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Transgenerational Imagery in Sofia Andrukhovych's Novella Collection *Old People*

1 A New Generation Representing a National Imaginary

A representative of the younger generation of women writers in independent Ukraine, Sofia Andrukhovych (*1982) contributes to the postcolonial national fiction with her texts, creating a collective Ukrainian identity. Studying early independent Ukrainian literature, Mark Andryczyk detects a tendency to deconstruct official histories and national myths already in the texts of the 1980s, which are still applicable to the development of further Ukrainian fiction. The euphoric time of Independence unleashes “upending [of historical accounts and national mythology], playing with them, and dethroning them of their authority” (Andryczyk 2012, 48). The scholar repeatedly emphasizes that at the dawn of its development post-colonial national writing needs stability and structure (Andryczyk 2012, 123; 125; 141), although he sees the basic means of realizing this need in postmodern literary techniques (Andryczyk 2012, 46; 122), including spatial and temporal displacement of (central) characters to places outside Ukraine (Andryczyk 2012, 102). Andryczyk's understanding of Ukrainian postcolonial writing is close to Bhabha's consideration of nation and narration in respect of the “international dimension both within the margins of the nation space and in the boundaries in-between nations and peoples” (1990, 4). Andrukhovych's prose has a certain tonality and is at the same time in tune with the national imagery alongside the other women's voices of Natalya Snyadanko, Irena Karpa, Tania Maliarchuk, and Yaroslava Lytvyn, to name but a few. Developing the paradigm set by their predecessors (Oksana Zabuzhko, Yevhenia Kononenko, and Maria Matios) at the dawn of the country's independence, “engagement with the ‘great’ national issues, such as those of the traumatic Soviet past and Ukraine's post-Soviet challenges” (Wallo 2019, 5), women authors help diversify their representations of national identity, transgressing the confines of geographical boundaries in the topoi of their fiction and experimenting with the literary tools for their implementation in the prose of the new millennium.

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Analyzing the national imaginary through historical and literary lens, Oleksandra Wallo goes deep into Ukrainian idealistic “striving for unity” (2019, 8), which for quite some time has been an issue even after Independence. Her reflections conclude with a position favorable of imaginative literature, which, as opposed to narrative history, can fill in the gaps of documentary sources (2019, 13) following the Aristotelian differentiation between history and fiction: “The real difference is this, that one tells what happened and the other what might happen. For this reason, poetry is something more scientific and serious than history, because poetry tends to give general truths while history gives particular facts” (Aristotle). During the decade before and after the collapse of the USSR Ukrainian fiction is overtly postmodernist. In his analysis of the construction of post-Soviet Ukrainian identity in prose, Andryczyk affirms, that “[n]ever in the history of Ukrainian literature has the Ukrainian intellectual been given so much attention in prose as in the period [between 1990 and 2001]” (2012, 12). Yet in the framework of women’s literature of the period the incompatibility or impossibility of relationships between female and male Ukrainian intellectuals prevails, as in the novels by Zabuzhko and Kononenko (Andryczyk 2012, 89–99). Tamara Hundorova considers the postmodernism of Ukrainian women’s literature through the prism of feminism focusing on the double female marginality in the traumatic history of nation and the “search for paradise, for virgin land” (2019, 186; 197). Among pioneer women writers Hundorova praises Zabuzhko whose postcolonial fiction is equal to that of US-American and British novelists: in her texts the search for identity and the heroine’s road to herself, themes of sisterhood, infantilization, corporeality, eroticism and sexuality, a blend of popular literature with the intellectual essay (2019, 190–195), define the development of Ukrainian women’s writing for the following decades. In the examination of the national plots, Wallo champions how in their novels the canonical writers (Zabuzhko, Kononenko, Matios) insert “women into the national story in ways that often contradict or complicate the traditional woman/nation plots” (2019, 23). Even though the following generations of Ukrainian women writers continue [to tackle] the collective national identity [,] they do not “foreground” it (Rewakowicz 2018, 11). Grouping Karpa, Andrukhovych, and Maliarchuk under the umbrella term of post-feminism, Rewakowicz singles out in their texts “progressive ideas of empowerment and choice as substitutes for political activism. Their female characters, by and large liberated and independent, enjoy their sexuality and freedom, and yet, at the same time, dream [of finding the] right man” (Rewakowicz 2018, 120). Younger women writers, among them Sofia Andrukhovych, address other issues in their narratives, apart from national traumatic experiences, which are oftentimes at the core of the modern Ukrainian novel.

2 Transnational Narrative in Andrukhovych's Fiction

This article studies the transnationality of Andrukhovych's short prose texts, focusing on the historical imaginary and temporal aspects of the family stories in the early twenty-first century. At the forefront of a Pleiades of post-Independence Ukrainian women writers, in her texts Andrukhovych reflects on nationwide identity beyond the traditional or established earlier narrative frames of the literary discourse, advancing human mobility processes and decreasing the distance between such ontological binaries as Self and Other, past and present, and outside and inside. Andrukhovych experiments with content and form in her writings and modifies the canon established by Zabuzhko. Andrukhovych's prose is transnational in the broad understanding of the notion, due to its highly transcultural nature. Ukrainian identity is far from fixed, stereotyped, or homogenous in the system of characters in the collection *Stari Ludy* [Старі люди (2008); Old People], consisting of two novellas written earlier: *Stari Ludy* [Старі люди (2003); Old People] and *Lito Mileny* [Літо Мілену (2002); Summer of Milena].¹ The transcultural mode of Andrukhovych's writing is represented by diverse narrative strategies, the shift in character focalization, the dialogical interaction of different generations within one family group, and the variation of topoi. These features reveal the protagonists' ambivalence, exceeding the boundaries of national belonging in each novella. Additionally, in *Lito Mileny* Andrukhovych employs elements of magical realism, a common tool in postcolonial fiction which creates a transcultural imagery with a potentially universal appeal.²

