

GASTRONYMS AS MARKERS OF IDENTITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY FRENCH-LANGUAGE NOVEL

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Черкашина Т. Гастрономи як маркери ідентичності у сучасному франкомовному романі

У статті актуалізовано дослідження гастрономів як маркерів ідентичності в сучасному франкомовному літературному дискурсі. Проаналізовано романістику сучасних франкомовних авторів, зокрема Мюріель Барбері, Амелі Нотомб, Мішеля Уельбека з ретроспекцією у французьку літературу реалізму, натуралізму, регіоналізму. У цьому аспекті згадано романи Еміля Золя, Бориса Віана, Марселя Паньоля. У сучасному франкомовному літературному дискурсі гастрономи постають додатковими засобами характеристики персонажів (передусім для більш повного розкриття їх психологічного портрету, засобом репрезентації їх як представників того чи того соціального прошарку населення, етносу). Часто кулінарний дискурс представлено як етнографічний маркер, гастрономічний путівник певної місцевості. Романи “Ласоці” Мюріель Барбері, “Ні Єва, ні Адам” Амелі Нотомб, “Покора” Мішеля Уельбека катологізують регіональні, національні й інтернаціональні кулінарні традиції, які органічно поєднуються в кулінарних уподобаннях французів. Любов до споживання французьких регіональних страв стає локальною характеристикою героїв, описом їх як типових представників певної місцевості, певного регіону; ідентифікує їх родову приналежність, бо регіональна кухня асоціюється передусім із домашньою їжею. Заоплення героїв національною, “високою”, кухнею репрезентує їх як представників французької нації, як людей, які пишуться своєю країною, її гастрокультурою; ідентифікує їх як активних і свідомих громадян. Тяжіння до споживання інтернаціональних гастрономів характеризує персонажів як нетипових представників своєї нації, ідентифікує їх як космополітів, людей, які відриваються від своїх джерел, є відкритими світові, усьому новому. Часом гастрономічні уподобання героїв руйнують соціальні, національні, культурні стереотипи, що яскраво представлено в романах “Елегантність їзачихи” Мюріель Барбері й “Ні Єва, ні Адам” Амелі Нотомб, головні героїні яких свідомо порушують загальноприйняті правила.

Ключові слова: сучасна франкомовна література, гастроном, гастрономічний дискурс, Мюріель Барбері, Амелі Нотомб, Мішель Уельбек.

Cherkashyna T. Gastronyms as markers of identity in the contemporary french-language novel

*The article updates the study of gastronyms as markers of identity in contemporary French-language literary discourse. The author analyses the novels of contemporary French-language authors, in particular Muriel Barbery, Amélie Notomb, Michel Houellebecq, with a retrospective to the French literature of realism, naturalism, regionalism, and mentions the novels of Émile Zola, Boris Vian, and Marcel Pagnol in this regard. In the contemporary French-language literary discourse, gastronyms are additional means of characterising characters (primarily for a more complete disclosure of their psychological portrait, a means of representing them as representatives of a particular social stratum or ethnic group). Often, culinary discourse becomes an ethnographic marker, a gastronomic guide to a particular area. Muriel Barbery's novels "Delicacies", Amélie Notomb's "Neither Eve nor Adam", and Michel Houellebecq's "Submission" catechise regional, national, and international culinary traditions that are organically combined in the French culinary preferences. The love of eating French regional dishes becomes a local characteristic of the characters, describing them as typical representatives of a certain area, a certain region, and identifying their family affiliation, as regional cuisine is associated primarily with home cooking. The characters' fascination with national, "haute" cuisine represents them as representatives of the French nation, as people who are proud of their country and its gastronomic culture, and identifies them as active, conscious citizens. The tendency to consume international gastronomic items characterises the characters as atypical representatives of their nation, identifies them as cosmopolitans, people who break away from their origins, are open to the world, to everything new. Sometimes the gastronomic preferences of the characters destroy social, national, and cultural stereotypes, which is vividly represented in the novels *The "Elegance of the Hedgehog"* by Muriel Barbery and *"Neither Eve nor Adam"* by Amélie Notomb, whose main characters deliberately break the generally accepted rules.*

