

## EMOTIVENESS OF CONTEMPORARY MEMOIR LITERATURE: CASE STUDY ON VICTORIA BELIM'S NOVEL

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*The current research aims at examining the means employed for creating emotivity of contemporary memoir literature and is based on the analysis of the novel "The Rooster House: A Ukrainian Family Memoir" by Victoria Belim, a contemporary American-Ukrainian writer and journalist. The author was born in Ukraine in a multinational family, left for the USA at the age of fifteen, and returned to Ukraine in 2014, when the war started. In her book Victoria dwells upon the way she has been trying to redefine her identity. She describes her feelings and emotions against a historical background, analyzing the traumatic events which occurred in Ukraine during Soviet times up to present day (e.g. Holodomor, Chornobyl, annexation of the Crimea, events on the Maidan), thus, making the national tragedy her personal one. It accounts for the topicality and novelty of the article. The analysis of the memoir proves that the personal story cannot be deprived of emotiveness which results from the very context of redefining identity during the war in Ukraine; the description of the author's own feelings and emotions aroused by the events and her memories; the use of emotively charged language and tropes, which add to the expressiveness of the discourse; the presence of different forms of personal pronouns; the employment of sensory and somatic language, etc. The study demonstrates that among the tropes occurring in the memoir, metaphors, similes, epithets and allusions prevail. All those aspects of the memoir's emotiveness are aimed at affecting the reader, appealing to their feelings and attempting to establish emotional connection for making the story memorable and calling forth the reader's emotional response. The contentions and examples presented in the study provide preliminary support for the theoretical principles that have been talked about in the literature related to the concept in question.*

**Key words:** emotive language, creative non-fiction, tropes, sensory language, identity, peace, resilience, Holodomor.

# ЕМОТИВНІСТЬ СУЧАСНОЇ МЕМУАРНОЇ ЛІТЕРАТУРИ: НА МАТЕРІАЛІ РОМАНУ ВІКТОРІЇ БЕЛІМ

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*Мета запропонованого дослідження полягає в аналізі засобів, які використовуються для створення емоційності в сучасній мемуарній літературі. Матеріалом дослідження слугує роман «The Rooster House: A Ukrainian Family Memoir» Вікторії Белім, сучасної американсько-української письменниці та журналістки. Авторка народилася в Україні в багатонаціональній родині, у віці п'ятнадцяти років виїхала до США, а у 2014 році, коли почалася війна, повернулася в Україну. У своїй книзі Вікторія Белім розповідає про те, як вона переосмислила і віднайшла свою ідентичність. Вона описує свої почуття та емоції на тлі історичних подій, аналізуючи травматичні події, які відбувалися в Україні за радянських часів і до сьогодні (наприклад, Голодомор, Чорнобиль, анексія Криму, події на Майдані), перетворюючи національну трагедію на особисту. Цей факт зумовлює актуальність та новизну статті. Аналіз мемуарного роману доводить, що особисту історію не можливо позбавити емотивності, яка закладена саме в контексті переосмислення ідентичності під час війни в Україні; завдяки опису власних почуттів і емоцій, викликаних подіями та спогадами авторки; використанню емоційно забарвленої мови та тропів, що підсилюють експресивність дискурсу, а також різних форм особових займенників та сенсорної і соматичної лексики тощо. Дослідження демонструє, що серед тропів, присутніх у проаналізованому мемуарному романі, переважають метафори, порівняння, епітети та алюзії. Усі вищезгадані аспекти емотивності твору спрямовані на здійснення впливу на читача, звернення до його почуттів та спробу встановлення емоційного зв'язку. Завдяки цьому історія стає незабутньою і неодмінно викликає емоційну реакцію з боку читача. Твердження та приклади, представлені в дослідженні, підтримують постулати, що обговорюються в теоретичних джерелах, пов'язаних із поняттям емотивності мемуарних творів.*

**Ключові слова:** емоційно забарвлена мова, творча документальна проза, тропи, сенсорна мова, ідентичність, мир, життєстійкість, Голодомор.

**Introduction. Topicality and objective of the research.** The concept of emotiveness has been the foundation stone of multiple researches suggesting a variety of views and perspectives on the subject (e.g., Leech, 1981; Nazzal, 2022). G. Leech, for example, claims that emotiveness reflects the way how a language can convey the writer's personal emotions, encompassing their attitude towards the reader or the subject being discussed (Leech, 1981: 15). Another scholar (Nazzal, 2022: 4) maintains that emotiveness is not lim-

ited to the use of rhetorical devices only, and it is culture-specific, situation-bound and context-related. The concept of emotivity also incorporates subjectivity, affectivity, and expressiveness. The latter is produced due to the use of linguistic means such as language units and context (Absattar et al., 2022), in other words, by means of emotive language which is employed to provoke an emotional reaction in the reader; for instance, understanding and empathy for a fictional character's predicament (Kulchytska & Erlikhman, 2024: 99). It is evident that words do not only let us acquire new information and modify our systems of beliefs. They make us feel emotions toward what they are depicting (Macagno & Walton, 2014: 5–29).

