ROCZNIKI HUMANISTYCZNE
Tom LXXII, zeszyt 11 – 2024
ZESZYT SPECJALNY / SPECIAL ISSUE
DOI: https://doi.org/10.18290/rh247211.10s

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THE FICTIONAL AND THE FACTUAL IN ALEXANDER J. MOTYL'S *WHO KILLED ANDREI WARHOL: THE AMERICAN DIARY OF A SOVIET JOURNALIST*[*]

Narratology studies offer a broad theorization of the problematics of fact and fiction in postmodern literature. Jean-Marie Schaeffer (2013), for instance, analyzes the distinguishing features of factual and fictional types of narratives, arguing that the former are referential whereas the latter have no reference, adding that "factual narrative advances claims of referential truthfulness whereas fictional narrative advances no such claims" ("Fictional vs. Factual Narration"). The scholar hypothesizes that the difference between factual and fictional narrative lies in the degree of the "libera[tion] from the epistemic constraints of truth value" ("Fictional vs. Factual Narration"). Discussing literary references in historical fiction, Jan Tlustý (2017), on the other hand, mentions that "through historical fiction, the very historicity of our human experience is revealed, while it is through imaginative play with the historical events and the guiding forces of an epoch that the reader discovers how history becomes inscribed in human lives, influencing our individual fates" (550). Another scholar, Thomas Pavel (1986), focuses on the properties of fictional discourse and delineates two major trends in the study of relations between reality and fiction, namely a segregationist view, which "characterize[s] the content of fictional texts as pure imagination without

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[*] Funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), under Germany's Excellence Strategy in the context of the Cluster of Excellence Temporal Communities: Doing Literature in a Global Perspective (EXC 2020), project ID: 390608380.

truth value" (11), and an integrationist outlook, "claiming that no genuine ontological difference can be found between fictional and nonfictional descriptions of the actual world" (11). Opposing both integrationist and segregationist approaches to theories of fiction, Ruth Ronen (1994) claims that "a certain autonomy should be granted to the logic and semantics of fiction, an autonomy that would prevent unwarranted attempts, on the part of literary theorists, to forward or imply claims about what is the 'actual state of affairs'" (11). Ronen further argues that "the fictionality of literary worlds is a composite phenomenon assuming both inter-world relations (fiction cannot be defined outside a cultural system that defines also nonfictional modes of being) and intra-world organization" (12). Borders that demarcate fiction are of interest also to Pavel (1986), who divides them into sacred, actuality, and representational ones (81).

The blurring of the demarcation line between historical facts and fictional entities characteristic of postmodern fiction has resulted in the increased interest of literary studies in the role factual discourse plays in a literary text. This article aims to analyze representations of historical facts and fictional material in Motyl's *Who Killed Andrei Warhol* through the lens of postmodern and narratological theories.

Born in New York City in 1953 in the family of second-generation Ukrainian immigrants, Motyl is a poet, writer, artist, and professor of political science at Rutgers University-Newark. He is an expert on Sovietology, Ukrainian political history, nationalisms, revolutions, and empire studies and a person of versatile talents; as a political scientist he contributes to *Kyiv Post*, *Ukrainian Tyzden* (*Ukrainian Weekly*) and American print media; he writes poetry and fiction, and creates art. Even though the writer's literary output is quite notable, his creative fiction has been overshadowed by his academic works, and, therefore, has rarely been the object of scrutiny of literary scholars. So far, the research on the author's early novels has been developed by Tetiana Ostapchuk and Tatiana Krol. Ostapchuk (2018) investigates the concepts of borderlands, borderscapes, and border memories in Motyl's novel *Fall River* (2014), as well as the image of a ship (Ostapchuk 2017) and the representations of DP characters (Ostapchuk 2014) in his *Whiskey Priest* (2005). The researcher argues that "in all his novels, Alexander Motyl constructs bonds with his own American and Ukrainian heritage, that of his family, and the national minority he belongs to" (Ostapchuk 2018, 86). Krol, on the other hand, investigates the Ukrainian historical component in *Sweet*

Snow (2013), focusing on famine studies and providing a comparative analysis of the novel in the context of other Irish and Ukrainian works of fiction.