The above features in Andrukhovych's early texts, including the fusion of the boundaries of the Self/Other opposition, especially salient in the binary old/young, lay the ground for the transcultural syncretism in modern Ukrainian prose in which the "family saga, centered on the history of the restoration of family and national history relevant to postcolonial writing, represents the positive meanings associated with old age. [The] saga's elderly character acts as a historical memory agent, a symbol of the wholeness of life, an example to follow" (Bashkyrova et al. 2021, 220). The reconsideration of the old family saga is found in Volodymyr Lys's novels *Stolittia Yakova* [Століття Якова (2010); Jacob's Millennium], *Solo dlia Solomii* [Соло для Соломії (2013); Solo for Solomiya], *Kraina hirkoï nizhnosti* [Країна гіркої ніжності (2015); A Land of bitter Tenderness], Marina Hrymych's *Frida* [Фріда (2015); Frida], and Luko Dashvar's *PoKrov* [ПоКров (2016);

¹ All translations from the Ukrainian are my own.

² See also the contribution by Matteo Colombi in this volume.

PoKrov]. Foregrounding the elderly characters in her collection, Andrukhovych debunks the notion of the boundary as a discriminatory practice of alienating and making older adults invisible in society. Cultural geography and, partially, memories of older adult characters constitute transnationality in Andrukhovych's collection in question.

In terms of literary genre, *Lito Mileny* might be said to be a fusion of the *Bildungs-* and *Reifungsroman* (in Barbara Waxman's terms) in the context of an extended family story. In this novella, the Ukrainian multiethnic palette (Gypsies and Africans act as minor characters), imagined and experienced geographical space (Africa), and migration across the continents, form individual, collective, or national identities that resonate, firstly, with the long-cherished intentions of Soviet-era Ukrainians to break through the Iron Curtain and to end the stifling system of the regime before the country's independence. Secondly, the migration trauma for Ukrainians in post-Independence times, which limited the freedom to travel westward to a significant extent before Euromaidan, is equally tangible in the period of *Lito Mileny's* creation: the ease with which the novellas' characters travel is a literary way of verbalizing the postcolonial experience, resulting in a prophetic vision of Ukraine today. After all, "[w]e live in an era of transnational migrations, when displacement becomes voluntary or desirable, and rootlessness itself becomes a symbol of globality" (Hundorova 2023, 72). One of the remarkable features in Andrukhovych's collection is the blurring of the conventional dichotomy between the familiar setting (home) and alien territory (new and sometimes quite distant locations for the characters of both novellas). In their journeys, the characters get to know strange people and different places which in the process of crossing the boundaries turn out to be close and understandable for them.

In the vein of globalization, Andrukhovych subverts the identification between a person and a citizen, especially in *Lito Mileny*. The characters strengthen the already established figure of decolonized Ukrainians and also form their cross- or transnational experiences. In connection with emancipatory images of the older adults, the texts signal positive transformations in society, which slowly but surely heals itself from the traumatic colonial past and develops in tune with the democratic values of Western civilization. Freedom of travel is one of the fundamental values granting transcultural mobility that often leads to the formation of a hybrid personality able to share experiences enriching one's individual and national identity.

In her understanding of the family, Andrukhovych, in both texts, is quite open in presenting communities with non-trivial family bonds, not necessarily blood-related, and thus with various family histories constellating transcultural and transgenerational narratives. Focusing alternately on the first and third generations, the family constellation in the eponymous novella *Stari Ludy* facilitates

the treatment of the incurable disease of the female protagonist whereas in *Lito Mileny* each family age group interacts actively with the central character. As Maria Rewakowicz underlines, “[b]oth works emphasize the importance of family relations but also reverse the accepted notions of what it is that constitutes family” (2018, 123). Intentionally imaginative stories or memories shared by the characters of *Stari Ludy* widen the contemporaneous horizons of the institution of the family, which for many decades in the history of Soviet Ukraine was labeled a *unit of society*.

Even though Sofia Andrukhovych follows her own literary path with a unique yet already identifiable authorial voice, it is hard to detect the pursuit of a national identity in her novellas so imperative in the canonical Ukrainian women’s prose of Independence; evident is rather a focus on the regional collective within the global context, in the form of the self-reflection of the carnivalesque postmodern literature of Bu-Ba-Bu.³ One of the approaches relevant to tackling the family constellations in Andrukhovych’s collection *Stari Ludy* is age studies.