Keywords: *contemporary French-language literature, gastronome, gastronomic discourse, Muriel Barbery, Amélie Notomb, Michel Houellebecq.*

General statement of the problem and its connection with important scientific or practical tasks. Gastronomes have long been a part of the poetics of French-language novels, which is no coincidence, as French cuisine is one of the most famous and best in the world, it lays the foundations of the modern world gastronomic culture, and other national cuisines are guided by it, so it was quite deservedly and naturally recognised by UNESCO in 2010 as the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. The French-language literary discourse actively uses gastronomic themes to individualise characters, to recreate local colour, and to emphasise the special role of national gastronomic traditions in the life of French society. Therefore, the study of French culinary discourse in the works of French-speaking contemporary authors will allow us to better reveal the peculiarities of the national mentality, cultural traditions and transformations that take place in the life of the French people.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Identification of previously unsolved parts of the overall problem. The analysed topic has already been the subject of philosophical, cultural, sociological, linguistic and literary reflections, in particular, we already have the studies of Fritz Olhoff [5], Karin Becker [11, 12], Jean-Jacques Boutaud [13], Joshua J. Frye and Michael S. Bruner [16], Sidolyn Naulin [19], Georg Zimmel [1], Vadym Nikolenko [4], who in their works attempted to correlate the gastronomic traditions of a particular nation with the specifics of the national mentality. Noteworthy are the scientific works of Svitlana Kovpik [2, 3], which review the culinary preferences of the characters of literary works by different national authors in historical, literary and theoretical aspects. In the context of our research, we also draw attention to the studies of Stéphane Chaudier [14], Lydia Cotea [15], Clement Lemaitre [18], and Hanna Satanovska [6], who have investigated the poetics of works by individual French-speaking authors, addressing, among other things, the analysis of the culinary discourse of the individual novels that will be the subject of this article. The gastronomic discourse of one of the novels mentioned in this article was analysed in more detail in our previous articles [7, 8]. However, even today we do not have thorough literary studies that would comprehensively address the issue under consideration, including with a focus on the traditions and innovations of reproducing gastronomic discourse in contemporary French-language novels, on changes in the culinary traditions of the French, on the coexistence of national (including regional) and international gastronomes in the everyday gastronomic culture of the French, which is reflected in the pages of contemporary French-language works, becomes a means of expressing the identity of the characters, and helps to actualise other problems, primarily of a social nature, raised in literary works.

Formulation of the purpose and objectives of the article. The aim of our study is to analyse the gestures of contemporary French-language discourse as a means of expressing the identity (national, regional, cultural, social) of the protagonists.

Presentation of the main research material. Gastronyms as markers of characters' self-identification have long been used in the French literary tradition, especially in the era of realism and naturalism, and later in the literature of ethnography and regionalism. Their inclusion in a literary work made it possible to fully reveal the psychological portrait of the hero, to represent him as a representative of a certain social class, ethnicity, as was the case in the novel "Foam of days" [25] ("Écumes des jours") by Boris Vian, where the protagonist is a consumer of gastronomic

items that are completely atypical for ordinary French people, real culinary masterpieces, some of which are on the verge of reality and fantasy, such as his famous “pianoctail”, a fanciful mixture of drinks and the sounds they make: “*For each note, says Colin, I use an alcohol, liqueur or flavouring. The strong pedal corresponds to beaten egg and the weak pedal to ice cream. For seltzer, you need a trill in the high register. The quantities are directly related to the duration: a sixteenth note is equivalent to one-sixteenth of a unit, a quarter note to one unit and a round note to four units. When a slow tune is played, a system of registers is set in motion, so that the dose is not increased – which would result in an over-abundant cocktail – but the alcohol content. And, depending on the duration of the tune, you can, if you wish, vary the value of the unit, reducing it, for example, to a hundredth, so that you can obtain a drink that takes account of all the harmonies by means of a lateral adjustment*” [25, p. 13].

