

the result of an act, of making (as opposed to making up). Remobilized by our contemporary sense of the heterogeneity of language and world, this broad sense of the word fiction is more and more understood to be commensurate with all acts of textualization or narrativization, regardless of generic or modal distinctions and notwithstanding authorial intent. This broad sense of fictionality as a condition attendant on any act of putting-into-words helps to explain why writers such as Marguerite Duras, Nathalie Sarraute, Jean Rouaud, Eugène Savitzkaya, and, in English, Seamus Deane, have been happy to let certain of their works be described or discussed as novels – this despite the evidently nonfictional force of the works in question, and the absence of any markers or strategies within them seriously undercutting that force.

The factors outlined point to the idea that the contemporary generalization of the notion of autofiction has taken the form of an increasingly constructive paradigm. In other words, the incidence of fiction in the context of autobiography is no longer regarded as primarily subversive of that context. As we have become more and more accustomed to commuting between fiction and reality, so we have come to look for something more than just an ironic play-off between the two. Increasingly, what contemporary writing gives us is a sense of the necessity of the conjectural and conditional within the auto/biographical enterprise. As demonstrated in late 20th-century autobiographical writings in French – by the likes of Jorge Semprún, Jacques Roubaud, Béatrice de Jurquet, and Chantal Chawaf – loss, forgetting, and trauma have so disturbed the modern subject's claim to experience that, increasingly, the only chance to retrieve or bear witness to past events appears to lie in the indirectness, or as William Maxwell would call it, the “unsupportedness”, of fiction.

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See also The I-Novel

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Avila, Theresa of see Teresa of Avila, Saint

Avvakum 1620–1682

Russian archpriest and autobiographer

The archpriest Avvakum is not only a central figure in the religious disputes of 17th-century Russia, but also the founder of a genuinely Russian autobiographical tradition. These two

aspects of his significance are closely intertwined. The Church reforms introduced by the patriarch Nikon (1605–81) led, in 1667, to a schism between the official Russian Orthodox clergy and the adherents to the old traditions. It would seem that the alterations were insignificant: Nikon brought the Russian Orthodox rite closer to the Byzantine by redefining such particulars as making the sign of the cross, singing, and bending during the service. Yet Nikon's reforms met with fierce resistance from a part of the Russian population who considered that they were the work of the Antichrist. Avvakum was the ideological leader of this traditionalist party, which came to be known as the Old Believers. The official repressions against Avvakum were severe: in 1653 he was banished, together with his family, to Siberia for ten years; shortly after his return to Moscow a second exile in Mezen in the Arkhangelsk region was inflicted on him; lastly, in 1667, a church council sentenced him to imprisonment in the northernmost region of European Russia, in Pustozersk, where in 1682 he was burnt at the stake as a heretic.

Avvakum wrote his autobiography while serving his sentence in Pustozersk. He conceived of it as a political epistle with the foremost aim of supporting the Old Believers' position after the schism of 1667. This pragmatic scope determines the form of the whole text. Avvakum's *Zhitie (Life Written by Himself)* is by no means a *Bildungsroman*. The author does not bother to describe his childhood, the formation of his personality, or his problematic existence as a dissident. He rather conceives of his own existence from the position of a religious leader whose legitimation is beyond any doubt. Two separate styles can be discerned in his autobiography: episodes from his personal life are presented in colloquial, sometimes even vulgar Russian, whereas significant events that mirror Divine Providence are worded in church Slavonic and biblical quotations. The subsequent versions of Avvakum's text between 1669 and 1675 intensify the tendency towards self-fashioning in the manner of a saint and display an increasing use of biblical expressions. Avvakum perceives his life in terms of present martyrdom and future redemption. Accordingly, he chooses as his predecessors Job, Lazarus, and, ultimately, Christ. Avvakum resorts in his *Life* to hagiographical devices: many episodes are shaped after textual models from the Bible or legends. At the end of the text, the cumulative account of the various miracles and healings worked by Avvakum sums up his saintly aspirations. One should not reproach Avvakum, however, for the bending of reality. He did not intend to provide a true rendering of his life. Most of the peculiarities of his autobiography can be explained if it is interpreted as a kind of textual icon. In the Russian Orthodox tradition, Christians believe that icons are not made by human hands. The artist is not the creator of the icon, but a “translator” of the holy original. An icon is in no way meant to represent reality; it rather opens a window into eternity. The usual laws of perspective do not apply within the iconic depiction; icons have an “inverted perspective”. Strictly speaking, an icon cannot be looked at; rather, it looks at the viewer. This is also the reason why icons do not have a frame, which could delineate a semiotic borderline between art and reality. Icons translate a higher reality into human life. Avvakum's text has a very similar hermeneutic basis. He does not conceive of himself as the author of his *Life*. His biography is already written by God; he only “translates” this original text into a book. The *Life* is not a closed text, but open in two directions: towards the heavenly

author and towards a very concrete reader, Avvakum's fellow inmate Epifanii. Avvakum's autobiography functions as the medium of exchange between God and his faithful. Therefore his impressive self-awareness should not be misinterpreted as the birth of modern individuality. The contrary holds true: Avvakum aims at a typological identity with Christ, and his autobiography is not the document of a unique life, but of God's miraculous presence in this world which finds its conclusive evidence in the archpriest's *Life*. It is precisely this quality that empowers Avvakum's autobiography to be a political pamphlet proving the truth of the Old Believer's fight against the Nikonian reforms.

The text circulated in handwritten copies in their religious community and was published only in 1861. The *Life* was highly esteemed among Russian writers in the 19th century: Ivan Turgenev considered Avvakum's writings as a source of the purest Moskovian language; Lev Tolstoi used to read Avvakum's life aloud in the circle of his family; Nikolai Leskov modelled the protagonist of his novel *Soboriane (The Cathedral Folk)* on him.

ULRICH SCHMID

Biography

Born in Grigorov, Russia, 25 November 1620. Married Anastasia Markovna, 1638. Became deacon, Nizhnii-Novgorod, 1642; ordained priest in Lopatishchii, 1644. First visited Moscow and met Stefan Vonifatiev, a reforming priest in the tsar's circle, 1647 or 1648. Archpriest in Iur'evets-Povol'zhskii; headed for Moscow at the invitation of the tsar, 1652. Led the resistance to patriarch Nikon's reforms of the Russian Orthodox liturgy, 1652–53. Was arrested, 21 August 1653; spent his first period of exile with his family in Tobolsk, then exiled to Enisseisk in the region of the River Lena in Yakutsk, summer 1655. Joined Pashkov's expedition in Dauriia with his family. Began three years of wandering: travelled from Enisseisk to Bratskii Ostrog, then moved through the Baikal region to Lake Irgen and to Lake Ingoda. Departed from the Nerchinsk Settlement, 1662. Returned to Moscow, 1664; wrote first supplication to the tsar. Stripped of his rank and condemned by Church Council in Uspenskii Cathedral, 13 May 1666 (his family were sent away from Moscow to Mezen in the

Arkhangelsk for 18 months while he was investigated). Interrogated for the last time before being exiled to Pustozersk, August 1666. Sent to Pafnut'ev Monastery until 30 April 1667. Wrote fifth supplication to the tsar, 1669. Final exile in Pustozersk, 1672/73. Completed the *Zhitie* [Life], 1675. Burned at the stake in Pustozersk after 14 years of incarceration, 1682.

Selected Writings

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Further Reading

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