There are a number of useful studies analyzing peculiarities of emotive language. One of them claims that emotive language is “an extremely important technique in creating audience's engagement with a text” which is aimed at evoking a particular feeling on the part of the reader (Banhatti, 2024). Another study explores different types of emotive language: a) strong verbs or action verbs; b) sensory language appealing to the reader's five senses; c) figurative language, which adds colour, interest, and emotion to the writing; d) rhetorical questions, which engage the reader and have them try to infer the answer; e) personal pronouns, which urge the reader to share the author's experience (Child, 2023). It is equally significant for a writer to build true-to-life descriptions of emotions and simultaneously evoke emotional response in a reader (Kim, 2020). According to K. Overman (2023), it is a direct appeal to the reader's feelings and an attempt to establish emotional connection that make stories memorable. It is equally true about fiction and non-fiction literature as writers of both “need to revisit each scene to address what happens emotionally.”

Although emotiveness has been studied mainly on lexical and syntactic levels of the language of fiction prose and media, it is an essential component of any type of discourse (Gouthier & Di Bari, 2003). However, research pool is not abundant in the description of personal writings' emotivity specifically. Therefore, the present study focuses on the analysis of the signs of contemporary memoirs' emotiveness, and it is based on the book “The Rooster House: A Ukrainian Family Memoir” written by Victoria Belim (2024).

**Research Methods and Materials.** The present research is aimed at analyzing the means of creating emotivity of memoir literature on the example of the book “The Rooster House: A Ukrainian Family Memoir” by Victoria Belim (2024), a Ukrainian-born writer and journalist.

Among the research methods, a text-based method of emotive analysis and a descriptive method have been employed. Within the framework of the former, the key concepts of linguistics of emotions have been commented on. The latter one has been used for presenting the author's emotions aroused in the process of redefining her identity, of searching for her missing relative, of telling her family story against a historical and cultural background. Textual analysis has revealed the presence of flashbacks, fragmented narratives, and non-linear timelines, as well as the emotional and sensory dimensions of memory. The memoir's emotiveness is abundantly associated with the author's trauma from her relative's death during the Soviet times, the ongoing war in Ukraine, and her journey of rediscovering her identity.

**Overview of theoretical sources.** In a number of researches on memoir literature, scholars lay emphasis on the role of emotions of this literary genre. D. Landsborough (2024), for example, states that while sharing particular experiences from their life, writers highlight personal reflections, emotions and insights rather than chronology of the events. K. Overman (2024) regards the writing of memoirs as a two-step process. In Step Two she includes the emotional component which signifies what feelings the described events aroused in the author and what reactions they resulted in. Remembering their feelings about the author's emotions, readers feel more connected to the story. According to A. Wurdeman (2024), "memoirs are for thoughts and feelings. In a memoir, emotional truth reigns supreme." L. Lai claims that "memoirs are usually fueled by emotion and sensory details. It is the emotions and physical sensations surrounding events that linger in our minds and our lives" (2015: 154–167). Memoirs arouse readers' interest and, simultaneously, keep them connected. They help readers find out that other people feel the way they do, and readers also learn about lives that are different from theirs, so that their "minds and hearts can stretch to understand how life is for others" (Bomer, 2005: 2).

In order to keep the reader interested, memoir literature should be read like fiction and it should have the reader forget they are dealing with a true story (Lyon, 2024). Besides, according to P. Ricoeur "the fictional and the historical narrative participate in the same narrative structures". The scholar differentiates two planes in the memoir, "the plane of the description of figures of thought and discourse, called tropes <...> and that of the plea in favor of the modes of argumentation that rhetoric opposes to the hegemonic claims of logic" (2004: 247–248). In the present research, attention is paid

to both “planes” which contribute to the emotiveness of the memoir under discussion.

**Discussion and Results.** In the autobiographical novel “The Rooster House: A Ukrainian Family Memoir”, which covers four generations, Victoria Belim, who has Ukrainian roots, describes how she established her identity by returning to Ukraine, searching for information about her relative who was considered missing in the 1930s, through the memories of her childhood and her family, reflections about Ukrainian culture, analysis of the bloody history of the Soviet Union, the crimes of the NKVD and resilience of the Ukrainian people. The traumatic experience of finding her own self is described against a historical background. This fact can in no way be deprived of emotiveness.

