynsky who lived around the 1950s. As I. Nabytovych observed, Adrian’s dreams model his individual memory and the “memory of his ancestors and the national memory, united in a single and unbreakable line that the poet Taras Shevchenko has defined as ‘the dead, the living, and the unborn’ – those who create the nation, those who once lived, those who live in modern postcolonial Ukraine today, and those who will take their place tomorrow” [Nabytovych, 2021 p. 58]. Thus, the oneiric discourse mounted in the text of “The Museum of Abandoned Secrets” contributes to the affirmation of ancestral and national continuity within the Ukrainian community.

Just like “The Museum of Abandoned Secrets”, “The Beech Land” depicts the heroic struggle of Ukrainian insurgents against Soviet oppression, in the midst of which Ukrainian national identity is shaped. In comparison to O. Zabuzhko, whose task was to articulate the UPA narrative as part of Ukrainian history, M. Matios traces the line of historical continuity even more explicitly, pointing to the hereditary, family connection between UPA soldiers and the participants of the current Russian-Ukrainian war. The protagonist of the final part of the novel, a soldier of the “Aidar” battalion Petro Shkaraburiak turns out to be a grandson of the UPA insurgent Petro Vivchar. This is how a direct familial thread connects the fighters for Ukrainian independence through generations.

In “The Museum of Abandoned Secrets”, there is an implication that the war for Ukraine’s independence, that is, the war against the empire, continues. Thus, at the end of the novel, Daryna declares: “*the war goes on, that the war never stops – now it is our war and we haven’t yet lost it*” [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 697]. This war is understood as somehow implicit, hidden – it takes place at the level of media and political intrigues, its escalation is only being prepared; the main characters, Daryna and Andrian, are anticipating it. Whereas for M. Matios, writing her novel at the time of the war in Donbas, the military theme is a key one. The war is depicted as a painful fragmentation of the utopian world of Bukovyna among colonial rulers.

The author’s anticolonial mindset is explicitly articulated in the characters’ life stories. For instance, the experience of the First World War is shown through the perspective of Dary Berehivchuk, a Hutsul from Bukovyna, who was mobilized into the Austro-Hungarian army. As M. Krupka aptly highlighted, M. Matios’s war narrative extends to the broader issue of the colonial status of Ukrainian people [Крупка, 2022, p. 468]: Ukrainians find themselves on opposing sides of the front lines. Dary discovers that his adversaries in the Russian army are unexpectedly more mentally akin to him, sharing the same Ukrainian language than his fellow soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian forces. In this way, according to M. Krupka, “the writer emphasises the tragedy of a stateless nation doomed to fratricide” [Крупка, 2022, p. 469].

The motif of fratricide as a consequence of colonialism is reinforced in the novel’s epilogue, which describes the events in Donbas in 2014. Dary’s great-great-grandsons, Petro Shkaraburiak

and Stepan Kopaiderevo, find themselves on opposite sides of the frontline: Petro is a soldier of the Ukrainian army and Stepan is a pro-Russian separatist. The men do not recognize each other when they meet. Stepan finds wounded Petro on the battlefield, but refrains from immediately taking his life due to a surprising discovery – a photograph of a woman bearing a striking resemblance to his own mother found in Petro's pocket. The mother's face becomes the only thread that suggests a certain connection between the two enemies who speak different languages and fight on different sides of the front. In their bloodline, a hope for reconciliation lies – a hope that this thread will lead Ukrainians out of the labyrinths of colonial history, towards understanding of who their ancestors are and who their true enemy is. M. Matios shows how the ancestral ties of the Berehivchuk family are disrupted as a result of repressions and forced resettlements orchestrated by the Soviet authorities. In this context, Petro's phrase to Stepan takes on a special meaning: "...*maybe if we had known each other before, we would not have been enemies?*" [Matioc, 2019, p. 908]. It expresses sorrow for the lost national – and family – unity. The fractured cohesion is a consequence of colonial traumas, which are further deepened by the new imperial aggression. Therefore, the idea of unity becomes one of the key themes in the novel. This idea is embodied in the figure of Petro – as he connects the family threads of Dariy Berehivchuk and Petro Vivchar. Just like his ancestors, Petro engages in the battle for Ukrainian independence.

