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CONFRONTING AGEISM AND THE DILEMMAS OF AGING: LITERARY GERONTOLOGY AND POETIC IMAGINATION—BARANSKAYA TO MARININA

Jane Gary Harris

Jane Gary Harris, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Pittsburgh. Address for correspondence: 8 East 8th Street, Apt 3-A, New York, NY 10003, USA. jpgharris2003@yahoo.com.

Literary gerontology, a relatively new field of scholarship, endeavors to contemplate, analyze, and examine social, cultural, and biological expectations and ageist stereotypes as well as to query perceptions, representations, and misrepresentations of aging and old age, frailty and dementia, forms of victimization, family relationships, and the experience of daily life. Research requires the examination of both external and internal perspectives of social gerontology and its expression in literary and linguistic forms. These may include discourses emerging from a theoretical distance (gerontology, biology, demography, psychology, philosophy, etc.) as well as discourses stemming from subjective or experiential knowledge (diaries, autobiography, prose, poetry as well as common proverbs and adages).

This essay endeavors to investigate Russian cultural stereotypes of the constructs of aging not only via Eriksonian psychosocial theory, Ol'ga Krasnova's challenge to ageist delusions, or the United Nation's *World Report on Aging and Health*, but through the poetic imagination as reflected in literary discourse expressed in a vividly imagined portrait gallery of older male and female heroes, and the linguistic discourse inhabiting the cultural legacy of proverbs and sayings. For example, while Natalya Baranskaya's 1968 story "Provody" (The Retirement Party) offers readers a chance to evaluate the effect of retirement on the heroine's identity, by 1999 *Prizrak muzyki* (The Spector of Music), Aleksandra Marinina's novel, provides a radical alternative to the image of the old woman as victim. Meanwhile, Irina Muravyova and Ludmila Ulitskaya vividly envisage images of older women as victimizers. In contrast, Ludmilla Petrushevskaya's "Most Vaterloo" (Waterloo Bridge, 1995) and Ludmila Ulitskaya's "Vtorogo marta togo zhe goda" (March Second of That Year, 1991) proffer the poetic imagination as agency, challenging society's culturally imposed ageist stereotypes, while Denis Dragunsky's and Tatyana Tolstaya's narratives suggest how older male heroes retrospectively and prospectively imagine and contemplate alternatives of aging and dying.

Keywords: Ageism; Agency; Biological Determinism; Ego Integrity; Literary Gerontology; Poetic Imagination; Retrospection; Wisdom

INTRODUCTION: LITERARY GERONTOLOGY, THEORY AND PRACTICE

Since the middle of the twentieth-century Russian writers have offered the reading public a wide variety of literary works containing images of older people, portraying their lives and personalities as they face the challenges of everyday living in contemporary Russian society. This vast portrait gallery not only challenges the biological, social, and cultural stereotypes subsumed under the term "ageism"[1] but employs the poetic imagination to counter biological, social, and cultural determinism.

Literary gerontology, as a relatively new field of scholarship, endeavors to contemplate, analyze, and examine social, cultural, and biological norms and ageist stereotypes portrayed through the images of aging represented in literary narratives by querying perceptions, representations, and misrepresentations of old age, frailty and dementia, forms of victimization, family and intergenerational relationships (see also Gullette 2011; Krasnova 2005; Kriebernegg 2015; Oró-Piqueras and Falcus 2018; Phoenix, Smith, and Sparks 2010; "Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan" 2002; Presniakova 2005; Savkina 2011; "Staret' po-russki" 2005; Twigg and Martin 2015; *World Report* 2015).

This essay suggests that the writings under consideration introduce the reader to the broad philosophical conundrum of aging, explored from multiple perspectives of a rich and variegated literary portrait gallery of elderly heroes and via different genre frames suffused with ever-present intertextual references to socially and culturally constructed stereotypes. My contention is that these various discourses offer up the human imagination, namely, *the poetic or creative imagination as agency and resistance*, not only to biological but to ideological and social determinism, that is, to society's culturally imposed stereotypes and norms, and in the process serve as forms of resilience (see also Gramshammer-Hohl 2017; Harris 2020; Kenyon, Clark, and De Vries 2001; Kriebernegg 2015; Nepomnyashchy 1999; Randall and Kenyon 2004; Waxman 1990; Woodward 2006; Wyatt-Brown 1990; Zeilig 2011; Zirin 2007).