At the age of fifteen, Victoria moved to Chicago (the USA), and later to Brussels (Belgium), where she is still living with her husband. It was in 2014 when the Crimea was annexed by Russia, that she experienced a great shock and felt an irresistible desire to return to Ukraine and redefine her identity. Another trigger for Victoria’s so-called “searching expedition” was the mysterious entry in her great-granddad Sergey’s journal about his brother Nikodim who “vanished in the 1930s fighting for a free Ukraine” (Belim, 2024: 31). Victoria Belim does not present the events chronologically. She keeps on resorting to flashbacks, now and then returning to her childhood, to stories about her great-grandparents, etc. Writing about her recent trip to Ukraine, the writer describes an amalgamation of feelings that took possession of her. That “emotional rollercoaster” is related to her family members, memories about her childhood and her home, past and present events occurring in Ukraine. All that highly contributed to the emotiveness of the memoir in question. For example, when describing the period when her family moved to Chicago, Victoria writes that she missed her home country and was unhappy, “grew depressed and wrote poems about death and the futility of life” (Belim, 2024: 9). While following the events on Maidan in 2014, and the war going on in Ukraine, Victoria suffered from pain, panic, agony and grief. She says: “Current events in Ukraine muted all sensations in me apart from fear and panic” (Belim, 2024: 13). It was then that she perceived herself as a part of Ukraine sensitively reacting to her country being mercilessly torn apart: “Each new bout of violence convulsing Ukraine reverberated in me, releasing a flood of images and memories” (Belim, 2024: 13).

Setting out on the thorny road of looking for her identity, Victoria seems to be comparing two parallel worlds — the Ukraine of her childhood and the

present-day country. Thus, there exist two Maidans in her mind — the one where she met with her school friend before leaving for the USA, ate chocolate ice-cream and admired the blossom of chestnut trees in Khreshchatyk, where she felt as if spring would never end; and the Maidan full of smoke and shooting, flooded by the blood of people fighting for the independence and freedom of Ukraine, when she felt as if spring would never come.

On the pages about Holodomor, readers can feel the writer's excruciating pain oozing literally from every line. Here, Victoria Belim combines information from historical sources with her grandmother Valentina's memories, which add to the memoir's emotiveness and turn the national tragedy into her personal one [Mintsys & Yatskiv, 2024: 87]. Victoria cites Stalin's notorious brutal words about worthlessness of a human life, which justified Holodomor in Ukraine: "If only one man dies of hunger, that is a tragedy, if millions die, that's only statistics" (Belim, 2024: 130). Guided by that principle, the Soviet power was trying to bring Ukrainians to their knees and erase the whole nation by starving millions of people. Victoria's grandmother Asya witnessed how in front of all the villagers, members of a requisition brigade beat up her neighbor Orisha for picking up several grains of wheat from the ground. Later, they took the woman away, and thereafter she was never seen again.

Victoria Belim's feelings of grief and pain permeate the whole book. The feelings are caused by the thoughts about the past and present wars, by the death of her relatives. The subjective and expressive reflection of the author's state of mind affects the readers and helps establish their emotional connection with the author, leaving no one indifferent. For example: "On many nights I lay in bed and the only way I could relieve my pain was to imagine a sharp knife cutting through my diaphragm, breaking through my bones, and tearing my flesh" (Belim, 2024: 23). Besides, the choice of adjectives with a strong emotive power highlights the author's feelings and affects the reader too. E. g.: infuriated, dumbstruck, blindsided, heart-wrenching, excruciating, etc.

Writing about the most decisive moments in her life, Victoria Belim uses somatic words in order to depict her overwhelming emotional state by presenting "natural bodily experiences and expressions, <...> unconscious rather than deliberate, genuine rather than artificial, feelings rather than thoughts" (Edwards, 1999: 272–273). For example, when she was watching on TV the events taking place on Maidan in 2014, she was so overcome by emotion that her "heartbeat deafened" her (Belim, 2024: 8). Illustrating the

highest point of excitement when she was approaching her grandmother's house in her second hometown Bereh, Victoria writes: "The slower we drove, sinking into the soft mud, the more my heart raced" (Belim, 2024: 46). When Victoria came to the Regional Archive Bureau in Poltava after a lot of failures to find information about her missing relative, she was so thrilled that her "heart raced" when the chief archivist was opening a book of records (Belim, 2024: 82).