The stigma of late adulthood is subverted by Andrukhovych by means of the historical imaginary, too. For instance, Marta, one of the protagonists in the *Stari Ludy*, narrates various kinds of stories, both invented and real. Addressing them not only to Luka, her young lover, who is the grandson of Marta’s stepsister, and one of the narrators, but also potentially to larger audiences, Marta rewrites her family’s, the town’s, and the nation’s histories, thus decolonizing them on these levels. With her made-up stories, the elderly character fills in the gaps which had been left unfilled by the Soviet hegemony. Andrukhovych’s multiple endings to the novella, combined with often unexpected shifts of narrators, and especially a number of stories-within-a-story, creates a computer game effect with alternative choices, close to the experience of millennials and subsequent generations. *Stari Ludy* is as heterogeneous in content and structure as in its resonance with Kaisa Kaakinen’s reception aesthetics (2017, 9).

As a representative of Eastern European literature, Andrukhovych articulates a new Ukrainian identity beyond the post-Soviet in her transtemporal, transcultural, and transnational imagery. The characters in both novellas transcend the postcolonial transition, acting in a transtemporal dimension. The protagonists undergo transformations of their identities, reconsidering their selves in the post-colonial reality. In their transcendence they become models for the readers to follow.

³ Bu-Ba-Bu is a literary postmodern performance group founded in Lviv in 1985 by the Ukrainian writers Yuriy Andrukhovych, Viktor Neborak and Oleksandr Irvanets. The Bu-Ba-Bu in the name of the group stand for “burlesque, balahan [chaos] and buffonada.”

Andrukhovych's prose aims to decolonize the collective Ukrainian identity in the sense outlined by Lydia Hiraide; it "not only seeks to overthrow colonialism, but also to remove and redress its lasting traces and legacies afterwards" (2021, 14). Andrukhovych's therapy is not as sharp and painful as in the prose of the older women writers' generation but is rather imbedded in the less realist sub-genre of magical realism, enabling the "rehistoricizing" (Kaakinen 2017, 4) of the traumatic past and present under the guise of the fantasy world, as opposed to the realist novel that "gives readers a coherent 'mental picture' of the nation, grounded in historical time" (Wallo 2019, 9). What is really debatable in the collection *Stari Ludy* is the history of collective time: in both novellas the temporal dimensions are unidentifiable by default, following the laws of fantasy/magical realism genre regulations. Rehistoricizing, applied in reference to Kaakinen's reception aesthetics, seems to be relevant in connection to the authorial intention of Andrukhovych, whose novellas narrate family sagas, making them comprehensible worldwide. The dynamics of family constellations in Andrukhovych's imagery is achieved through the continuity and active interaction of their generations.

The Ukrainian woman writer produces an *erregendes Moment* (inciting incident in Gustav Freytag's pyramid of dramatic structure terms) in challenging and simultaneously celebrating late adulthood. Considering old age as a temporal reference point, Andrukhovych fills in the gaps existing in the national literature in the early twenty-first century and indirectly portrays the demographic crisis in Ukraine as an aging country. The continuity indicative of family constellations in *Stari Ludy* tackles time and timelessness as both an affirmation of Ukrainian national identity and Ukraine's belonging to a Western past and present.

3 Narrative Diversity in *Stari Ludy*: Intergenerational Voices

In her 1996 study of monstrosity, Rosemary Thompson observes "a movement from a narrative of the marvelous to a narrative of the deviant" (1996, 3); "what aroused awe now inspires horror" (1996, 3). This diagnosis resonates with the perception of age in the development of Western civilization: de Beauvoir's *La Veilleuse* (1970), D.H. Fischer's *Growing Old in America* (1978) and T.R. Cole's *The Journey of life. A Cultural History of Aging in America* (1992) process social changes in Western civilization, including Ukrainian culture, in relation to late maturity, which ranged from veneration of old people to their neglect. In literary texts of different eras, elderly characters are almost always represented as Others, regardless of whether they are revered or disrespected. In her novellas, Andrukhovych changes the attitude

of disdain for late maturity to sincere admiration for old age, which is represented by her older adult characters.

Rosemarie Thompson assumes that the nature of the monstrous represented by freaks is based on the cultural perception of Others (Thompson, 10). In the framework of age studies, this assumption is developed by Margaret Gullette, who argues that “[h]uman beings are aged by culture” (2004, 12). The age scholar calls stories forms of aging “time machines” and points out that insofar age/aging is culturally constructed, it could therefore be critiqued and reconstructed (2004, 12). Common to all social strata, age and aging are represented implicitly in fiction, “from survival, resilience, recovery, and development, all the way up to collective resistance to decline forces” (2004, 17). In her collection of novellas, Andrukhovych represents old age explicitly and undermines the stereotype of the invisibility of older people who are often ignored by younger generations. Filled with hedonistic flavor, the texts of the Ukrainian author create an appealing vision of late adulthood, often devoid of the fear of aging and death.

In this respect, the theoretical staples of feminist study of aging developed by Barbara Waxman are applicable to Andrukhovych’s family stories. One of the key positions in Waxman’s analysis of women’s prose in the context of age studies is the counter-narrative, the destruction of ageist stereotypes rooted in the consciousness of the modern world. Following her feminist agenda, the scholar subverts opposition between youth and late adulthood, advancing “positive associations with [old – A.G.] age” (Waxman 1990, 2). Waxman proposes the genre of the *Reifungsroman*, or the novel of ripening, as a variation on the classic *Bildungsroman*. If the latter is focused mainly on the problems of the younger generation, the former depicts the processes of aging and the later life of middle-aged and elderly characters. The metaphor of the open road, mentioned in the title of Waxman’s book, focuses attention on the changes and the development of the protagonists of fictional texts. Those older adult characters, traditionally assigned secondary, stereotypical roles, are placed in the limelight in the new literary discourse of aging. Likewise, in the novellas *Stari Ludy* and *Lito Mileny*, elderly female characters (Marta and Cecilia, respectively) travel with pleasure and joy, not considering going back to the family hearth, although in the finale both characters return home.