In "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets", the idea of universal unity and interconnectedness is embodied in the motif of "connecting threads": "*Threads. Threads that make up a pattern that we can't see. That's why no story is ever finished, no one's*" [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 95]; "*everything around her is threaded with these lifelines, and a hundred, a thousand of them run invisibly through her and into other people's lives, but to discern and comprehend the pattern they draw – a picture so grand, so magnificent, that a single glimpse of it fills you with knee-buckling awe (...)*" [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 93]; "*(...) the thin – flickering and countless – dazzling threads running through it all, piercing her life – and stretching beyond it, beyond the horizon of the visible to compose a deliberate, no, deliberating, living design, Dovganivna – Adrian – Boozerov – Mom – herself – Vlada – R. – boss – captain...*" [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 284]. The threads symbolize the interconnectedness of every individual's destiny with the broader history of their lineage and nation, which ultimately manifests in the form of a symbolic universum – a map of the starry sky.

As V. Ageyeva observed, in the novel "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets", the striking revelation of universal interconnectedness is conveyed through the image of a Ferris wheel, on the top of which one's head would always spin in childhood [Areeba, 2010]. From the height of the Ferris wheel, one can see how disparate elements come together into a cohesive panorama, as described by Darina Hoshchynska: "*a sudden meteoric convergence, in her mind's eye, of people scattered throughout time and space, with no connection to each other that a normal, ground-level view could discern into a single, meaningful design, a complete picture, a vista*" [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 92]. The concept of universal interconnectedness is imbued with a metaphysical sense: the protagonist "discovers" the ontological proof of God's existence in the fact that someone is supposed to see "*the entire picture—the whole thing, from above*" [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 94]. The idea of God that is able to look over history as a unified whole, reveals a propensity towards comprehensiveness and totality. It carries the hope for the reconstruction of the tangled and often interrupted historical process. Therefore, it can be associated with a postcolonial inclination towards creating a comprehensive grand narrative, from which an individual and a collective could derive their identity.

The image of God that with a bird's-eye view encompasses the intricacies of human destinies, is also found in «The Beech Land». The historical panorama spanning 225 years unfolds before the reader from the perspective of the "Heavenly Chancellery" – God's archive, the "*unique collection of complete dossiers on all living and dead souls in the Universe*" [Matioc, 2019, pp. 20–21]. The "heavenly book collector" "*works flawlessly and smoothly. There are no gaps and white spots in it*" [Matioc, 2019, p. 41]. The symbolical figures of the Creator, as well as the Black and White Angels, appear as archivists of the "Heavenly Chancellery" that contains information about everything that has ever happened in a specific territory, including Bukovyna. By introducing the images of God and the Angels at the beginning of the book, M. Matios hints at the transcendental source of her historical panoramic novel: the records of four families – Berehivchuk, Vasylyko, Vivchar, and Wagner – that are kept in the God's archive.



M. Matios puts an eloquent explanation of the moral and even didactic function of history into the Creator's mouth: "*The recollection of the bygone events or people who have passed away is at the same time the restoration of historical and moral justice for these people*" [Marioc, 2019, p. 42]. The Chancellery's servants, the White and Black Angels, engage in a discussion with God, wherein the metaphysical essence of their archive is revealed. The embodiment of cynicism, the Black Angel, asks: "*So why do You, Almighty God, need such an array of insignificant information about the insignificant dead of the past?*" [Marioc, 2019, p. 42]. The Black Angel seems to be rather a historiographer (than a historian), driven towards selection and demarcation between the significant and the inconsequential within the array of historical facts. The Creator, on the other hand, perceives history as a memory of the deceased, inextricably linked to justice and humanity: "*Every person is great. Even after death. That is why it is worth reminding us of them from time to time. (...) This work – reminding us of the past – is ceaseless. When we neglect it, the living plunge into wars*" [Matios, 2019, p. 43]. In the conversation between the Angels and God, M. Matios draws a clear line between different understandings of history – as a compilation of facts about the past and as a spiritual value.

The postcolonial interpretation of history, articulated in the conversations between God and the Angels, is also underlined by the fact that "*reminding of the past*" is perceived as "*a matter of security not only for an individual, but also for entire states, and perhaps even continents*" [Marioc, 2019, p. 43]. This admonition evidently applies primarily to the Russian-Ukrainian war. The author establishes a connection between the integrity of history and the anti-imperial struggle. Held in the hands of the Creator, history works to "*cure humanity's conscious amnesia and historical sclerosis*" [Matios, 2019, p. 43]. In the postcolonial context, history is therefore a matter of national security, as well as morality and justice. Its divine nature is also noteworthy.

