

# AUTOFICTION AS A MEDIUM OF MNEMOHISTORY IN THE CONTEXT OF PARADIGM TRANSFORMATIONS

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## Abstract

One of the most significant genres in Western contemporary literature is autofiction. Its orientation towards remembering the individual past and history has provoked reflections on a transformation of cultural paradigm and linked to the development of mnemohistory and the concept of literature as the shapers of cultural memory.

This paper examines the autofiction genre as the mnemohistorical medium through which individual memories are expressed. Using the insights of individual postmodernist and metamodernist theorists as sources, we can see the changes in autofiction over the past decades.

Since the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in Latvian prose, we can see various elements of autofiction and differentiate some groups of texts. A vivid contemporary autofiction is Svens Kuzmins' novel *Brīvībene* (Orbīta, 2024). The article aims to characterise Kuzmins' autofiction in the context of postmodernism and metamodernism, highlighting reinterpreting historical events through personal lenses as an eventual example of paradigm transformation and the medium of mnemohistory. The study's results show oscillations between documentary facts and fiction, irony and sincerity, and the search for identity, historicity, and depth. These mark the existence of several elements of metamodernism and demonstrate that literature can be an active participant in the process of mnemohistory. Metamodernism and mnemohistory share a position of active engagement, focusing on reinterpreting the past to create meaningful frameworks for the present.

**Keywords:** *documentary facts, fiction, mnemohistory, postmodernism, metamodernism*

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### **Insight into the development of the contemporary autofiction genre**

In the review of the second European Writers' Festival, held at the British Library in May 2024 and bringing together writers from across Europe to discuss how storytelling is changing, concluded that "writing about personal experience embedded in history remains central to European literature" [Topol 2024]. In contemporary literature, this recording of the self in history occurs by combining autobiographical motifs, documentary material, and imagination. Critics have called this kind of writing autofiction. The term was coined by the French writer and, critical theorist, professor of French literature at New York University Serge Doubrovsky, who wrote on the back cover of his novel *Fils* (1977) a few lines that stated the official birth of a new genre: "Fiction, of strictly real events and facts; autofiction if you like" [Doubrovsky 1977]. Since then, autofiction signifies a narrative form that undermines the generic borders between autobiography and fiction. Unlike autobiography, autofiction takes more liberties to play around with the chronology, affects, and accuracy of the story but still adheres to depicting real-life events. French narratologist Gérard Genette perceived autofiction as a fictional narrative helmed by a characterised version of the author that maintains a connection to extratextual truth. However, the author's self-image is often largely fictional; the author just like implies – "I, the author, am going to tell you a story of which I am the hero, but which never happened to me". [Genette 1993: 77–76]

It must be admitted that there is a lack of consensus among critics regarding the concept of autofiction. German literary theorist Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, in her work *Handbook of Autobiography / Autofiction* (2019), has pointed: "autofiction" is not a unified notion. Critics have struggled to define "autofiction" and various suggestions are under discussion. The fact that literary studies do not provide a consistent explanation of what "autofiction" in fact means may be considered as a sort of epistemological weakness and an argument to abstain from the category at all." [Wagner-Egelhaaf 2019: 3] Other researchers also describe opinions about autofiction as significantly diversified: "Indeed, although some critics look at autofiction as a massive phenomenon and consider it the literary genre of the twenty-first century, others simply deny it. In spite of this, autofiction has stimulated a prolific discussion about authorship, readership and literature in general." [Miceli 2024: 141] However, it cannot be said that the concept of autofiction has been ignored; in recent years, researchers have paid extensive attention to this issue from very different perspectives [Czyżak 2024; Heidenreich 2018; Jacobi, Ott & Schönwälder 2022; Grell 2014; Procházka 2024; Roche, Grell, & Burgelin 2010; Wagner-Egelhaaf 2019; Worthington 2018, etc.].

Autofictional writing is linked to the actualisation of individual and collective memory in literature, which has been booming for several decades. In the introduction to the collective monograph *Memory Frictions in Contemporary Literature* (2017), editors María Jesús Martínez-Alfaro and Silvia Pellicer-Ortíñ conclude that a memory boom has been observed in literature since the 1990s. This tendency "has made memory a central concern in contemporary culture and politics in all societies on a global scale" [Martínez-Alfaro, Pellicer-Ortíñ 2017: 1]. It has challenged the historicist mode that predominated until the 1980s. The reassessment of historicism's universality, totality, and objectivity has prompted a focus on memory, which helps highlight the fields of subjective and local experience and, through subjectivity, activates empathy for understanding historical events.