The joy and pleasure experienced by her characters serve as a calling card of Andrukhovych’s prose. Yuriy Telets singles out the concept of hedonism in post-colonial Ukrainian narrative fiction both in terms of content and as an aesthetical tool. The scholar finds the literary strategy of hedonism specifically popular with the Ukrainian readership as a therapeutic form of decolonization of a traumatic past, which he defines as

a way of forming an array of artistic texts of the post-totalitarian era, which aim to deconstruct and interpret the moral-ethical and socio-cultural dogmas established by socialist realism, aimed at silencing and tabooing topics important for the spiritual and physical development of the individual, and also to debunk the myths codified by the Soviet authorities regarding the place and role of man in society, according to which the only possible mechanism of satisfaction is service for the benefit of the state. (Telets 2023, 6)

Hedonistic practices employed by modern Ukrainian writers take corporeal and extracorporeal forms. On the one hand, there is a distinctive preoccupation in their texts with the body as a postcolonial marker; on the other hand, “not only the sexual manifestations of the human body, but also other phenomena of emotional and existential experiences” (Telets 2023, 8) help combat the colonial mythology imposed by the Soviet regime, which still echoes in the mentality of the postcolonial era.

The leitmotiv of Andrukhovych’s collection is the goal expressed by the elderly protagonist of the story *Stari Ludy*, Marta, who enjoys every moment of her life: “I wanted life to be pleasant for me at the age of ninety-odd years” [“Я хотіла, щоб для мене життя в дев’яносто з гаком років було приємне” (Andrukhovych 2008, 47)]. Marta uses the past indefinite, one of the reasons for which is the terminal illness of the female character. In the fiction of age, late adulthood sometimes overlaps with the condition of illness narrated in (auto)biographical form and known as *pathography* (a medical humanities term coined and defined by Anne Hunsaker Hawkins). Despite epistemological quibbles over the genre concept, Maria Vaccarella further defines pathography as a story of illness written from the experience of survival, comprising four elements – battle, journey, rebirth, and health-consciousness (Vaccarella 2012, 193). In reference to Andrukhovych’s hedonistic fiction of aging, two elements of pathography are relevant: the journey and health-consciousness of the older adult Marta whose final 102 days of life take on a carnivalesque character.

The author of the story *Stari Ludy* offers a unique pathography: in addition to her terminal disease, the main character falls ill due to tonsillitis. In contrast, Marta overcomes a lingering infection. Curiously enough, Andrukhovych describes a hedonistically exciting treatment process (Andrukhovych 2008, 44–45). Moreover, the open ending of the novella, in which Marta’s destiny remains unknown, serves as a euphemism for death: the four characters and a dog will sit over a yellow lake, “at the bottom of which the reflection of old people, puppies, trees and stars will remain. Time is not mandatory for the lakes” [“Відображення старих людей, цуценят, дерев і зірок. Час для озер не обов’язковий” (Andrukhovych 2008, 82)]. The use of the future indefinite creates the continuity of human experience and hope for the existence of life in distant future generations. Setting “old people, puppies, trees and stars” in one synonymous row neutralizes

the Otherness of the older adult characters in the story, especially from the perspective of Luka, an artist and a photographer, one of the three homodiegetic narrators of the novella.

The novella's plot unfolds around Luka's amorous relations with his grandmother's stepsister, resulting in their journey around Ukraine and finding home. Two generations younger than Marta, Luka stereotypically refers to other older adult characters (who play a minor role) as gray and pitiful in comparison with Marta, whom he often compares with a girl or a young woman. Presented in the exposition of the novella, the countdown of time left for Marta records only the 102nd, 101st, 97th and 9th days in detail, ending with the infinity of human existence due to several options in the development of the plotline and the timelessness of the final scene. The past, a mandatory component of the present, and the future form a whole, fluid and frozen at the same time.

Stari Ludy begins with the wedding of Luka's grandparents, the sixth in a row. Yet the novella's main character is Marta, the second narrator. Luka meets Marta at his grandparents' wedding and they go on an unplanned trip together. Though the action takes place in autumn and winter, the denouement reveals timeless reality close to transcendence.

The transtemporal dimension is formed in the novella by a *carpe diem* appeal by the female protagonist, repeated in different variations a number of times: "we live now, not tomorrow" ["живемо зараз, а не завтра" (Andrukhovych 2008, 47; 59; 64–65)]. Andrukhovych reinforces it with Marta's observation: "From an early age, a person has a habit of not reacting to his doom in any way. The further, the more not to react" ["Людина змалку вже має звичку ніяк не реагувати на свою приреченість. Чим далі, тим більше не реагувати" (Andrukhovych 2008, 39)], which, together with the lines of other older adult characters in the novella, form a poignant reflection on late adulthood for modern Ukrainian society, which should be taken into account at all stages of human life, from childhood onwards.