Motyl's 2007 novel *Who Killed Andrei Warhol: The American Diary of a Soviet Journalist* is set in 1968 in New York, and the plot is constructed around the assassination attempt by Valerie Solanas to kill Andy Warhol in his Union Square studio "Factory". The writer opts for the diary form and adds an authorial preface and an introduction signed with the name of Vilen Abelin. The diary reconstructs an imaginary friendship between Warhol and a Soviet journalist, the relationship which the author defines as "Warholian" (Motyl 2007, ix).[1]

Emphasizing subjective experiences, postmodernism has demonstrated a steady interest in the genre of a literary diary, which, as Hooks (2020) writes, is specific to a given culture and moment and expresses "an emotional and actual experience of what has happened as … [a given person] remembers it" (xiii). Motyl's novel can be categorized as a variation of a literary diary, a pseudo-diary. A pseudo-diary appeals to factual material that creates the illusion of documentary evidence and offers a vibrant representation of the world that is not divisible into "fact" and "fiction", but embodies a labyrinth of endless reflections, thus exhibiting the playful nature of postmodern literature. Narration in the form of a diary allows an author to achieve verisimilitude and to represent an alternative view on history, thus evaluating a given era directly, through the eyes of a contemporary or—as is the case with a pseudo-diary—a specifically chosen persona.

One of the features of diaries is, as Julie Rak (2020) puts it, that they "begin where the diarist wants them to, pursue as winding a path as the writer wishes and, unlike autobiographies or fiction, do not end. They stop, some-

[1] The meaning of "Warholian" primarily suggests Warhol's aesthetics, marked by irony and self-irony, paradoxical mixture of the objectified and the arty, and the blurring of the boundaries between High Art and mass production. Pop art heralded the era of consumerism, emphasizing machine-fabricated objects rather than unique ones, and replicating and multiplying the former. Therefore, Warhol is credited with importing "the assembly line into the world of *Kunst*" (Tata 2006, 99), multiplying sameness and erasing uniqueness, utilizing "leftovers" and transforming a mass product into a cult, i.e., Warholian object of art. Similarly, compiling the fictional leftovers of the Soviet journalist's recollections, Motyl chooses the form of diary for his novel, "the quasi-literary diary genre", which constitutes "a dialogue with history … [with] that history … [being] reconstructed within the pages of the journal written in first person with chronological entries and dated pages" (Hooks 2020, xii). Following the paradigm of postmodern metafiction in the authorial foreword and utilizing self-irony, he reflects on the writing process, the authenticity of the diary, and its Warholian spirit, mentioning that: "A text that is so Warholian in spirit can only be an accurate representation of Andy Warhol's life. Andy, for one, would surely have given the diary the seal of approval—and that is all that matters" (Motyl 2007, x).

times without warning, suspended or exhausted or finished as the lives of their writers continue elsewhere, unless they themselves have died" (65–66). In Motyl's novel, the entries in Ivanov's diary end abruptly after the protagonist learns about the attempt to kill Warhol. This leaves the readers disoriented, their expectations for a denouement thwarted. Therefore, the novel's opening part signed by Vilen Abelin aims to not only introduce the main character and the scribbler of the diary, Olexandr Ivanov, but also articulate the reasons for the unexpected end of Ivanov's visit to America, the decline of his career after *perestroika*, and his death after the collapse of the USSR. Furthermore, in the introduction, Abelin provides a commentary on the diary, emphasizing his role in its editing and publishing. Thus, the narrative strategy of the preface echoes the introduction written by Pat Hackett for *The Andy Warhol's Diaries* (1989), in which the editor refers to the history of her friendship with the artist and defines her contribution to the compendium of personal records of Warhol's life.