Since the late 1990s, the mixing of memory and history has been conceptualised as a new discipline or subfield of history – mnemohistory (in German *Gedächtnisgeschichte*), first introduced in the broader context of cultural memory studies by the German historian Jan Assmann in his 1997 book *Moses, the Egyptian: the memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*. Mnemohistory abandoned the positivist study of the past in favour of the study of the actuality of the past, not the factuality of the past: "Unlike history, mnemohistory is concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as remembered." [Assmann 1997: 9] Thus, people's memories were valued and became an essential testimony of the past, reviving and embodying historical facts. Mnemohistory focuses on how separate groups construct, use, and reshape memory in different contexts.

When memory is embodied in cultural forms, we can speak about the formation of cultural memory that Assmann included in the studies field of memory [Assmann 2008: 109–118]. According to this conception, literature is one form of production of cultural memory. Researchers of cultural memory Astrid Erll and Anna Rigney have recognised that the "literature is a medium of remembrance" [Erll & Rigney 2006: 112], which contributes, along with other media, to shaping collective memory and determining how societies remember their past [Gūtmane 2024: 42]. Furthermore, with the spread of the culture of memory, the hierarchical view that history is the primary, whilst literature – the secondary source of knowledge about the past, is being abolished. Postmodernist theoretician Linda Hutcheon notes the relation between historical and literary sources: "there is no question of a hierarchy, implied or otherwise. They are both part of the signifying systems of our culture. They both make and make sense of our world." [Hutcheon 1989: 28]

Reconstruction of memory, the mixture of documentary or historical or autobiographical facts and fiction in the formation of the writer's self-image, and the writer's arrival in the position of the novel's hero are among the main trends at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in contemporary

Latvian prose. Hence, it fits into this general flow of autofiction in Western literature. Depending on the works' primary focus, we can see some groups of autofiction elements in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Latvian literature.

The first group consists of prose texts with a conditional historical orientation, which primarily focuses on historical events that are connected to the creation time of the works and the author's reflections on the past and present. The most striking example of the novels in the series *Mēs, Latvija. XX gadsimts* (*We, Latvia. XX century*, 2014–208) is Pauls Bankovskis' novel *18* (2014); autofiction can be seen more directly in individual stories from the collection Andra Manfelde's *Mājas pārnāca bāsa* (2018). These works can be considered examples of *historical metafiction* because the author comments in the first person on the creation of the work, the past being examined, or the process of cognition. He does not hide his involvement and reflects on it. Theorist Linda Hutcheon introduced the term historical metafiction in her 1987 essay *Beginning to Theorize the Postmodern*. In her seminal study, *The Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), Hutcheon has described novels that are "both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" [Hutcheon 1988: 5]. Such novels both question and affirm that knowledge of history reflects real history; they exhibit a fusion of self-reflection and historical truth.

Along with historical metafiction, among the historical novels inside and outside of the series, it is possible to highlight a work that could potentially be considered more of an autofiction – Nora Ikstena's novel *Mātes piens* (2015) because the author's involvement is not directly positioned here, the author does not use her name, and several facts from her biography have been changed, there could still be many autobiographical motifs depicting the experience.

The second group consists of prose of a conditional biographical orientation, which is dedicated to a historical or more recent past personality, at least – to outstanding classics of Latvian literature, but in which the author's self-reflexive presence and self-image are also felt, for example, Nora Ikstena's *Esamība ar Rēgnū* (2007), *Vīrs zilajā lietusmētelītī* (2011). Several novels from the series *Es esmu ...* (*I am...*, since 2020) are worth mentioning here, especially – Andris Akmentiņš's novel *Meklējot Ezeriņu* (2021), Inga Gaile's novel *Rakstītāja* (2020). From recent literature, a vivid compilation of documentary and fiction is worth mentioning in Baņuta Rubesa's novel *Te bija Brunis* (2024), dedicated to her father and his experience in the Latvian Legion and the post-war years. However, the works of this group can also be considered more like biographical metafiction, in which the author takes on the role of a commentator and a reflector but does not convey the broader field of their personal biography and experience. This group also reveals a way to express one's attitude towards the object being described and one's own literary or social-political views.