Research in literary gerontology requires the examination of both external and internal perspectives of social gerontology and its expression in literary and linguistic forms. These may include discourses emerging from a theoretical distance (gerontology, biology, demography, sociology, psychology, philosophy, etc.) as well as discourses arising from subjective or experiential knowledge (autobiography, diaries, prose, poetry, as well as common proverbs and adages). Indeed, the basic dichotomy of this external/internal perspective on old age turns up in the ageist language of everyday Russian proverbs, in linguistic discourse inhabiting the cultural legacy of proverbs and sayings. For example, while "*Starost' ne radost*'" (Aging is no joy) or

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[1] Ageism has been defined variously, but always includes stereotyping, prejudice, and age-based discrimination. Highly prevalent and insidious, it produces deleterious effects on health, mental health, and social participation. Pervasive ageist stereotypes of older people as uniformly frail, burdensome, and dependent are not supported by evidence and therefore limit society's ability to appreciate and express inherent human potential and social capital. Such negative attitudes toward older populations also affect decision-making, influencing choices pertinent to public policy, public attitudes, and behaviors.

"*Starost' neizbezhna*!" (Aging is inescapable!) express the most familiar of negative cultural clichés reinforcing the essentialism of biological determinism, the less common subjunctive proverb "*Kak by snova na svet narodit'sia, znal by kak sostarit'sia*" (If only one knew how to age, it would be like being born into the world anew)[2] emphasizes the opposite idea of human possibility, the imagination, or fantasy, accessible through the subjunctive potential of the "if only" (*kak by*) clause, invoked to express states of irreality—wishes, hopes, dreams, potential, and possibility, implying and promoting realms of emotional and/or psychological agency.

Consequently, this essay is an attempt to comprehend Russian cultural stereotypes of the constructs of aging not only via Eriksonian psychosocial theory (perhaps the most frequently cited and disputed discourse on the culture of aging and the aging personality [Erikson 1997]), Ol'ga Krasnova's incisive piece "Developing Delusions: Elderly People and Aging" (2005), or the oft-cited United Nations' *World Report on Ageing and Health* (2015) that consolidates ideas stemming from the "Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging" (2002; see also Zelenev 2008) adopted at the Second World Assembly on Aging—but through late twentieth-century Russian literary and linguistic discourse.

This essay employs aspects of literary gerontology to analyze how twentieth-century Russian writers from Natalya Baranskaya to Aleksandra Marinina illuminate, represent, and confront stereotypes of aging and old age through a vivid portrait gallery of older characters, focusing on the multiplicity of their responses to the processes of biological, social, and cultural aging. Questions include: How do such narratives represent the dilemmas of aging faced by their various heroes, and how do their narrators present coping mechanisms or offer resilience or resistance to biologically expected norms or culturally and socially anticipated attitudes and behaviors?

Generally speaking, I have been astonished by the heterogeneity of the literary imagination to offer readers not only sensitive and compassionate understanding but revelations regarding issues of aging, offering a wide range of possibility, and suggesting a broad set of coping skills and aging strategies. Thus, this essay will consider late twentieth-century Russian writers' efforts to provide readers the opportunity to evaluate numerous issues associated with aging and old age and to assess situations illuminating different forms of ageism, including aspects of victimization, based on norms or stereotypes associated with older people as well as suggest multiple forms of agency and resistance.

Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of lifespan development is one of the most frequently cited and disputed theoretical discourses on the culture of aging and the aging personality. His model posits eight psychosocial stages, each one conceptualized as an individual dialectical crisis, marked by an internal struggle, conflict, or challenge, which must be experienced and negotiated in order to move on to the next stage (Erikson 1997).

Erikson theorized that the final stage of human development—the "eighth stage"—begins when an individual (over 60) experiences a sense of mortality, which

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[2] Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

precipitates the final life crisis. This stage was envisaged as a critical struggle between its systonic element, *ego integrity*, and its dystonic element, *despair*, where both dispositions must be understood and embraced so that its basic strength, actionable "wisdom and integrity," may emerge. This stage differs from its predecessors, according to Erikson, in that it emphasizes *retrospection* as its final developmental task. He perceived this task as a *life review* that can be positive or negative, with *wisdom*, defined as "informed and detached concern with life itself in the face of death itself" (Erikson 1997:61). Its opposite, *despair*, may involve numerous forms of rejective denial, from bitterness and regret to arrogance, pomposity, or disdain to the extreme of suicide.