An equally essential role in enhancing emotiveness of the memoir and appealing to the readers' senses is played by the use of sensory language making the narration more authentic and "palpable". For example, the concept of home in Victoria Belim's memory acquires a symbolic meaning, in which acoustic characteristics, smell, taste, and touch complement the images and enable the reader to trace the work of memory in the pictures of the past (Yatskiv, 2021: 166). Thus, describing the house in the Ukrainian town of Bereh, where Victoria spent her childhood and where her grandmother lived, she mentions that its sounds remained unchanged: "the doors creaked in the same high-pitched register", "the wall clock still chimed the hour fifteen minutes late" (Belim, 2024: 55). Writing about her visit to the local church, the author emotionally presents her perspective, combining the acoustic characteristics of the place with its smells: "The prayers echoed against the white walls and faded, leaving behind the soft murmurs and the pale arabesques of incense smoke. Dizzy from the scents of myrrh and olibanum I stepped outside into the sun, where tolling bells and cooing doves blended into a single bittersweet accord of spring" (Belim, 2024: 87). Symbolic in Victoria Belim's restoring her identity is the cherry orchard planted by her great-grandmother Asya, which "fed and clothed" the family and helped them "survive the chaos of the early nineties" (Belim, 2024: 26). Victoria's orchard is filled with a range of sounds and aromas: "The garden was silent in the limpid light of early morning, and the sounds of my rake and the leaves rustling in my footsteps echoed in the cool air" (Belim, 2024: 272); "Bereh's garden became my endless reservoir of scents and their nuances" (Belim, 2024: 73). Reading about Victoria's walk in the forest, we can breathe in the fragrance of the flowers growing there: "The tiny purple flowers grew in a thick mass underfoot and when I stepped on them, they released a camphorous scent with a lingering sweetness" (Belim, 2024: 256).

Unique tropes and expressive means contribute a lot to the emotiveness of Victoria Belim's memoir. For instance, with great warmth the author describes the Kyiv of her childhood years, where her family lived in the

“so-called khrushchevski apartment”, which was similar to other peoples’ places. The simile and personification she uses in the description of their neighbourhood emphasize that she still loves that city and it is still familiar and dear to her: “<...> I could admire the poplars standing like rows of soldiers on a military parade, <...> and the yellow eyes of windows in a similar set of apartment blocks across the street”. The narration becomes highly personalized due to the repetition of different forms of the first-person-singular possessive and personal pronouns: “Still, **I** liked that Kyiv. It was <...> **mine**”; “Yet it was **my** Kyiv, because **I** discovered it with my father”; “**I** latched onto **my** memories of Ukraine in an attempt to restore what was **mine** and part of **me**” (Belim 2024: 8; 41). Owing to this, the reader can understand the writer’s strong desire to redefine her identity.

While trying to find out what had happened to her missing relative in the 1930s, Victoria Belim asked her grandmother questions, which the latter was reluctant to answer because it was too painful for her to speak about the trauma the family had experienced. The following metaphor implies this idea: “The past into which I delved for stories was a repository of pain for her” (Belim, 2024: 221). Finally, Victoria discovered from the NKVD records which were available in the Poltava archive, that her great-grandfather’s brother had been imprisoned for conspiracy against the Soviet government, and that he had committed suicide in prison. There were a lot of inconsistencies in the reports, which meant that they were full of lies. The writer emotionally conveys this idea with the help of epithets, metaphors and a simile: “The shameless, blatant lies that seeped through every line clung to me like leeches”; “The fog of lies and half-truths made it difficult to orient oneself, to use one’s personal moral compass to analyze the situation” (Belim, 2024: 215–216). Writing about the language of Soviet propaganda, Victoria Belim alludes to George Orwell’s satire and his doublespeak: “The Orwellian language of ‘brotherly assistance’ and ‘liberation’ hid occupations. ‘Disarming dangerous elements’ meant passing a sentence without evidence or trial” (Belim, 2024: 216).

Victoria stayed in Ukraine till 2019. When she was completing her novel, Russia unleashed its full-scale war. Despite feeling overwhelming pain aroused by the war, the writer is full of hope for Ukraine’s victory. She is feeling an unprecedented link with Ukraine and finishes her book symbolically: writing about moving on, taking care of the cherry orchard full of sunlight and birds’ songs, mentioning the proverbial “vivre memento” (Belim, 2024: 286). Hereby, the memoir reaches its emotional peak.



**Conclusion.** The findings of the present research show that the story told in “The Rooster House: A Ukrainian Family Memoir” by Victoria Belim is connected to the social and cultural environment in which it takes place, along with the alternative resources available within this setting for understanding oneself and society. Simultaneously, it proves that the memoir is characterized by emotiveness which results from (1) the very context of re-defining identity during the war in Ukraine; (2) the description of the author’s own feelings and emotions related to the events and her memories; (3) the use of emotively charged language and tropes (among which metaphors, similes, epithets and allusions prevail); (4) the presence of different forms of personal pronouns; (5) the employment of sensory and somatic language; (6) the author’s being consistent within the whole novel, expressing hope for peace which will be brought by Ukraine’s resilience and victory. All the above-mentioned aspects are aimed at affecting the reader and calling forth their emotional response. In the future, it would be relevant to investigate the concept of MEMORY and ways of presenting it in the memoir.

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