The third group is the prose of a conditional autobiographical orientation, which includes the author's own field of experience and memories and elements of self-reflection at the time of writing. This group is comparable to historiographic metafiction, which addresses the constructed nature of historical accounts. In turn, "autofiction addresses the constructed and constantly changing nature of authorship: although an autofictional author may have an empirical existence outside an autofictional text, the primary image we as readers have of the author is presented through the text's narrative positioning" [Worthington 2018: 13].

Examples of autofiction in Latvian literature can be found already in the first precedents of postmodernism, for example, in the works of Regīna Ezera in the 1970s. However, in the 2000s, a greater spread of the autofiction genre has been observed. The most striking examples are novels by Jānis Joņevs *Jelgava 94* (2013), Rihards Bargais *Plikie rukši* (2017), *Nemodernās Slampes meitenes* (2021), and, in a way, also a novel by Anna Auziņa *Mājoklis. Terēzes dienasgrāmata* (2021). In this group, the authors most directly record themselves in history as they re-create their experiences and documentary evidence and create a documentary-fictional form of the time and space of their lives. Another example of autofiction is Juris Rozītis's novel *Displaced Person. Kāda latvieša stāja svešumā* (2024), the modernistic *Bildungsroman* – a novel about the growth of young man's growth in exile in Latvian society and his travels in Australia and Europe in the 1970s. Although the author distances himself from the text, does not use his name, and tells the story from the protagonist's point of view, this work can be considered autofiction. These are prose texts that the term autofiction can most directly characterise.

As can be seen from the aforementioned, the tendency to fuse fact and fiction and author involvement in text intensified after the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This coincides with a period when Latvian prose experienced an increased interest in history, focusing on reconstructing individual experience and memory in literary text. Thus, Latvian literature entered the general circulation of the mnemohistorical process and caused controversy among literary scholars, writers, and historians, marking a turning point in the understanding of the role of the literary text in evaluating and preserving the past<sup>1</sup>. At this point, Latvian literature enters the public eye, becoming a way to reevaluate the perceptions of historical and recent past based on the synthesis of individual experience, memory, and documentary archive materials.

How does this relate to broader cultural paradigm shifts? By examining the development of the autofiction genre from the perspectives of postmodernism

<sup>1</sup> See: Žurnāls "Domuzīme" (2018). Izrāumi no tumsas. Diskusija par romānu ciklu "Mēs. Latvija, XX gadsimts". *Delfi Kultūra*, 10. 10. Available: <https://www.delfi.lv/kultura/news/books/izravumino-tumsas-diskusija-par-romanu-ciklu-mes-latvija-xx-gadsimts.d?id=50449031>

and metamodernism, it is possible to draw certain conclusions about the most current trends in attitudes towards the past, memory, history, and their connection to the present.

### **Autofiction between fact and fiction: the point of view of modernist and postmodernist literary paradigms**

Although elements of autofiction are almost as old as the entire history of writing, the author's deliberate play, mixing fact and fiction, can be traced back to the Romantic era and the resulting modernist literature. In Knut Hamsun's novel *Sult* (1890), Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–1927), Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Rainer Maria Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910) or even in almost all of Kafka's works, the writer themselves is more or less embodied in one of the characters or some situations. In modernist prose, the writer is both himself and not himself; he simultaneously reveals and hides himself, but his intentions are serious. They intensively try to bring back the past, turning to memories, but often also using documentary materials (especially Joyce). The documentary facts serve modernists as a way of revealing subjectivity. Through the prism of subjectivity, modernists seek to uncover the complexity and fragmentation of the individual's inner world. This inner world becomes the main object of study, and external space is illuminated through complex techniques – narrative changes, inner monologues, streams of consciousness, or parables.

In turn, this intense positioning of the self in the text and its interpretation from a critical perspective led to Roland Barthes' postulated idea of the author's death in the 1960s. However, with the development of postmodernism, the author again wants to return to the text but does it playfully and defiantly. Wagner-Egelhaaf has acknowledged that postmodern writers' play with the synthesis of autobiography, documentary, and imagination is a natural reaction to Barthes's proclamation of the author's death, and this is "a symbol of the author's presence and persistence" [Wagner-Egelhaaf 2019: 1].