This metaphysical approach to justifying history is combined in the novel with entirely rational, documentary sources such as newspaper clippings, letters and archival documents. By employing this combination of fantasy and realism, M. Matios affirms one of the programmatic principles of metamodernism: "*All information is grounds for knowledge, whether empirical or aphoristic, no matter its truth-value*" [Turner, 2015]. This principle is particularly relevant in the context of postcolonial history, which often entails the interweaving of canonized myths and suppressed facts, speculations and gaps.

At the same time, and again in accordance with the metamodernist guideline, the author tries to overcome the historically determined limitations and present the history of the "Beech Land" as if it were preserved in perfect integrity in an inviolable, all-encompassing archive. The reference to the "Heavenly Chancellery" emphasizes the intention to create a complete and coherent historical narrative where all elements are interconnected fragments of a single grandiose picture.

The cohesive historical panorama is beyond the grasp of the human eye, accessible only from an elevated standpoint, from the position of God. In "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets", Daryna remarks that the perfected pattern woven from human destinies only glimmers for a moment, and "*the very next instant the picture disintegrates, scatters*" [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 92]. Therefore, within the framework of postmodern play with citation and collage, the process of "*reclaiming one's own past*" (P. Nora) in "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets" is perceived as a meticulous search, decryption, and resistance to fragmentation, followed by the reassembly of fragments into a new, postcolonial narrative. At the same time, the implacable fact of untold stories, destroyed and lost archives, is compensated by the mystical discourse of the novel, within which the characters seek historical truth in their dreams. The author's appeal to dreams appears not only as a formal technique but also as a sign of the absence of other, "normal" channels of connection with the past. Thus, the oneiric discourse underscores the tragic incompleteness of the postcolonial community's history.

Just like M. Matios, O. Zabuzhko creates the image of an invulnerable imaginary archive where the all-encompassing truth about everything that has happened in the world is preserved. In "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets", this archive takes the form of an infinite vault of filmed footage that exists somewhere in the virtual realm: "*...somewhere out there lies buried a humon-*

*gous, immeasurable — infinite, that's it — vault, an archive of things once witnessed, of footage that wants to be watched. How, by whom, those details are not important. This, one must admit, is a comforting thought*" [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 134]. In "The Beech Land", the postcolonial longing for a comprehensive, complete, and truthful narrative of the past is embodied in the image of the "Heavenly Chancellery". The image of an eternal celestial archive overseen by the Creator himself resonates with the Daryna Hoshchynska's idea of God: "There must be someone who sees the entire picture—the whole thing, from above" [Zabuzhko, 2012, p. 94]. As we can see, the metaphysical dimension of history is emphasized in both novels.

Based on the conducted analysis, it is possible to draw a series of conclusions. The fantastisation of history as well as its elevation to the metaphysical level can be seen as specific features of narration in postcolonial writing. As observed, O. Zabuzhko employs fantastisation within the realm of postmodern chaos, collaging and blending dreams and reality. On the other hand, she outlines the image of an all-seeing God in whose eyes this intricate chaos must appear as "the whole thing". In M. Matios's novel, the fantastical discourse is rather the sign of metamodernist utopic belief in the possibility of transcending historically conditioned limits. The Creator appears in the frame story of the novel instilling hope that the tumultuous history of long-suffering Bukovyna is securely preserved somewhere above. In both cases, going beyond realistic depiction serves as a tool for restoring lost wholeness, filling in the gaps. It complements the incompleteness, helping to overcome the fragmentary and opacity of history.

Within postcolonial culture, the interruption of historical continuity, as well as the disintegration of ancestral heritage, is experienced as the tragic consequence of former statelessness and totalitarian oppression. Hence, the devaluation of grand narratives initiated by postmodernism occurs in postcolonial cultures with a caveat: the deconstruction of the "official truth" of imperial or totalitarian regimes must be followed by the reconstruction of the national narrative. Accordingly, the momentous novels of contemporary Ukrainian literature emphasize the value of narrative integrity and consistency of national (and familial) history. The significance of these factors is reflected on the formal level: the novel "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets" is constructed as a family saga, integrating numerous individual "stories" into one panoramic narrative; "The Beech Land" encompasses over two centuries of national history through the stories of family lineages and their interweaving.