Marta comes forward with the three following forms of coping with late adulthood: first, "live by memories. This method helps alleviate many unpleasant things, often it can act as a substitute for life itself" ["жити спогадами. Цей спосіб допомагає полегшувати чимало неприємних речей, часто він може виступати як заміник самого життя" (Andrukhovych 2008, 46)]. Marta's prescription correlates with the *life review* (coined by Robert Butler), which, when structured, amounts to psychotherapy in gerontology. When applied to analyze the literary representations of older adult characters, the concept of life review brings sense and meaning to the otherwise desperate elderly: it "presupposes a conscious and comprehensive immersion of an elderly person in the past in order to find mental balance (older adults feel better about past mistakes if they perceive them more leniently)" (Gaidash 2019, 38).

Second, the protagonist declares: “Another way to endure old age is not to think about it [...] That’s what my grandfather and grandmother did. As long as I can remember, they worked without looking around, bustled about, helped everyone in a row, not giving themselves the opportunity to even think about anything” [“Інший спосіб витримувати старість – не думати про неї [...] Так робили мої дідо і бабця. Відколи я себе пам’ятаю, вони працювали, не озираючись навколо, метушилися, допомагали всім підряд, не даючи собі можливості навіть подумати про щось” (Andrukhovych 2008, 55)]. Marta’s memories of her own grandparents are an important two-layered component of the aging code in the novella: the older woman establishes the continuity of generations, proving that she is not alone in her late adulthood and that there is a family example that serves her as both a support and a role model. It is distinctive of postcolonial Ukrainian prose to fill in the lacunas in family stories, namely insofar as “the elderly often act as mediators, becoming a painful narrative ‘core’ that seeks to be verbalised and at the same time avoids verbalisation” (Bashkyrova et al. 2021, 218). Furthermore, the social engagement of Marta’s grandparents demonstrates an active strategy of aging, one of the means of harmonious life of an older adult (Palmore 2005, 165).

Finally, the woman character observes that people: “[...] try to drive away the fear of old age and death with constant thoughts about them [...] That’s what my aunt did” [“Страх перед старістю і смертю намагаються відігнати ще й постійними думками про них [...] Так робила моя тітка” (Andrukhovych 2008, 64)]. In her observation, Marta’s age and death are united by fear that her aunt eventually overcomes, as a result of which the relative’s life goes on and she becomes “the kindest person in the whole family” [“найдобрішою людиною з усієї [...] сім’ї” (Andrukhovych 2008, 66)].

The transgenerational modus in the novella is encoded in the sexuality of the aged Marta, “unpredictable and wild” [“непередбачуваної і дикуватої” (Andrukhovych 2008, 21)], a self-confident woman (“Isn’t there anything you want from me?” [“Невже від мене немає чого хотіти?” (Andrukhovych 2008, 22)]) whose intimate experience is directly and elegantly depicted (Andrukhovych 2008, 47; 49–50, 61–62; 64). In this respect, these depictions resonate with the prose of Taras Prokhasko, in particular his collections *Inshi dni Anny* [Інші дні Анни (1998); Anna’s Other Days] and *Neprosti* [Непрості (2002); The UnSimple]. Andrukhovych intensifies her imagery with the dichotomy older woman/young man, in which there is no aggravation of age differences, or any other differences:

[T]hey lived together like brother and sister, son and mother, like friends, lovers, like a woman and a man, like a cat and a dog, like two drops of water, like Papua and New

Guinea, like blood and milk, tea and lemon [...] like alpha and omega, old age and youth, right and wrong, like he and she.

[вони жили разом, як брат і сестра, син і матір, як друзі, коханці, як жінка і чоловік, як кіт і пес, як дві краплі води, як Папуа і Нова Гвінея, як кров з молоком, чай з цитриною [...] як альфа й омега, старість і молодість, правда і кривда, як він і вона (Andrukhovych 2008, 40)].

Applying a catalogue-like style, the author somewhat glamorizes the relationship between Luka and Marta, as in a May–December romance, through the means of “corporeal hedonism” (Telets 2023, 121).

As opposed to more conventional representations of the relationship between a young woman and an old man, Andrukhovych develops the idea of an inverted relation in the liaison between Marta and Luka. Waxman argues that in *Reifungsromane* the images of “young old” women destroy the stereotype of “unfeeling aliens” (1990, 105), forming instead an attractive picture of late adulthood: older adult female protagonists fall in love with younger characters and are passionately loved in return. In addition, Jeannette King provides an insight into the lack of representations of intimate liaisons of transgenerational couples in Western literature: Relationships between older women and younger men subvert patriarchal power relations between the sexes, in which the male’s greater age reinforces his position of dominance. To neutralize such threats, the older woman must be ridiculed, or demonized, and the relationship must prove a failure (2013, 147). Social awareness of age issues in the second half of the twentieth century has a positive effect on the representation of older women in literature. In *Stari Ludy*, Marta

imposes her will on him [Luka – A.G.] but in such a way that in the end he accepts it as his own and cannot imagine it to be any other way. A more common in real life ‘sugar daddy’ relationship is turned on its head here to become a ‘sugar mammy’ tale. Andrukhovych empowers her female characters but, ideally, in this fictional world man and woman, equal and understanding, tend to live harmoniously, loving each other till death does part them. (Rewakowicz 2018, 123)

The protagonist of *Stari Ludy* reinforces the vision of older adult woman liberated from prejudices and ageist stereotypes: “The woman who is willing to make that change must become pregnant with herself, at last. She must bear herself, her third self, her old age, with travail and alone” (Popova).