Until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the positioning of the writer in literary fiction was quite clearly distinguished from autobiographical writing (non-fiction), but with the development of postmodernism, their boundaries became blurred. This blurring of boundaries is also related to the fact that postmodernism, in reference to Hutcheon's observation, is self-consciously art within the archive, and that archive is both historical and literary [Hutcheon 1989: 6]. Wegner-Egelhaaf also tried to explain the reasons for this liminality and called for distancing from the naive notion that an autobiography may be "true" or "truthful", that critics rejected as early as the 1960s: "Critics have argued that nobody can ever thoroughly report his or her

life since, on the one side, human memory is deficient, and, on the other side, human beings are narcissistic, which means they are not at all neutral and objective when it comes to looking at themselves – and others. As early as in the 1960s, literary scholars have highlighted the fictional dimension inherent in every autobiography.” [Wagner-Egelhaaf 2019: 1]

However, contemporary autofiction has an essential difference from autobiography. In one case, the primary aim is to create an artistic work, develop an idea, and attain a level of artistic generalisation, whereas, in the other, the primary objective is to reconstruct or construct a life story. Each of these cases involves building a different relationship with the reader. The French philosopher Philippe Lejeune developed his well-known theory of *the autobiographical pact* showed how this pact differs from *the fictional pact* [Lejeune 1989, 13–15]. Autofiction can be considered a specific strategy of self-expression in which authentic experiences take on textual form, in contrast to the rules of establishing an autobiographical pact. The measures taken within it do not unify the self-image nor create the possibility of reconstructing the linear course of biography and its cause-effect sequences [Czyżak 2020: 94]. Autofiction oscillates between the autobiographical and the novelistic pact. French narratologist Gerard Genette called it “intentional contradictory pact” [Genette 1993: 76]; American researcher Marjorie Worthington metaphorically described it as *no-man’s-land* [Worthington 2018: 13].

Lejeune once allowed it is theoretically possible to find a work based on a fictional pact in which the author, narrator, and character all have the same name but denied its real possibility: “the coexistence of the identity of the names and fictional pact, and that of the difference of name and the autobiographical pact being excluded by definition” [Lejeune 1989: 15]. However, these oscillations between the autobiographical and fictional pact have been possible since the turn of the century. This means that unsure of how to read the text, as an autobiography or as a novel, the reader oscillates between two attitudes of reception. Autofiction “no longer revolves around a pact (...) between writer and reader about the truthfulness or inventedness of a literary text, but refers more generally to the symbolic function of language, the process of putting experience into words, and results in the typical blending of strictly referential facts” [Gronemann 2019: 242].

Being in the in-between space is associated with the advent of the post-truth era in postmodernism, when “facts, the truth, and reality are increasingly undermined, while fiction is given a status upgrade” [Wynants 2020: 10]. As fiction’s role grows, writers’ *linguistic self-consciousness* also increases [Worthington 2018: 13–14].

It seems paradoxical that literature offers more and more reality in this age of blurred reality and truth. The author’s expression of individual experience and opinion sounds like a backlash to the rapid development of media and digital

technologies but also due to globalisation, which threatens the loss of human uniqueness: "The insistent diversity of autobiographical and autofictional production all over the world is an obvious and weighty counterpose to these ongoing processes of homogenization which calls for thorough scholarly research." [Wagner-Egelhaaf 2019: 4]

However, authors of autofictions also tend to distance themselves from the sole expression of truth, and this attitude can be viewed in the context of contemporary postmodern transformations.

### **Possibilities of contemporary interpretation of autofiction: Svens Kuzmins' novel *Brīvībene***

From the previous part of the article, it can be concluded that the mixture of documentary and fiction in autofiction became particularly relevant in the era of postmodernism. The self-reflexive blending of fact and fiction is associated with self-consciousness, deconstruction of grand narratives, revaluation of values, irony, pluralism, demolition of boundaries, challenge, and playfulness, which are characteristics of postmodernist literature. Still, since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a change in literary mood has also been felt. However, as early as 2002, postmodernist theorist Hutcheon herself declared in the second edition of her work *The Politics of Postmodernism* (2002) that postmodernism was over: "postmodern may well be a twentieth-century phenomenon, that is, a thing of the past." [Hutcheon 2002: 164] Increasingly observing the discrepancy between literary practice and the nihilistic and ironic position attributed to postmodernism, theorists began searching for a new evaluation perspective.