Motyl's fascination with the life and personality of the pop artist was sparked by the documentary *Absolut Warhola* (2001), which made him aware of the similarities he shared with Warhol, i.e. their East European background and the influence of the Slavic culture on their lives. As the writer mentions in an interview with Dzvinia Orlowsky,

> I suddenly realized that I had sort of known all the time—that Warhol was a Slav and that he grew up in an immigrant neighborhood, went to church every Sunday, celebrated Christmas on January 7, and then eventually broke out of the ghetto and came to the big city. His story was my story—well, sort of—and that piqued my interest in his life and career and work. (quoted in Orlowsky 2008)

In "Was Andy Warhol Ukrainian?",[2] Motyl explores the influence of the twenty-year-period of Rusyn poverty-stricken life in a Pennsylvanian ghetto community on the artist's personality and his artistic production. Motyl reflects on Warhol's ethnic background and his art, and argues that the trendsetting New York avant-garde artist "Andy Warhol always remained Andrew

[2] This article sparked debate in Warhol studies. Paul Robert Magocsi (2019) criticized Motyl's idea that Warhol "belongs at least partly to the culture of Ukraine" (Motyl 2011–2014, 554), claiming it a "cultural appropriation of the most misconstrued kind". The scholar concludes: "No cultural appropriation, Slovak or Ukrainian, is necessary for Andy Warhol, who undoubtedly is an American artist of Carpatho-Rusyn ethnic heritage". For detailed research on Warhol's ethnic origin, see Elaine Rusinko's "Andy Warhol's Ancestry: Facts, Myths, and Mysteries" (2019).

Warhola": "a shy boy of peasant stock who was born and raised in a deeply religious and cloistered Eastern European ghetto community in Pittsburgh" (Motyl 2011–2014, 549). The researcher explains that after their immigration to the USA the Warholas were immersed in the local Rusyn community, never quite learned English, and remained deeply religious. Thus, Rusyn rituals were a normal part of Andy's life, making it hard for him fit in:

> Although his low self-esteem was partly a product of his being sickly, shy, and gay, one can't help suspecting that it was also related to his being as a "bohunk," with strange-looking parents who spoke broken English, went to church regularly, and did not comprehend American ways. (Motyl 2011–2014, 550)

Motyl adds that American society used to discriminate against Slavs, and in Pittsburgh, where Warhol was raised, "Rusyns not only lived in a dirty ghetto, but also held the dirtiest jobs … and in the early part of the twentieth century generally occupied the lowest rung of immigrant society, lower even than the Italians, Irish, and Germans" (550). Motyl's hypothesis is that Warhol's ethnic background and Eastern-rite Catholicism influenced his art:

> The move from Pittsburgh to New York [in 1949] may have symbolized a break with the past and been reflective of his insufficiently "subjective" national consciousness, but it would be absurd to think that so many years would not have left their mark on his later creativity. (552)

Thus, Motyl argues in favor of perceiving Warhol's approach to art as a commodity not "as a path-breaking reconceptualization of the nature of art in capitalist society, but … as a peasant boy's belief that all art, not just folk art, is part of everyday existence and as such can serve as a source of livelihood" (552–53).[3]

At the center of Motyl's (2007) novel is "an insider's view of Warhol's private life" (ix), and the representation of historical events in 1968 through the gaze of the fictional character instructed in the Soviet ideological paradigm. The persona of Ivanov demarcates the juxtaposition of the two diametrically opposite ideological concepts—American, grounded in the freedom of the individual and outlined in the image of Warhol, and Soviet, embodied

[3] In *Who Killed Andrei Warhol* Motyl portrays Warhol as a silent, exquisitely shy artist and compares his paintings to Ukrainian folk art: "I steal a look at the canvas and see that it, like the one in the Factory, is of enormous flowers. Ukrainian folk art immediately comes to mind. This Andrei Warhol is just a Carpathian craftsman, I think, probably like his ancestors" (2007, 83).

in the reflections of the journalist. It is for that reason that the novel's protagonist, journalist Oleksandr, or Sasha, Ivanov is central to understanding the novel. Ivanov arrives in New York at the height of the garbage strike. He resides at the Chelsea Hotel and regularly attends the office of the Communist party of the USA, which is, by coincidence, located in the same building as Warhol's "Factory". Thus, Ivanov gets acquainted with Andy Warhol, or as he calls him Andrei Warhol. In Ivanov's perception, Warhol is a working-class man as the word "Factory" proves to the journalist that he is a proletarian genius and a socialist realist painter: "We are in the artist's studio, and it is called the Factory. *Zavod!* The name is music to my proletarian ears, and I think that perhaps this thin man Andy has more to him than meets the eye" (Motyl 2007, 36).