Luka’s comparisons of Marta with a young woman (Andrukhovych 2008, 17; 21) or even a child (Andrukhovych 2008, 32–33), signal a reverse stereotyping that devalues the achievements and features of old age per se: “I looked at pink heels, which cheerfully peeked out from black sandals – women of that age usually have cracked heels, right? Marta had completely childish ones” [“Я дивився на

рожеві п'яти, що весело визирали з чорних босоніжок – у жінок такому віці п'яти, як правило, потріскані, правда ж? У Марти вони були зовсім дитячі” (Andrukhovych 2008, 22)]. In the context of age studies, the comparison of older characters with younger generations is considered ageist (Dzyuba 2016, 67). At the same time, Andrukhovych emphasizes graphically Marta's reflections on her age, illness, and the feeling of what is happening to her: her short lines are interwoven with Luka's narration and highlighted in bold letter, forming a mental dialogue with her companion. Marta's lines, along with her memories of her grandparents, explore the topic of death and after-death (Andrukhovych 2008, 56), its aesthetics, the manifestation of which takes on a grotesque form (Andrukhovych 2008, 56–58).

The transgenerational layer of the novella is built on the narrative triangle of Marta, Luka and Fiona, in which Marta's voice consisting of fifteen imbedded stories (on 80 pages of text) prevails. Of different length (from two pages to one paragraph), Marta's stories are united by their enchanting or mysterious nature. The protagonist explains the need to share her stories: “I just imagine everything that can happen in life. I want to continue and expand it at least a little” [“Я просто уявляю собі все, що може статися у житті. Хочу хоч так його трохи продовжити і розширити” (Andrukhovych 2008, 69)]. In the finale to the novella, some components of her made-up stories are combined like a kaleidoscope into a series of variations on the further development of events. Thus, the main storyline of Marta's and Luka's journey, both physical and spiritual, ends trifold: 1) with uncertainty: “It is not known for sure what exactly happened to Luka later” [“Невідомо напевне, що саме сталося з Лукою потім” (Andrukhovych 2008, 70)]; 2) with a conditional state, when the third narrator Fiona models various adventures that could have happened to Luka due to Marta's stories: “Everything could have been different” [“Усе могло бути й інакше” (Andrukhovych 2008, 74)]; “After all, anything could have happened to him. I can't even imagine, where did all the stories she told Luka lead to. What I combined from them are pitiful comic strips compared to what could have been in reality” [“Зрештою, з ним могло трапитися все що завгодно. Я навіть уявити не можу, куди завели Луку всі історії, які вона розказала. Те, що скомбінувала з них я, – жалюгідні комікси в порівнянні з тим, що могло бути насправді” (Andrukhovych 2008, 75)]; and finally, as mentioned above (see note 3) with an open finale that transgresses the distinction between old age and death (Andrukhovych 2008, 64).

The novella is partly composed in an epistolary form, and not only Luka, but also Marta thus addresses Fiona, whose identity is revealed at the end of the story. Actually, Fiona herself acts as the narrator at the end of Marta's and Luka's journey. The author's technique of changing the focalization and the multiplicity

of scenarios is a compositional component of the aging code in the novella, which is marked by the continuity of generations and intergenerational interaction.

4 The Ukrainian Variety of Magical Realism in *Lito Mileny*

In the Ukrainian fiction of the 1960–1980s there forms a rather new literary phenomenon known as *khytorna prosa* [химерна проза], close in its style to magical realism. Yet in its numerous studies of this “chimerical prose,” Ukrainian scholarship tends to identify the uniquely Ukrainian nature of this literature that originates from Ukrainian baroque, folklore, and the vernacular. Representatives of this poetics, such as O. Ilchenko [О. Ільченко], V. Drozd [В. Дрозд], V. Zemliak [В. Земляк], V. Shevchuk [В. Шевчук], Ye. Hutsalo [Є. Гуцало], V. Yavorivskiy [В. Яворівський], V. Miniailo [В. Міняйло], P. Zahrebelnyi [П. Загребельний], influenced with their novels mostly the younger generation of writers of independent Ukraine, who continued developing the traditions of non-socialist realism. In the chimerical prose, Nataliia Kobylko singles out the engagement of Ukrainian authors with mythology, oral folk art, mythological and biblical motifs, interwoven with the realistic texture of the books (2017, 8). Yet the scholar is convinced that the writers of chimerical novels normally “did not follow the path of direct borrowing of mythological plots or images, but offered sufficiently subjective, individual-authorial interpretations of mythological material” (Kobylko 2017, 8). The powerful voice of authors of chimerical prose was spurred on not only by the “Khrushchev thaw” and dissident movements, but also by the following factors: “1) the interest of writers in various conditional forms as one of the means of intellectual and philosophical knowledge of human existence; 2) ‘defense reaction of literature,’ when rethinking the folk ‘past’ became a salvation from stereotyping, leveling, aggressive ‘mass culture’” (Kurylenko 2017, 7).