Joan Erikson, Erik Erikson's wife and lifelong collaborator, before her death in 1997 and in light of her own retrospective review, added a "ninth stage" to their collaborative effort, for she came to perceive the eighth stage as "too romanticized." She claimed that "wisdom and integrity is something other people see in an older person, but it is not what that person is feeling" (Erikson 1997:105). She asserted that when old age comes upon you, it does not come slowly and must be faced directly (105). Thus, she added subjective realism to the ideal of "wisdom and integrity," the necessity of facing the practical issues of old age: retirement, dementia, forgetfulness, physical limitations, as well as facing death, reviewing one's life course, and asserting resiliency. She concluded with advice and a note of hope: "To face down despair with faith and appropriate humility is perhaps the wisest course" (106). But "no matter how severely hope has been challenged, [remember] it has never abandoned us completely. Life without hope is simply unthinkable" (113).

This Eriksonian lens caused me to wonder how contemporary Russian writers might represent this schema in constructing their images of older characters. Thus, in examining a variety of writings through a literary gerontological lens, one focus is retrospection—life's final developmental task—or the seeking to locate examples of hope through resistance, agency, and creativity as a significant aspect of the aging process.

Ol'ga Krasnova, in her article "Developing Delusions: Elderly People and Aging" included in a special issue of the journal *Otechestvennye zapiski* devoted to problems of aging, "Staret' po-russki" (Aging Russian style), confronts issues of aging directly from the perspective of a gerontological psychologist. She emphasizes that above all, we must recognize that the elderly differ among themselves; they are hardly a uniform group. She states: "First of all, we must define [the elderly] conceptually, that is, decide who we put in this group."

As she carefully points out,

> the elderly *are not a homogeneous grouping*, and in any group of elderly people one can find the most varied subgroups. For example, groups by age: from the "young old" to the very oldest ... by gender: elderly men and elderly women, aging occurs differently in these different groups. Some elderly live in mega cities, others—in tiny villages or in the country. They include people with both higher degrees and little education, academics and illiterates, with family and those who live alone, professionals and those who worked different jobs all their

> lives. Finally, elderly people differ in how their minds continue to function: some have an excellent memory, attention span, capacity for future development and study, while others suffer observable mental lapses, confusion, depression, or dementia. All these factors influence how a person experiences aging, how aging affects one's self-perception as an individual and as a member of society. But, *in addition they influence how society perceives older persons*. (Krasnova 2005; emphases added)

In seeking a working definition, Krasnova (2005) states "Usually those who reach pension age are called 'elderly.' Thus, in Russia, women older than 55 and men over 60 fall into this category." Nevertheless, when the words "elderly," "old age," "pensioner," or even "veteran" are mentioned, socially constructed stereotypes are evoked which call up negative connotations, supported by cultural tradition, strengthened by the mass media, and reinforced by the social environment. Moreover, as Krasnova points out, "the elderly often interiorize these stereotypes and, in response, lower their sense of self-worth, fearing to reinforce negative images." Such stereotypes include the opinion that the elderly are "useless, experience intellectual decline, do not live full lives," that is, that they are merely "living out their lives" rather than "living." In addition, gendered stereotypes, such as the condescending use of "*baba*" for any "older woman," intensify their negative connotations.

Hence questions must also include: How do writers, in particular late twentieth-century writers, perceive, conceptualize, and depict aging, old age, and the elderly? Do they tend to reproduce social and cultural stereotypes? If so, which ones do they perceive as "norms"? Do certain images resist stereotypes? If so, how? Are there dominant gendered portrayals of female vs. male elderly? What creative strategies, modes of perception, innovative literary devices, or particular forms of literary and linguistic representation do writers employ to challenge, deconstruct, negate, or resist static social and cultural categories? How do writers depict nonstereotypical older individuals or expand psychologically and philosophically complex or ambiguous or unique attitudes toward old age and the aging process?

We find that while some writers seem to recreate or rework accepted stereotypes, there is usually some effort to focus on the plight of the victim, at the very least to arouse pity/sympathy in the reader, while other writers actively oppose or resist standardized views of old age as a confining set of norms and expectations and clearly set out to challenge them. A number of contemporary writers have employed both thematic innovation and formal experimentation to produce new identities, to re-characterize or undermine previously accepted norms, to provide means of escape from the harsh reality of generic stereotypes, to reveal truly unexpected examples of agency, or to offer subversive or resistant readings or a re-examination of older images and paradigms.