At times, it could be a characteristic of more general images, as in Emile Zola’s novel “The Belly of Paris” [26] (“Le ventre de Paris”, 1873), where gestural discourse was used to characterise the image of the French capital: “*Paris was chewing the fat of its two million inhabitants*” [26, p. 26], “*Paris, fat, superb, overflowing with food, in the depths of darkness; he entered it, on a bed of vegetables; he rolled there, in a stranger of edibles, which he felt swarming around him and which worried him*” [26, p. 7].

Gastronomic discourse became an integral part of the literature of regionalism. For example, the autobiographical tetralogy “Childhood memories” [21–24] (“Souvenirs d’enfance”) by Marcel Pagnol, one of the most prominent representatives of French regionalist literature, is replete with descriptions of Provençal dishes, their subtle gustatory characteristics, cooking techniques, and the processes of selecting and collecting ingredients. From the pages of the memoir tetralogy, a real culinary encyclopedia of typical Provençal cuisine emerges. For example, the mother of the protagonist of the tetralogy cooks exclusively typical Provençal dishes, for which he and his friends go hunting (primarily partridges) and collect the local Provençal herbs necessary for cooking.

The same feature of using gastronyms in a work of fiction continues to be actualised by contemporary French authors. Thus, stereotyping associated with the creation of a typical menu for a typical representative of a particular social stratum is imbued in the novel “The Elegance of the Hedgehog” [9] (“L’Élégance du hérisson”) by the contemporary French writer Muriel Barbery. The novel plays on the stereotypical perception of the concierge’s culinary preferences by the residents of an elite building, which is why the main character has to specially prepare dishes that are

atypical for her food tastes, just so that their smells fill the lobby of the building and do not debunk the myth of a typical concierge of a typical elite building in the central part of Paris.

While the protagonist of Muriel Barbery's novel "The Elegance of the Hedgehog" accepts the rules of the game and supports the culinary game imposed by social stereotypes, the protagonists of the novel "Neither Eve nor Adam" [20] ("Ni Ève, ni Adam") by the contemporary French-speaking writer Amélie Notomb, on the contrary, break the stereotypes of national cultural preferences of representatives of different nations (more about this in our previous study [7]). The protagonist, a Belgian cosmopolitan, chooses to eat only traditional Japanese dishes every time, while her fiancé, a typical Japanese from a respectable Tokyo family, prefers international gastronomic items, excluding the purely Japanese international gastronomic items of sushi and sashimi. Thus, the process of choosing gastronomic names becomes a vivid means of characterisation. A representative of a typical closed Japanese ethnic community tries to internationalise through his culinary preferences, while a cosmopolitan European girl tries to localise herself through her choice of purely local gastronomes, emphasising over and over again that these gastronomes are available only in Japanese cuisine that is closed to the world and cannot be found even in the most sophisticated and expensive restaurants in the world.

Just like the gastronomic names in Marcel Pagnol's "Childhood memories" and Muriel Barbery's "The Elegance of the Hedgehog", the Japanese gastronomic names in Amélie Notomb's "Neither Eve nor Adam" are available for consumption only in the area described. At the same time, a small part of purely national gastronyms can go beyond the local gastronomic culture and become international stereotypes (such as sushi, pizza or hamburgers). An interesting reflection on this phenomenon can be found in contemporary French novels. For example, the protagonist of the novel "Delicacies" [10] ("Une Gourmandise") by Muriel Barbery, a well-known food critic, conducts a real research based on the study of national food types. Portion sizes, the choice of dishes according to the principle of "typical for the local culinary tradition" / "atypical for the local culinary tradition", "healthy" ("useful") / "unhealthy" ("harmful"), "haute cuisine" ("complex") / "ordinary cuisine" ("simple", "unpretentious"), etc, the culture of their consumption, according to the protagonist, characterises not only individual national representatives (typical French, typical Americans, etc.) but also the nation as a whole. For example, he explores French cuisine, which is made up of numerous regional gastronomic specialities, most of which can only be prepared with local

regional products, and at the same time, it is characterised by the existence of “haute cuisine”, which is an integral part of French gastronomic life and has long gone beyond the borders of France, becoming a global gastronomic treasure.

