

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE ORIGINS OF BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY GENRES

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Abstract. In the literary process, poetics is enriched with new ideas, themes, styles, and tendencies, leading to transformations, differentiations, and syntheses across types and genres. Biographical and autobiographical works have evolved as a direct result of this phenomenon, becoming more complex in form and richer in content. This article analyzes the generic features, specific characteristics, developmental stages, and interrelations of biographical and autobiographical works from a comparative perspective.

Keywords: biography, autobiography, historicity, documentary quality, evolutionary development, stages of refinement, poetic features.

Today, in the field of world literary studies, one of the most pressing issues is the investigation of the gradual development of biographical and autobiographical works, their classification by genre and theme, distinguishing them from historical and purely fictional literature, and revealing their unique artistic-ideological, structural, stylistic, and poetic characteristics.

In the scholarly study of the development of biographical works – their forms, manifestations, and distinctive features – numerous researchers and writers have made significant contributions. Among them are English biographer Virginia Woolf, French writer André Maurois, and American scholars and authors such as J.Clifford, D.Aaron, P.Kendall, C.Rollyson, B.Roorbach, I.Stoune, and M.Lackey¹. Their research has explored the emergence of artistic biography, its defining characteristics, principles of composition, and the interrelation of historicity, documentary authenticity, and artistic creativity within the genre. Similarly, in the works of foreign literary scholars such as G.Pomeranseva, Y.Ushakova, and A.Shubina, as well as Uzbek literary critics S.Mirvaliyev and G'.Murodov, various views on the nature of biographical literature, the work of biographers, and analyses of artistic biographies are presented². In parallel, both global and Uzbek literary studies have conducted substantial research into the autobiographical genre³, examining its generic essence, stages of development, and its relationship with the biographical form.

¹ Woolf V. The Art of Biography // Biography as an Art. edited by James Clifford. – New York, 1962.; Maurois A. The Ethics of Biography // Biography as an Art. edited by J.L.Clifford. – New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.; Clifford J.L. Biography as an Art. – New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.; Aaron D. Studies in Biography. – Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.; Kendall P.H. The Art of Biography. – New York: W.W.Norton and Company, 1985.; Rollyson Carl. Biography: A user's Guide. – Chicago: Ivan R.Dee, 2008.; Roorbach Bill. Writing Life Stories. – Ohio: Writer's digest books, 2008.; Стоун И. Биографик қисса ҳақида. // Жаҳон адиблари адабиёт ҳақида. – Тошкент: Маънавият, 2010.; Lackey M. Truthful conversations with American biographical novelists. – New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. – 264 p.; Lackey M. The American Biographical Novel. – New York: Bloomsbury, 2016.

² Померанцева Г. Биография в потоке времени. – Москва: Книга, 1987. – 335 с.; Ушакова Е. Литературная биография как жанр в творчестве П.Акройда: Дисс...канд.филол.наук. – Москва, 2001. – 195 с.; Шубина А. Проблема биографического жанра в творчестве П.Акройда: Дисс...канд.филол.наук. – СПб, 2009.; Мирвалиев С. Ўзбек романи (жанр манбалари ва унинг ташкил топиши). – Тошкент: Фан, 1969. – 313 б.; Муроодов Ғ. Тарихий роман: генезиси, кейинги тараққиёти. – Тошкент: Фан, 2005. – 170 б.

³ Philippe Lejeune. Le pacte autobiographique. – Paris: Poétique, 1975. – 368 p.; Романова Г.И. Автобиография // Литературная энциклопедия терминов и понятий. – Москва: Интелвак, 2001.; Романова Г.

In fact, when studying the emergence and development of these two genres, it is appropriate to examine them in relation to one another. This is because, according to certain theoretical sources, autobiography emerged on the basis of biography. This assumption is not without merit. Over time, biography and autobiography have evolved in close connection with one another. Below, we present several observations on this subject.