One of the defining themes shared by both novels is the anti-colonial struggle, particularly the military campaign of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. This theme necessitates depicting the tragic consequences of imperial oppression. In "The Beech Land", these are devastation and turmoil, fratricide, ruptured familial ties, the destruction of the Bukovynian "utopia". In "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets", these repercussions are shown through the lens of postmodern hypertextuality – as "burnt manuscripts", irretrievably lost archives, fragmented stories.

Further exploration of the postcolonial factor in Ukrainian literature involves establishing synchronic and diachronic connections between texts of the postcolonial and anticolonial orientation of Ukrainian literature as well as the literature of post-dependent nations. Researching literary texts from the postcolonial standpoint deepens the understanding of literature's role as a factor and a mirror of emancipatory processes of national self-identification and collective memory reconstruction. Placing Ukrainian literature and culture in general into the context of postcolonial criticism opens up a broad field for analysing the unique way of thinking and self-identification of the Ukrainian community, while enriching the global postcolonial paradigm with distinctive Eastern European concepts and meanings.

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## UKRAINIAN POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL AS A NATIONAL NARRATIVE: "THE MUSEUM OF ABANDONED SECRETS" BY O. ZABUZHKO AND "THE BEECH LAND" BY M. MATIOS

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**Key words:** *postcolonial narrative, postmodernism, metamodernism, metanarrative, national narrative*

The article examines the seminal novels of Ukrainian women writers from the first and second decades of the 21st century, namely "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets" ("Музей покинутих секретів", 2009) by O. Zabuzhko and "The Beech Land" ("Букова земля", 2019) by M. Matios. The selected works are analyzed through the lens of postcolonial criticism, that is, from the point of view of the historical experience of the statelessness of the Ukrainian community and its reflection in literary texts. The main attention is paid to the narrative features of the works, namely the tendency to broad narrative, integrity, and narrative completeness.

*The purpose* of the study is to highlight the postcolonial content of the narrative strategies implemented in the selected novels by O. Zabuzhko and M. Matios. Given that "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets" and "The Beech Land" represent different periods and ideological and aesthetic paradigms, namely postmodernism and metamodernism, one of the tasks of the study is to assert the relevance of postcolonialism in the context of metamodernism. The article aims to highlight the peculiarities of the artistic realization of "postcolonial" narrativity in postmodern and metamodern texts. Additionally, the narrative features of the selected novels are compared. The stated purpose necessitates the application of hermeneutic (interpretation of a literary text), comparative (identification of common and distinctive features of the selected works) *methods*, as well as the method of structural analysis (examining the narrative structure of the texts).

As a result of the study, it is established that postcolonialism, inherent in Ukrainian postmodern prose, remains relevant in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The postcolonial orientation of the novels "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets" and "The Beech Land" is manifested in their intention to affirm the continuity of Ukrainian history by building a panoramic narrative that covers different historical periods and establishes a hereditary connection between them. The study identified the following features common to both novels: the intertwining of family genealogy with national history; the development of narratives at different generational levels – children, parents, grandparents, etc.; the theme of the perpetual war for independence that continues to this day; the image of God as a transcendent guardian of history, capable of seeing the intertwining of human destinies in their entirety.

The defining theme shared by both novels is the anti-colonial struggle, particularly the military campaign of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. This theme necessitates depicting the tragic consequences of imperial oppression. In "The Beech Land", these are devastation and turmoil, fratricide, ruptured familial ties, the destruction of the Bukovynian "utopia". In "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets", these repercussions are shown through the lens of postmodern hypertextuality – as "burnt manuscripts", irretrievably lost archives, fragmented *stories*.

In addition, the selected novels exhibit an inclination to transcend the boundaries of realistic storytelling. Employing the montage technique, "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets" incorporates a mystical discourse of dreams that operates as a parallel reality, recounting events of the past. The oneiric discourse resonates with the image of an endless virtual archive storing memories of everything that has ever happened in the world. In "The Beech Land", the departure from realistic historiography occurs through metamodern fantastisation, where the historical panorama is framed by the story of the "Heavenly Chancellery" – a celestial archive inhabited by the Creator and the Angels. The appeal to mystical and imaginative discourses is interpreted as a manifestation of postcolonial longing for lost integrity and completeness. The images of endless imaginary repositories of information complement the incompleteness of history, aiding in overcoming its fragmentary nature and opacity.

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