In the spirit of French regionalist literature, the protagonist of “Delicacies” embarks on a culinary journey, describing in detail the French regional gastronomy. Recalling his childhood, just like the protagonist of Marcel Pagnol’s tetralogy “Childhood memories”, the protagonist of Muriel Barbery’s novel “Delicacies” catalogues in detail the typical Breton cuisine he ate every year on holiday at his grandparents’ house: “*Every year we went to Brittany. My grandmother worked magic in the kitchen. In her skilful hands, the simplest things turned into real miracles. White wine flowed like a river, and we ate, ate, ate. Sea urchins, oysters, mussels, fried shrimps, crabs with mayonnaise, squid with sauce, and of course roasts, stews, paella, chickens and geese - fried, stewed, baked, you name it*” [10, p. 25]. Grandpa’s sardine frying was a real treat for the children. As the protagonist of the novel said: “*There’s something about any fried fish, from simple mackerel to gourmet salmon, that is beyond culture*” [10, p. 25].

Later, with the same care, the protagonist of the novel catalogues the gastronomic system of another French region, Normandy, with its unchanging gastronomic elements, such as cider, calvados, flambé chicken, apples, apple pie, numerous dishes of wild animals and birds, but also a variety of seafood (oysters, mussels, squid, etc.).

The protagonist of the novel pays tribute to the common elements of French cuisine from different regions — bread, tomatoes, cheese. The description of the tomatoes that the protagonist tasted on his aunt’s farm is illustrative: “*In salad, roasted in the oven, in vegetable stew, in jam, fried, stuffed, dried, cherry, large and soft, green and bitter, flavoured with olive oil, coarse salt, wine, sugar, pepper, peeled, in the form of paste, sauce, mash, foam, even in sorbet*” [10, p. 34]. A description that presents almost all the most famous ways to prepare this basic product.

As the protagonist of the novel reflected, the regional gastronomic system, which had not changed for years, gave people a sense of belonging to the family, to the land, to unchanging centuries-old traditions, “*the indestructibility of granite*” [10, p. 89]. Instead, the existence of a powerful French restaurant culture, “haute” cuisine, was, on the one hand, a link to national traditions, and on the other hand, an open field for innovation, a kind of intermediate link between tradition and innovation: “*Menu: Royal stew: sea urchin in Sancho red wine with back, kidneys and liver of young rabbit and clams. Cod mackerel; southern-style mako-viola, fatty Gigliardo*

oysters and grilled foie gras. Thick mackerel broth with leeks. Turbot fillet, poached in a cocotte with herbs and rustic cider. Pieces of duchesse pears in cucumber leaves. Godoumi Gautier in aniseed liqueur with nutmeg flower and dried fruit, foie gras with radish [10, p. 82].

At the same time, the existence of its own powerful national gastronomic system does not exclude the inclusion of foreign cultural elements that are perceived as an exotic, international gastronomic segment. In many contemporary French novels, Japanese gastronomic elements such as sushi and sashimi are most often introduced. The protagonist of the novel “Delicacies” by Muriel Barbery reflects on the fact that dishes, the process of their preparation and consumption correlate with the established lifestyle and worldview of a nation. In contrast to the complicated and sophisticated culinary traditions, and thus lifestyle, of the French people, the Japanese gastronomic system and lifestyle are simple and minimalistic. In one of the chapters of the novel, the protagonist, then a young culinary critic, goes to a Japanese restaurant. The first thing that strikes him is the restaurant itself: “*In the restaurant, free of any frills, the hall was spartanly austere, and the chairs were not the most comfortable*” [10, p. 39]. Thus, a Japanese restaurant becomes a place of cold elegance, severity, clarity, and an expression of those features that are stereotypically denigrated in Japanese culture. This coldness and severity is also expressed in the frequent reference to the image of a stone: “*Cutting raw fish is like cutting stones*” [10, p. 39], — says the main character. At the same time, there is a “*marble silence*” [10, p. 39] in the kitchen while cooking sashimi.