In her study titled *“Characteristics of the Biographical Novel Genre”*, Feruza Xajiyeva offers the following insights regarding the emergence of the biographical genre: *“For instance, the biographical genre, which originated from primitive inscriptions engraved on ancient tombstones, has now reached the status of a specialized form of literary art. In the 20th century, the novelized biography gained global popularity”*⁴. The researcher traces the roots of the biographical genre back to early inscriptions on gravestones. This perspective holds considerable validity. Inscriptions carved by individuals on palace walls, temple columns, and gravestones reflect the socio-cultural, political, and even personal realities of their time. In this sense, it is entirely reasonable to date the origins of the biographical and autobiographical genres to antiquity. The Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, while tracing the development of autobiographical works alongside biographical prose in ancient literature, emphasizes that early biographical texts not only influenced the emergence of biographical and autobiographical forms in Europe, but also had a profound impact on the overall development of the European novel⁵. Therefore, it can be confidently stated that the roots of the autobiographical genre, like those of the biographical genre, extend back to antiquity. Indeed, the ancient period is of great significance as a formative era that laid the groundwork for the emergence of entire literary genres.

Literary scholar M.B.Rarenko includes autobiography within the broader framework of the biographical genre. He states: *“The genre of biography, which originated in antiquity, has continually evolved by adapting to the demands of each era. Due to its flexibility, the genre not only survived but also thrived. Today, biographers conditionally divide biographical works into artistic, scientific, popular, and academic types. Historical biography should also be considered as a separate category, and autobiography is regarded as its specific sub-genre”*⁶. This observation by Rarenko reinforces Bakhtin’s earlier claim. With this view, Rarenko implies that the autobiographical genre emerged on the foundation of biography⁷. This idea is well-founded, as both historical biography and autobiography recount the past – the life history – of an individual. The term *biography* entered the Russian language via French, and is commonly translated as “life story” or “personal history,” denoting the life path of a specific person. From

Автобиографические жанры // Литературная учеба. 2003. № 6.; Николина Н.А. Поэтика русской автобиографической прозы: учеб. пособие. – Москва: Флинта: Наука, 2002.; Лежен Ф. Автобиография во Франции. – Москва, 1998.; Маркова Т.Н. Авторские жанровые номинации в современной русской прозе как показатель кризиса жанрового сознания // Вопросы литературы. – 2011. – №1.; Мильчина В.А. Автобиография // В кн.: Литературный энциклопедический словарь. – Москва: Сов. энциклопедия, 1987.; Пушкарева Н.Л. У истоков женской автобиографии в России // Филологические науки. – 2000. – № 3.; Тўлаганова С.П. Ижодкор шахси ва адабий қаҳрамон муаммоси (Абдулла Қодирий ижоди мисолида) Филол. фан...фалсафа д-ри (PhD) дисс. автореф. – Тошкент, 2019.

⁴ Хажиева Ф.М. Биографик роман жанри хусусиятлари (И.Стоун, М.Қориев ва Н.Норматов асарлари қиёсида). Фил.фан.бўйича фалсафа док. (PhD) дисс.автореф. – Тошкент: 2018. – Б. 13.

⁵ Бахтин М.М. Формы времени и хронотопа в романе // Бахтин М. Литературно-критические статьи. – Москва: Художественная литература, 1986. – С.182.

⁶ Раренко М.Б. Жанр биографии как социальный феномен. DOI:1031249/rsoc/2019.03.02.

⁷ Раренко М.Б. Биография: Эволюция и гибридизация жанра: Аналит. обзор / РАН. ИНИОН. Центр гуманитар. науч.-информ.исслед. Отд. языкознания; Отв. ред. Трошина Н.Н. – Москва, 2017. – 68 с.

this perspective, *autobiography* (from the Greek *autos* – “self,” *bios* – “life,” *grapho* – “to write”) refers to the act of writing one’s own life story.

The emergence and development of autobiography are directly connected to the gradual evolution of the biographical genre. As a literary form, biography originated in ancient Greek literature in the 4th century BCE. One of the earliest and most well-known surviving examples of this genre is the work of the Greek philosopher Plutarch, later known as *Parallel Lives*. Although biographical texts were composed prior to Plutarch, almost none of them have survived to the present day. The earliest known biographical work dedicated to a historical figure is attributed to Isocrates and is titled *Evagoras*, written in honor of King Evagoras of Cyprus. In the literary traditions of many nations, numerous biographical works emerged at the intersection of scholarly and artistic thought. These texts often represent a synthesis of factual historical events and artistic imagination, where real-life and documentary elements are reinterpreted through the author’s creative lens.