In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the belief has already been strengthened that after the era described as lack of historicity, meaninglessness, and depth formulated by Jameson in his book *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1989), an era of historicity, emotional impact, and depth is emerging [van den Akker, Gibbons & Vermeulen 2017], which can be productively viewed from the perspective of metamodernism.<sup>2</sup> In literature, two distinct theories of metamodernism emerged in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For David James and Urmila Seshagiri, metamodernism is a lens "to reassess and remobilize narratives of modernism" [James, Seshagiri 2014: 89], to discover modernist stylistic features

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<sup>2</sup> Vermeulen and van den Akker's first article in an open-access journal dedicated to the new perspective, *Notes on Metamodernism* (2010) [Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010], called for further debate on the manifestations of after-postmodernism. Vermeulen and van der Akker's edited collection of articles, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism*, outlines the history and main research directions of the new perspective [van den Akker, Gibbons & Vermeulen 2017].

and themes in recent literature, namely, the existence of modernism practices today. Metamodernist theorists Robin van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen begin their own theory with a conceptual clarity: “We will first discuss the debate about the alleged demise of the postmodern and the apparent rise of another modernism. We will argue that this modernism is characterized by the oscillation between a typically modern commitment and a markedly postmodern detachment. We will call this structure of feeling metamodernism.” [Vermeulen, van den Akker 2010: 2] For these researchers metamodernism manifests “in literary works (and cultural and aesthetic forms more generally) through a mix of or oscillation between pre-modernist, modernist, and postmodernist tropes and devices” [van den Akker, Gibbons & Vermeulen 2019: 48] and a unifying similar sense of the world. In this perspective, alongside the various manifestations in contemporary literature, the coexistence of other literary and cultural movements characterising the capitalist system is also seen. Thus, their thoughts relate to the vision of postmodernist theorist Jameson that “postmodernism is not the cultural dominant of a wholly new social order (the rumor about which, under the name of “postindustrial society,” ran through the media a few years ago), but only the reflex and the concomitant of yet another systemic modification of capitalism itself. No wonder, then, that shreds of its older avatars - of realism, even, fully as much as of modernism — live on, to be rewrapped in the luxurious trappings of their putative successor.” [Jameson 1989: xi] Since the concept of metamodernism is a relatively new theoretical framework, it is still being debated and refined. The concept is not entirely accepted because of observable coexistence with other terms describing the cultural condition after postmodernism. Discussions continue about whether metamodernism is a separate paradigm, how it is related to digimodernism, etc. Without claiming to clarify the truth, this article will continue to use the criteria of the new theory in the analysis of autofiction and the study of a specific case.

Given that the paradigmatic processes in Western and post-Soviet literature (which we can still call Latvian literature) are different, parallels are nevertheless possible. In the following, Svens Kuzmins’ novel *Brīvibene*, a vivid example of autofiction in Latvian literature, will be examined as an example of metamodernism, inviting consideration of contextual analysis of similar examples.

First, postmodernist theorists Vermeulen and Aker consider autofiction a dominant genre in the metamodern era. By autofiction, they understand the use of specific stylistic strategies – the combination of “autobiographical and memoiristic writing with fiction proper and the presence of the author figure as an autobiographical/autofictional subject within the novel” [van den Akker, Gibbons, Vermeulen 2019: 48–49]. In their opinion, the stylistic strategies of modern autofiction are the same as those in postmodernist novels; however, their use creates

significant deviations from postmodern logic [van den Akker, Gibbons, Vermeulen 2019: 49]. The author's appearance in 21<sup>st</sup>-century literature is the opposite of the ironic game of postmodernist literature, "where the author characters serve a flattening function, foregrounding the constructed textual surface of the fiction. The appearance of author characters in twenty-first-century literature is performative (while foregrounding the real author as the creator of the work) as it applies depth and depthiness and invokes affect and affectedness by foregrounding a contemporary world that the real author and readers share." [van den Akker, Gibbons, Vermeulen 2019: 51]