For Ivanov, Warhol's art is purely proletarian and revolutionary as it "meticulously executes portraits of everyday things":

> I see bottles, cans—many, many cans, all by a capitalist food-producing company called Campbell's that I have seen in the stores—and other simple things that workers use in order to survive in the capitalist world. There are even paintings of money—plain green bills that dominate the whole canvas just as they dominate capitalist life,… the objects that fetishize, and that workers use, just use in order to live and reproduce their labor power—are all painted in a completely realistic style.… I do not know if Andrei is a Marxist, but I begin to suspect that he is a socialist realist painter. (Motyl 2007, 41)

Similarly, the eponymous paintings of Marilyn Monroe are also interpreted in terms of socialist realism and propagandistic cliches of the Soviet ideology. The protagonist explains: "Andrei is trying to say that Marilyn Monroe was a victim of capitalism—a martyr crucified on the cross of capitalist relations of production" (48). This reductionist commentary is a satirical representation of, as Motyl calls it, "the overintellectualized attempts of Warhol's interpreters to present him as a deeply philosophical thinker" (2011–2014, 552).

Motyl's (2007) depiction of Ivanov as "a passionate Communist" (xi) is congruent with the Soviet biased view on art, as invariably serving the cause of the class struggle. In Ivanov's view, Warhol's art is a collective enterprise and "his paintings ostensibly only depict capitalist objects, but in reality, they subject them to a savage proletarian critique" (124). To Ivanov, Warhol's freedom of artistic experimentation makes him "an American Lenin, a revolutionary with an iron will and a clear vision of the world. Like Vladimir Illich," Ivanov thinks, "Andrei is committed to a revolutionary transfor-

mation of the material—and spiritual—conditions of existence" (125). "I have fallen into the magical world of Andrei Warhol," he admits. "It is also the world in which the forces of motion, the dynamics that inspire it, are very different from those I know. There is no gravity here, and I am weightless" (127).

It is also Ivanov's Soviet mindset that directs his response to the news of Warhol's homosexuality. At first, having found out about Warhol's sexual orientation, Ivanov views it as "perversion" and "abnormality"; he feels stunned and shocked, his head is spinning, "like Lenin's after the seizure of the Winter Palace" (157). Subsequently, however, the reasoning of a communist and the determinism of a Marxist help him realize that he "has entered a perverted world – a capitalist world that destroys human life and forces normal human beings to act in abnormal ways. These bums and addicts and prostitutes were not born that way," Ivanov concludes, "They were made by the world, by the social conditions in which they live" (158). In other words, in Ivanov Motyl creates a compelling picture of a Soviet citizen, who is totally convinced about the advantages of living in the USSR, struggling for communism, and serving the Soviet state (158), and who simultaneously considers being born in the USA, the world of capitalism, a misfortune.[4]

Still, Ivanov's very persona as well as his fictitious relationship with Warhol allow Motyl to do much more than just investigate the Soviet mindset, for they also provide the background necessary for the novel's experimentation with facts. As the author puts it, "Ivanov's claims that Warhol opposed capitalism and promoted the interests of the working class in his art strike us as nothing less than a classic postmodernist inversion.… The irony," Motyl adds, "is that Warhol made postmodernism possible and the postmodernism has made Ivanov's critique of Warhol plausible" (ix).

In the preface to the novel, the fictive editor of Ivanov's diary, Vilen Abelin, highlights the historical background of the year 1968, and Warhol's

[4] The text abounds in authorial irony and offers a satirical perspective on Soviet propaganda and the hypocrisy of the totalitarian state. Reconstructing Ivanov's perception of "the bastion of imperialism" (85), the writer uses formulae of the Soviet press. Likewise, to delineate the protagonist's state of mind and to emphasize how deep the seeds of propaganda were rooted in the mentality of Soviet citizens, Motyl adds transcribed words from the lexicon of the Soviet period (*Belomor*, *gastronom*, *zavod*, *vozhd, partocratchik*, *nachalnik, apparatchik*), ideological cliches (*the bastion of the global bourgeoisie*, *builders of communism*, *architects of a new society*, *the cause of revolution*) as well as references to socialist reality (*a five-year plan*, *to work with Stakhanovite speed*, *socialist realism*, *a proletarian artist*). The writer intentionally uses archaisms to underline the entropy of Soviet scholarship in the field of English studies.