The protagonist, who, as he admits, “*grew up on cassoulet and cabbage soup*” [10, p. 39], observes the process of making sashimi: “*Chef Tsuno performed his act in front of me, his movements were light and stingy, frugal to the point of greed, but I could see flowers of pink, white and grey flesh blooming and blossoming in pearly moiré. I stared in awe: a miracle was happening before my eyes. It was a shock*” [10, p. 39]. Later, this work of art — sashimi — appears as something magical and perfect: “*Sashimi, a little bit of velvet, a little bit of silk, a little bit of a light cloud, in its strange alchemy retains a milky consistency that fog does not. The first pink bite that touched me so deeply was salmon, and I still had to meet flounder, scallop and octopus*” [10, p. 39]. According to the protagonist, “*through the network of sushi restaurants, the Japanese bring the image of their country to the world and transmit to it a peculiar way of life and devotion to traditions*” [10, p. 65].

Japanese cuisine is also a motif in Muriel Barbery’s novel “The Elegance of the Hedgehog”. The main character’s sashimi tasting ceremony is

presented in a similar style to the novel “Delicacies” as something incredible, fantastic and extremely exciting. The subtle taste and visual impressions are conveyed in the same way. However, in contrast to the novel “Delicacies”, where considerable attention was paid to sashimi as a central image, and an atmosphere of mystery, rigour and precision was felt, in “The Elegance of the Hedgehog”, the main character’s consumption of sashimi is more of a celebration, a solemn atmosphere, where “*everything was shimmering, sparkling, crystal and velvet*” [9, p. 272], with a huge number of accompanying details that created this atmosphere, such as: “*a lot of patterned cups*” [9, p. 272], “*a lot of small vegetables*” [9, p. 272], “*sake bottles*” [9, p. 272], which together created a real “*sushi banquet*” [9, p. 272].

Sushi, as an exotic and at the same time international gastronomy, also appears in the novel “Submission” [17] (“Soumission”) by Michel Houellebecq. In the novel, this gastronomy is something incomprehensible to the protagonist, he does not try to learn it and needs it only because, according to the protagonist, women love it: “*Everyone always agrees on sushi, even such fastidious gastronomes as caring women*” [17, p. 94]. That is why, having invited his girlfriend on a date, the first thing the protagonist does is offer her sushi. “*She didn’t want to eat, but everything always ends up with food. — Do you want sushi?*” [17, p. 94]. However, as it turns out later, the sushi does not save the situation and the girl leaves the protagonist in the middle of the restaurant without waiting for the order, “*the sushi arrived a few minutes after she left*” [17, p. 94] and for the protagonist it remained a purely “female” dish, a dish for seduction, completely alien to the protagonist.

Throughout the novel, the author introduces other gastronomic terms that are atypical of traditional French cuisine, but are already typical of the everyday food of ordinary French people. Indian dishes such as biryani with chicken (a dish similar to pilaf) and chicken tika masala (chicken with curry sauce) are already commonplace. Later on, the hero eats tabbouleh (a kind of oriental salad), meze (a set of snacks), sambousek with cheese (pies with cheese), Lebanese red wine, etc. While in Muriel Barbery’s novel “Delicacies” gastronomes become regional or national culinary guides, and in Amelie Notomb’s “Neither Eve nor Adam” they become a means of knowing oneself and knowing the Other, Michel Houellebecq pursues a different goal — to show how the French society is gradually changing through the entry of foreign gastronomes into the typical diet of the average Frenchman. Just as foreign gastronomic foods are part of the national French cuisine, so French society is gradually being filled with people of other nationalities. In this way, Michel Houellebecq actualises the political implications of the

novel. At the same time, Michel Houellebecq, like the vast majority of other contemporary French authors, does not ignore regional French cuisine, as the last, in his opinion, stronghold of the French nation.

Conclusions and prospects for research in this area. In contemporary French novels, the gastronomic system appears, on the one hand, as a reflection of the stable, patriarchal, culinary tradition of French culture, as a local, original culture, and, on the other hand, as an element of a multicultural environment that eventually brings changes to the eating habits of the French nation, globalising them and bringing them into a wider global context. At the same time, gastronomys become vivid characteristics of the characters' personal qualities and an additional means of revealing the author's intentions.

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