In many literary traditions, biographical works have emerged at the intersection of scholarly and artistic reflection. In such texts, historical and documentary events are conveyed through a creative synthesis of fact and imagination, giving rise to a literary form that blends factual narration with artistic interpretation.

The first known example of the autobiographical genre is believed to have appeared in the 2nd century CE. According to historical sources, this text – entitled *To Myself Alone* – is attributed to Marcus Aurelius. Around two centuries later, one of the most celebrated works of the genre, Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, was produced. However, not all scholars agree with this chronology. For instance, Professor Pavel Baldetsin of Moscow State University, in his lecture on *The Autobiographical Genre in 20th-Century Literature*, traces the origins of autobiography back to Babylonian culture⁸. Regardless of differing opinions, there is ample evidence to support the claim that the genre originated in antiquity. Autobiography, as a genre, began to take shape during this period, primarily due to a growing interest in the individual self. Prior to this, in the last centuries before the Common Era and the early years of the new era, social life was governed by collective traditions and accepted norms. People adhered to established laws, such as those in Greek city-states or those imposed by the kings of Egypt and Babylon. These norms were often sacralized through customs and were believed to be divinely ordained, with any contradiction seen as blasphemous.

In such a context, individuals had little opportunity for personal expression, and thus, there was minimal need or space for self-representation through autobiographical narrative. Some early writings did recount the victories of Eastern monarchs in grand, ceremonial inscriptions, but these texts cannot be classified as true autobiographies. They followed strict formulaic structures, narrating events associated with a ruler while omitting any mention of the ruler’s inner life or personal reflections. Therefore, such texts are better classified as biographical rather than autobiographical.

Nevertheless, some prominent figures of antiquity did leave behind descriptions of their lives that they deemed significant for future generations. One such figure was the ancient Greek writer, soldier, and statesman Xenophon (late 5th – early 4th century BCE), who served under the Persian king Cyrus. His work *Anabasis* (The Expedition) describes the retreat of ten thousand Greek mercenaries following the assassination of Cyrus and his rival Artaxerxes. Interestingly, although

⁸ <https://youtu.be/YlipFWtkOx0>

Xenophon himself led the retreat, he narrates the events in the third person, focusing on the course of events rather than personal introspection. Russian literary scholar A.F.Losev considers Xenophon's writings to be biographical in nature. In works such as *Memorabilia*, *Cyropaedia*, *Anabasis*, and *Agésilas*, Xenophon portrays historical figures like Socrates, the Persian kings, and King Agesilaus of Sparta as idealized heroes – brave, wise, and generous. According to Losev, Xenophon created some of the earliest examples of “novelized biographies”⁹ that explore the lives and accomplishments of great individuals. Yet, as previously noted, *Anabasis* is autobiographical in character: although the events are told in the third person, the narrator and central participant is Xenophon himself.

Similarly, the famous Roman statesman Julius Caesar (1st century BCE), in his *Commentaries on the Gallic War*, described his military exploits in detail without using the first person. These ancient texts played a key role in the evolution of autobiography as a literary genre.

As previously discussed, autobiography as a literary genre emerged at the end of antiquity as a response to the growing concept of the individual and the need for self-awareness. Initially, this genre carried a religious character, as exemplified by Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, which presents a psychological account of religious crisis and conversion. Subsequent works such as John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Archpriest Avvakum's *Life*, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* continued in this tradition. In summary, the emergence and development of biographical and autobiographical works, their poetic evolution, artistic features, and interrelations share many commonalities. This is quite natural, as autobiography developed on the foundation of biography and followed a parallel path of gradual evolution. This development manifested both in content and in form, reflecting their inherently interconnected nature.

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⁹ Лосев А.Ф. Античная литература – Москва: Просвещение, 1986. – С.166.