assassination attempt by Valerie Solanas on June 3, 1968. The reader finds out that the Soviet journalist "tried and failed, to prevent Solanas from shooting Andy" (xiv). Abelin suggests also that the Soviet journalist could have had considerable influence on Warhol's art if the former had stayed longer in New York. "It was then that Andy began searching for new directions," Abelin notes,

> and the diary provides some evidence of Sasha's influence. Andy's later important paintings of the communist hammer and sickle, for instance, appear to have had their roots in an extended conversation with Sasha. We can only speculate how Andy's art would have evolved if Sasha had not returned to the USSR and their friendship had continued. (Motyl 2017, xiii)

The quote triggers counterfactual thinking, and makes the reader imagine potential outcomes in the logic of a counterfactual narrative. If the reader follows the narrator's imperative to "think or imagine how Warhol's art might have changed if," he or she starts speculating and contemplating other options of Warhol's artistic development. Another episode in the novel which opens the gate for the counterfactual flight of fantasy and sends the fictional game into a spin is the journalist's attempt to thwart Warhol's assassination. Such potentialities delineated in the novel echo the ongoing literary debates concerning counterfactuality.

The study of counterfactuality has gained popularity among philosophers, historians, and literary scholars, who deal with "what-if" narrations. In the postmodern age of uncertainties, historians construct models of hypothetical chains of events, as does, for instance, Niall Ferguson in *Virtual History* (1999). Similarly, fiction writers build counterfactual scenarios and alternative histories, biographies, or autobiographies. While such "virtual" history is viewed by some historians and critics as an "unproductive approach in historiographic research" (Sládek 2010), counterfactual historical fiction and counterfactual narratives are quite abundant in contemporary fiction. Lubomír Doležel (2011, 106–9) gives examples of apocryphal counterhistories, such as Carlos Fuentes's *Terra Nostra* (1971), Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* (1953), Philip Dick's *Man in the High Castle* (1962), Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration* (1976), and Robert Haris's *Fatherland* (1992). Demonstrating how the counterfactual construction of the past works, Doležel addresses the philosophical tale *Sanatorium under the Sign of the Hourglass* by Bruno Schulz. "The narrator-protagonist visits the surreal sanatorium," Doležel writes, "to find his father, who had died in the actual world, alive and well.

Dr. Gotard explains to the narrator that such a counterfactual event can be effected by a special manipulation of time: 'Here we reactivate the past with its possibilities'" (111), the narrator hears. Drawing on Schulz, Doležel concludes that what counterfactual or alternative histories do is "reactivate the past with … [their] preactualized possibilities and then consider how human history might have proceeded after a counterfactual possibility had been actualized" (111). In the view of Ondrej Sládek (2010), counterfactual history (or historiography) differs fundamentally from counterfactual historical fiction and counterfactual narratives, as the "processing of historical facts as formation of hypotheses in counterfactual historical fiction is not limited to verifiable assumptions"; differences surface as well in the handling of reference, or of language, and in the general construction of narrative. Sládek refers to the role of the narrator, which is identified by Gerard Genette as one of the significant criteria in the study of the relation between fictional and factual narrative: "In counterfactual narratives," Sládek writes, "the role of the narrator is complicated by the fact that they are quite frequently not just purely factual or fictional narratives." Christopher Prendergast, on the other hand, distinguishes counterfactuals from fiction proper defining the former as a sub-genre and claiming that

> despite valiant efforts elsewhere to develop a general account of fiction as a branch of "possible worlds" theory, backed by a view of counterfactuals as fiction's "natural habitat", the logic of fiction in general starts from a different place, not in the assumption of a "what-if", but in the operation of an "as-if"…. Counterfactual fictions are a sub-genre of the class of fiction in which the "as-if" is married to a "what-if", but the two are not the same. (2019, 9)