Thus, the important feature of the genre and its carnivalesque mode is its literary response to the Soviet reality, “as the most acceptable model of opposition to normative socialist realist poetics and deformation of Ukrainian literature” (Voshchenko 2019, 19). This feature differentiates Ukrainian chimerical prose from the Latin American magical realism, represented first and foremost by Gabriel García Márquez, in its employment of a “comic strategy (carnivalization, in particular of tragic events, grotesque, parody, irony, humor, sarcasm, so-called ‘fooling’), which creates a humorous (non-serious, playful) pathos of chimerical novels” (Voshchenko 2019, 19). The common denominator of chimerical prose and magical realism is “deformation of spatial lifelikeness, the subjectivity of time”

(Zhuravska 2018, 11). The above-mentioned features of chimerical prose, in combination with features of magical realism, are widely employed by post-Soviet Ukrainian prose writers, such as Yu. Vynnychuk [Ю. Винничук], T. Prokhasko [Т. Прохасько], H. Rahutiak [Г. Пагутяк], Yi. Vesny [І. Весни], M. Hrymych [М. Гримич], or, in drama, P. Arie [П. Ар'є].

In contrast to the relatively realistic writing of *Stari Ludy*, the novella *Lito Mileny* is constructed in a fairytale mode. The story of one family, which is represented by several generations, fascinates with undisguised hyperbolic imagery, as in the case of the imprisonment and liberation of the bird woman Wanda, the birth of Cassandra echoing the Christian myth of the God's Son, the improbable death of the old hunter Oba, and the birth and rapid growth of Cecilia's twin sons in Africa.

The novella begins with Milena's birth and ends with her death. At the same time, the plot events are not limited to the life of the main character, but they extend deep into the history of the ancestors and ahead into the life of the descendants, thereby forming the continuity of human existence. The novella's magical realism is encoded in the title, *Lito Mileny*, in which 'summer' (in the Ukrainian language the noun *lito* [літо] can denote the number of lived years *lit* [літ]) means therefore also the life lived by the protagonist: "Everything was changing, and only where Milena lived was there always eternal summer" ["Усе змінювалося, і тільки там, де жила Мілена, завжди було вічне літо" (Andrukhovych 2008, 143)]. Only after Milena's death does the season change: "Young emerald grass instantly covered the fresh grave, and purple petals slowly fell from the bushes on it, plucked by the first, still timid breath of the autumn wind" ["Молода смарагодова трава миттю вкрила свіжу могилку, а з кущів на неї поволі опадали пурпурові пелюстки, зірвані першим, ще несміливим подихом осіннього вітру" (Andrukhovych 2008, 143)].

Death in the fairytale world of *Lito Mileny* is a magical transformation: "The next day Zemyslava's grandmother was not found. She simply disappeared, as if dissolved somewhere in the air of the garden, among the tree trunks" ["Наступного дня не знайшли бабці Земислави. Вона просто зникла, ніби розчинилася десь у повітрі саду, поміж стовбурами дерев" (Andrukhovych 2008, 132)]. Later, they found a slope "like a huge centipede queen," and "Summer went on" (Andrukhovych 2008, 133). Milena's family is dominated by patriarchy, although Milena's grandfather, father, uncle, and husband and their sons are an organic part of the family.

One of the dynamic plotlines in the novella is formed by an elderly couple in love, Cecilia and Narcissus, who "loved and knew how to dress like a young man" ["любив і вмів одягатися, як джентльменський молодик" (Andrukhovych 2008, 87)]. They taught Milena's mother, Cassandra ("the gray mother"), "to taste life

and enjoy every minute of it” [“відчувати життя на смак і щохвилини отримувати від нього задоволення” (Andrukhovych 2008, 89)]. The hedonism of the characters emphasized in both of Andrukhovych’s novellas deconstructs the colonial consciousness in which the subject was not supposed to enjoy life (Aheeva 2003, 47). The loving couple brings up Cassandra together with Zemyslava, forming a happy community of older adults. Like Luka’s grandparents in *Stari Ludy*, Cecilia and Narcissus arrange a wedding, which, however, breaks down because the older bride abandons the ceremony.

The love story of another elderly couple, Milena’s grandparents, Zemyslava and Leon, who is much older than his beloved, is marked by such a fantastic feature as the birth of their child, Cassandra, many years after Leon’s death, which was

a real miracle. Some mischievous and stupid neighbors began to spread disgusting gossip, but mostly people understood that this talk was just ordinary lies and nonsense, because everyone was well aware of the power of Zemyslava’s love and the fact that, apart from Leon, she did not know any man in her life.

[справжнім дивом. Деякі лихі і дурні сусіди почали, було, розпускати огидні плітки, але переважно люди розуміли, що це говоріння – просто звичайна брехня і нісенітниця, адже всі добре знали про силу Земиславиного кохання і про те, що, окрім Леона, вона не знала жодного чоловіка в своєму житті (Andrukhovych 2008, 88)].

Leon is a minor character, one of the founders of the family, who, on the one hand, is the embodiment of the family’s core: he is powerful, cheerful, all-powerful, experienced, unique. On the other hand, unlike Zemyslava in her late adulthood, his manifestation of old age is much more prosaic: “his hair turned gray, teeth fell out, eyes watered, hands trembled, insomnia visited every night, doctors almost every day, Leon coughed and croaked, and grew old, old, old” [“волосся сивіло, випадали зуби, очі сльозилися, руки тремтіли, щоночі навідувалося безсоння, майже щодня – лікарі, Леон кашляв і крєктав, і старів, старів, старів” (Andrukhovych 2008, 87)]. Before his death, Leon’s body became weakened, destroyed by time, crowned with a bald head. In addition, deterioration of another male character and indirect member of Milena’s family, Father Lavr, in his ripe old age equally reveals markers of physical decline. Yet the servant of the church could manifest either dementia or spiritual enlightenment: Father Lavr has a “toothless mouth” [“беззубим ротом” (Andrukhovych 2008, 99)], whose “old, decaying look spoke of indescribable quiet bliss” [“старечий, струхлявілий вигляд говорив про невимовне тихе блаженство” (Andrukhovych 2008, 97)].