*Brīvībene* is a typical autofiction. The novel's motto states: "Everything described in this book has an illustrative meaning. Any similarity to real people and events is accidental." [Kuzmins 2024: 5] Therefore, the readers accept the fictional pact in their attitude towards the text from the beginning and read it as a novel. However, the novel is written in the first person, without hiding the "I" connection with the author, using his real name and surname, his mother's, and the artist Helēna Svilāne-Kuzmina's name, including direct biographical references. Consequently, the readers are subjected to doubt and, when evaluating the possibilities of an autobiographical pact, allow this work to be read as at least a conditional autobiography. Readers are also invited to perceive as real persons the two grandfathers – Bernards Vanags and Arnolds Barkāns, as well as other mentioned persons and places (or at least believe that they are based on real-life prototypes and places). Without a doubt, the message of *Brīvībene* cannot be perceived only on a documentary or fictionally level. The author denies this possibility already at the beginning of the work, creating the feeling that, in this case, we have reached *no man's land* where fact can also be fiction and *vice versa*, to paraphrase the title of a collective publication *When Fact Is Fiction: Documentary Art in the Post-Truth Era* [Wynants 2020]. At the beginning of the novel, the author notes the frequent interchange of fact and fiction, thus referring to the statement contained in this book – "the so-called truth value is hardly a valid criterion for distinguishing fact from fiction" [Wynants 2020: 11]:

"Sometimes, it is like this: a stupid, absurd, shocking or otherwise remarkable situation comes to mind, anyway – whether it is possible or not, you describe it to the best of your ability and publish it, but others read it and say – exactly! (...) And vice versa: you describe a life situation as naturally and in detail as possible, that is, without lying even a millimetre (...), but everyone says – it does not tend to be like that! And so on, once, twice, until soon, you no longer fully trust what is happening to you." [Kuzmins 2024: 19]<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Here and henceforth, translation of Kuzmins' text – Z. G.

However, this oscillation between the fact and the fiction is not postmodernist ironically charged, self-sufficiently played out and nihilistic. It is more of an *irony with* than an *irony about* – a shared smile of the possibilities of believability. The swing between fiction and non-fiction, a flickering between them, paradoxically offers a clear view of reality, confirming its different development options, and creates a premonition of how it most certainly could have been. Furthermore, “something may well be both fact and fiction at the same time”, as acknowledged in the collective monograph *When Fact Is Fiction* [Wynants 2020: 12], so often fiction can reveal the essence of reality more clearly than fact. Therefore, it becomes clear that the most significant importance is not in documentary representation but elsewhere. As Marjorie Worthington admitted, “the meaning and power of an autofictional text resides more in its plot and themes than in the biographical or historical accuracy of the story it tells” [Worthington 2018: 3].

Flickering between fact and fiction, seeing reality in fiction creates a *depthiness* un *depthing* perspective typical of metamodern autofiction [van den Akker, Gibbons, Vermeulen 2019: 49–50]. In a reflection on his artistic quest, Kuzmins’ hero realises that what he was looking for: “it was probably depth. We always went where reality seemed broader, deeper, and more complex.” [Kuzmins 2024: 200]

To open the perspective of this *depthiness*, one must look down carefully. This desire to look into depths is associated with the conflation of the present and the past and the interest in history characteristic of metamodernist literature, contrasting the postmodernist belief at *the end of history*. The theoreticians conclude that the postmodern subject has ultimately lost the ability to orient itself and describe the relationships between past, present, and future, but the metamodern subject “the metamodern subject attempts to reforge the coherence between past, present, and future” [van den Akker, Gibbons, Vermeulen 2019: 52] and refuses “to accept the current state of the world, asking readers instead to think critically and defiantly about the ways in which world events are connected and how their own involvement figures in such a world” [Gibbons 2015: 41].

*Brīvibene* offers a strong position of involvement in the events of the ancient and recent past. No matter how often the hero leaves his grandfather’s house on *Brīvības iela* (*Freedom Street*) in Riga, he always returns, each time understanding the events of the past and the nature of their intertwining more deeply and comprehensively.