In his counterfactual comic narrative about Solanas' attempt to kill Warhol, Motyl blurs the line between historical and fictionalized facts. As a result, fictional characters (Ivanov and the Soviet communists Kelebek and Kolibri, Katyusha) and historical persons (Warhol, Julia Zawacka, Solanas, Gus Hall, Morris Childs) co-exist in the novel on equal footing. Therefore, while Motyl's novels *Sweet Snow* and *Fall River* can be categorized as historical fiction, with the writer set on reconstructing the history of the 1933 Famine (Holodomor) in the Soviet Ukraine or portraying the toil of displacement and emigration after the Second World War, *Who Killed Andrei Warhol* is an alternative life history, which creates a fictional world that agrees with historical records. In the novel, Motyl paints a historical portrait of the year 1968: he depicts hippie gatherings in New York, anti-Vietnam

war protests, the civil rights movement, and the student uprising at Columbia University, mentioning also seminal events like the Prague Spring, Robert Kennedy's candidacy for president of the U.S., and the assassination of Rudi Dutschke in Berlin. Poetic license allows the writer to introduce the historical context onto the fictitious canvas of the novel.

Motyl's literary text is a satire and critique of the USSR and communist ideology and propaganda, but, as the writer himself concludes, it also satirizes postmodern thinking, "unintentionally manag[ing] to make sense of nonsense and nonsense of sense in ways that can be termed hilarious" ("New Novel"). Still, the paradoxical postmodern introduction of new historical "facts", or rather counterfacts, defines Motyl's work of fiction as postmodern, clearly foregrounding Linda Hutcheon's (1998) idea that "[p]ostmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" (110).

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THE FICTIONAL AND THE FACTUAL IN ALEXANDER J. MOTYL'S *WHO KILLED ANDREI WARHOL: THE AMERICAN DIARY OF A SOVIET JOURNALIST*

Summary

The article addresses the 2007 novel *Who Killed Andrei Warhol: The American Diary of a Soviet Journalist* by Alexander J. Motyl, analyzing its literary representations of the factual and the counterfactual. In his comic narrative about the past, constructed in the form of a diary of a

Soviet journalist, Motyl blurs the line between historical and fictionalized facts. As a result, fictional characters (journalist Ivanov, Soviet communists Kelebek and Kolibri, Katyusha) and historical persons (Andy Warhol, Julia Zawacka, Valerie Solanas, Gus Hall, Morris Childs) co-exist on equal footing. Motyl's novel is also regarded as a critique of the USSR, communist ideology, and propaganda, and as a satire on postmodern thinking. The article discusses the genre features of *Who Killed Andrei Warhol* as a novel written in the form of a pseudo diary. The theoretical framework of the article is provided by the studies of the literary diary, and the works on representations of historical facts and counterfactuality in fiction.

Keywords: American popular fiction; political satire; the factual; the fictional; literary diary; Alexander J. Motyl

ELEMENTY FIKCYJNE I FAKTYCZNE W POWIEŚCI ALEKSANDRA J. MOTYLA *WHO KILLED ANDREI WARHOL: THE AMERICAN DIARY OF A SOVIET JOURNALIST*

Streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy wydanej w 2007 roku powieści *Who Killed Andrei Warhol: The American Diary of a Soviet Journalist* autorstwa Aleksandra J. Motyla i analizuje reprezentacje faktów i kontrfaktów w dziele literackim. W narracji komiksowej o przeszłości skonstruowanej w formie pamiętnika radzieckiego dziennikarza Aleksander J. Motyl zaciera granicę między faktami historycznymi a fabularyzowanymi. W efekcie w powieści współistnieją postaci fikcyjne (radziecki dziennikarz Iwanow, komuniści Kelebek i Kolibri, Katiusza) i historyczne (Andy Warhol, Julia Zawacka, Valerie Solanas, Gus Hall, Morris Childs). Powieść Motyla uznawana jest także za krytykę ZSRR, ideologii i propagandy komunistycznej oraz satyrę na myśl postmodernistyczną. W artykule omówiono cechy gatunkowe powieści jako pseudopamiętnika. Ramę teoretyczną artykułu stanowią badania nad dziennikiem literackim oraz prace nad przedstawieniami faktów historycznych i kontrfaktycznością w fikcji.

Słowa kluczowe: amerykańska literatura popularna; satyra polityczna; fikcyjne; faktyczne; dziennik literacki; Aleksander J. Motyl