In contrast to the unaesthetic manifestations of the old age of the male cast of characters in *Lito Mileny*, female images are presented in a rather attractive light. For example, two 80-year-old twin sisters, Matilda and Marcelina, have always “had a trail of ardent fans” [“ніколи не відставав шлейф з палких шанувальників”

(Andrukhovych 2008, 110)]. Organizers of monthly parties, the twins and their fans are a sophisticated company that definitely defies ageist stereotypes about the unkempt and withdrawn representatives of older adults: “These were not conservative, screwed-up virtues, dry and correct, like walnut shells. On the contrary, madness, eccentricity and even genius were usually hidden behind calmness and restraint. There was simply no end to wit” [“Це не були консервативні зашкарублі доброти, сухі і правильні, як лущайки волоських горіхів. Радше навпаки – за спокоем і стриманістю ховалися зазвичай шаленство, дивакуватість і навіть геніальність. Дотепності ж просто не було кінця і краю” (Andrukhovych 2008, 112)]. After a two-year stay in the company of the elderly twins, young Milena is ready for her own old age, which the main character will spend with dignity and warm memories: thus, having kept a collection of gifts from the twins and their friends, Milena “in the last decade of her life [...] liked to look at these pieces of the past” [“в останнє десятиліття свого життя [...] любила розглядати ці шматочки минулого” (Andrukhovych 2008, 112)].

Transgenerational imagery in *Lito Mileny* is also formed by short fragments with minor characters: for instance, ‘Granny In a Knitted Skirt,’ a former teacher who did not immediately recollect the correct answer to the child’s question concerning Kipling’s *Mowgli*, to which the audience reacted politely, because “who will laugh at an old person, especially if they themselves do not know the correct answer” [“хто ж сміятиметься зі старої людини, особливо, якщо й самі не знають правильної відповіді” (Andrukhovych 2008, 116)]. The author’s remark is a powerful comment on the perception of old age in the Ukrainian consciousness. At the same time, the writer reproduces rather creepy images of older adult characters in the novella: for instance, an aged couple looking like fish, “skinny, dry, ragged” [“худих, сухих, обірваних” (Andrukhovych 2008, 118)], who later turn out to be kidnappers of other elderly hostages. Even their further destinies are described with veneration: after meeting the demands of the kidnappers and releasing the hostages, the Fish regularly send Milena postcards and a gift.

5 The Transgenerational Family (as a Backbone) of Andrukhovych’s Short Prose

Andrukhovych’s family stories narrate transnational stories, transcending the spatial and cultural confines of Ukraine, through journeys, letters, and memories. The heterogeneous perspectives in her novellas resonate with globalization, inscribing her texts organically into modern literature, with regard to the context of reception aesthetics. Andrukhovych offers a hybrid type of knowledge and its

transmission, insofar as storytelling and self-discovery avoid the linear forms of the family narrative and approach a fluid and flowing type of writing that reveals the multigenerational interaction in a wider transnational context.

The collection of novellas *Stari Ludy* is a hymn to late adulthood; the Otherness of the world completely shatters persistent ideas about old age that still exist in the public consciousness. The collection is important in introducing into Ukrainian literature aging strategies, even if some of them are utopian, and the perception of old age by other generations. The main message of the work is the visibility and dignity of late adulthood. In the eponymous novella *Stari Ludy*, the transgenerational code is formed by the topos and metaphor of an open road, which performs both the therapeutic function of the psychological recovery of the main character and the didactic function of undermining established stereotypes about the lives and ways of life of representatives of late adulthood. The ageist stereotyping of older adults is contrasted with the philosophy of enjoying life at any age. From the point of view of the pathography genre, and within the framework of medical humanities, Andrukhovych actively uses some of the proposed motifs of the genre, in particular the journey and health-consciousness. In the character of Marta, the following options for adaptation to late adulthood are expressed in the eponymous novella *Stari Ludy*: living both memories and an active life (in the case of Marta, traveling, sharing stories, and planning for the future); thinking of old age not as decline and loss, but as a time of the greatest spiritual development of the individual and enjoying life. Hedonistic practices in late adulthood and productive intergenerational interaction due to the lack of exacerbation of age differences between elderly and young characters form a common background in the collection of novellas. In addition, Andrukhovych undermines ageist stereotypes and sexual taboos surrounding female old age in the images of Marta, Cecilia, and other female older adult characters. At the same time, a gender bias is observed in the reproduction of ripe old age in the novella *Lito Mileny*: the last hours, days, weeks, and years of the female characters (Zemislava, Milena) are somewhat romanticized, while descriptions of old age in male characters (Leon, Father Lavr) are presented in a rather naturalistic manner. The engagement with magical realism in *Lito Mileny* becomes a productive decolonizing strategy, too. The late adulthood of Milena and other characters in the novella is one of the stages of human existence, not overshadowed by the unknown and fear of the afterlife, but full of activity and gratitude for the life lived. Transgenerational imagery in Andrukhovych's novellas help readers transcend the historical imaginary of a given age to envision age free from stereotypes.

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