The historical field touched upon in the novel encompasses the experiences of grandparents, parents and Sven himself, connecting them in a single connection and in a new, courageous way, abandoning the position of victim in the whirlwind of history and introducing the so uncomfortable idea of co-responsibility, which has so far only been heard episodically in Latvian prose evaluating history. The field of experience of the novel’s protagonist is the time of Kuzmins’ youth –

the turn of the millennium, which has so far been a period that has been little explored in Latvian prose. Moreover, it is a time associated with the formation of metamodernism. Authors of the article *Metamodernism: Period, Structure of Feeling, and Cultural Logic – A Case Study of Contemporary Autofiction* states that the transition from postmodernism to metamodernism approximately lasted from 1999 to 2011 [van den Akker, Gibbons, Vermeulen 2019: 43]. The beginning of the 2000s in the development of metamodernism can be compared to the transition to postmodernism in the 1960s. The start of the century is a period when it is increasingly evident that history is not impossible. The return of history, which can be associated with ecological, economic or (geo)political crises, is called the *bend of history* [Arquilla 2011], with this metaphor revealing a repeated engagement with history, an awareness of the unguaranteedness of progress and at the same time – an active involvement in its approximation, a position of hopeful realism or informed naivety.

In Kuzmins' novel, the affirmation of history sounds especially strong. Although the hero feels that all his memories of his ancestors are just a copy of a copy, he thinks that perhaps getting to know oneself should not begin with the knowledge of one's core, as has been considered so far. However, perhaps first, "one should get to know one's space, its history and mood, the background of events and the changing environment" [Kuzmins 2024, 138]. Regarding the rehabilitation of history, the novel's choice of the turn of the millennium seems quite conceptual.

Reading of Kuzmins' autofictional novel in the context of the interrelationship between postmodernism and metamodernism invites us to examine other works of similar orientation, asking the question – perhaps the past two decades have also seen signs of paradigm transformation in Latvian literature. Possibly other typologically similar texts can also be viewed in the context of the bend of history, the change of perspectives of surface and depth, the author's involvement and responsibility, faith and disbelief, irony and sincerity, truth and imagination.

The recording of oneself and one's memories in history in Latvian prose continues with a more self-conscious authorial stance, facilitated mainly by the overall process of cultural mnemohistory.

## Conclusions

1. In contemporary Latvian literature, similar to trends in Western literature, there is a noticeable inclination to reconstruct individual memories and writing oneself within history. This phenomenon can be seen in various texts that explore past events through the author's perspective, particularly in metahistorical, metabiographical, and autofictional prose. This tendency aligns with the development of postmodernism, the emergence of a culture of

memory, and the introduction of mnemohistory and cultural memory theories in Latvia.

2. Although the spread of the autofiction genre began in modernism, its culmination in the Western world has been observed since the 1990s. Examples of autofiction in Latvian literature can be found already in the first precedents of postmodernism, for example, in the works of *Regīna Ezera* in the 1970s. However, in the 2000s, a greater spread of the autofiction genre has been observed. This increase indicates “cultural performance” of authorship, (...) a conscious enactment of the production of an authorial instance [Miceli 2024: 147].
3. To assess the performance of the autofiction genre, it is essential to reevaluate the notions of the boundaries between fact and fiction. Just as memoirs come alongside historical narratives to collectively reconstruct the shape of the past, literature also becomes a medium for this memory-history. In postmodernism, the oscillations between fact and fiction are used playfully and ironically to stimulate processes of deconstruction and revision. The metamodernist movement uses this combination to understand, deepen, and emotionally engage the past.
4. The author in autofiction appears as narrator and hero. Still, he is a narrativised version of that person rendered into writing [Worthington 2018: 2]. The author’s role in contemporary autofiction restores the search for meaning and runs counter to the ironic play of postmodernist fictions wherein author characters serve a flattening function, foregrounding the constructed textual surface of the fiction.
5. *Svens Kuzmins*’s novel in Latvian literature is one of vivid examples of 21<sup>st</sup>-century autofiction as the medium of mnemohistory which can no longer be fully described only from the perspective of postmodernism. The work’s characteristic personal involvement, orientation towards depth and authenticity, linking the past and present, sense of changing eras, assumption of responsibility, non-avoidance of emotionality and refusal of postmodern hiding in cynicism encourages us to examine this and other potentially typologically close prose texts from the perspective of the latest theoretical approaches.
6. The new perspective on autofiction and other combinations of documentary and fiction in literature is associated with an inclusive and interdisciplinary attitude because “the “textual approach” and the “documentary approach” are equally to be handled and brought into relation with each other in a case specific and subtle way. To look at how a text is made does not necessarily mean to deny the “truthfulness” and the historical value of what is reported” [Wagner-Egelhaaf 2019: 5]. This attitude is consistent with the mnemohistorical perspective.

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