The United Nations publication *World Report on Ageing and Health* (2015) lists key issues to be addressed. These include: (1) the "heterogeneity of experiences in older age," (2) the "inequalities that underlie this diversity," (3) "the environments an older person inhabits," the need to (4) "avoid ageist stereotypes," (5) "empower older people to adapt to and shape the challenges they face as well as the social

change that accompanies population ageing," and (6) "consider health from the perspective of the older person's trajectory of functioning rather than the disease or comorbidity" (*World Report* 2015:27).

Moreover, *World Report* emphasizes the concept of resilience, or the ability to adapt, as a crucial resource for older people and allows differentiation between people." It points out that different forms of resiliency must be considered in dealing with older people and lists some things that older people identify as important, including having a role or identity; relationships; the possibility of enjoyment; autonomy; security; and the potential for personal growth. It also identifies significant "domains of functional ability": meeting one's own basic needs; learning, growing, and making decisions; contributing; as well as building and maintaining relationships and being able to move around (*World Report* 2015:27–30).

Thus, in this essay, I question how such theoretical and practical considerations are viewed, reflected, treated, and confronted by late twentieth-century Russian writers, through the poetic imagination, in their characterizations of the elderly. Indeed, questions arise as to the source of differences between "norms" and "stereotypes." Therefore, readers are urged to reconsider what is normal or appropriate behavior for older persons and, indeed, what comprises "norms."

AGEISM—REAL AND IMAGINED

As one of the first writers to raise issues of ageism and aging to the center of attention in her work, Natalya Baranskaya in the story "Provody" (The Retirement Party; Baranskaya 1968) focuses on the meaning, purpose, and distortion of the basic socioeconomic concept of retirement. The narrative itself is blunt and clear in presenting the "facts" of the heroine's response to the "end" of her career. Retirement comes about not due to displeasure with her work or even because she has continued to work past 55, the official retirement age for women, but due to ageism supported by unfeeling ignorance, sexism, and greed on the part of her bosses and colleagues who show little concern for her as an individual or fellow worker. And she has no recourse.

The setting itself is dismal. The story opens: "A retirement party was being held in the auditorium. The narrow assembly hall was almost empty. On the makeshift stage sat three people facing another twenty or so in the front rows" (Baranskaya 1968:77).

The heroine, Anna Vasil'evna Kosova, is perceived as mute—indeed, muted by the experience of "her" retirement party, not only placed in an awkward position but deprived of the single source of meaning in her life, as revealed in the course of the narrative. "She sat perfectly still except for her thin hands which kept wringing and knotting a handkerchief. The party was in her honor" (Baranskaya 1968:77). She lives alone, is childless, her husband having sacrificed his life in the war. She is left with nothing, not even someone to care for.

The story, in particular through its ironic portrayal of the unbearable situation, leaves the reader in distress—wondering how a simple, unassuming person can be so miserably maltreated. Pity encompasses a sense of outrage at her mistreatment, but also at the system. We are left wondering not only how those assembled at the retire-

ment party can be so cruel, heartless, and unfeeling as to celebrate, but also how the system can be so rigid and insensitive to the plight of older women still fully functional, able, and capable of working hard to contribute to their workplace and society.

The narrative offers the reader a chance to evaluate the issue of retirement and to imagine the pain and struggle of the heroine as she faces her predicament, imposed on her by the ageist and sexist views of her predominantly male colleagues as well as society's unwritten rules and assumptions. Instead of being represented as a reward for a life of hard work, retirement is perceived as deprivation—not only of income but also of purpose and identity as well as of meaningful relationships. Work gave Anna Vasil'eva life meaning. Suddenly, retirement, represented falsely as "necessary," is forced on her; she becomes its "victim."

When Anna Vasil'evna wakes up the following morning, she realizes she has "nowhere to go and nothing to do." "Staring vacantly at the wall, with hands hanging limply at her sides, Anna Vasil'evna sat rooted to the edge of her bed. The alarm clock continued to ring and ring as though there would never be an end to this needless ringing" (Baranskaya 1968:83).

The reader is thus challenged to try to comprehend what can only be seen as the victimization of such older women. Due to ageism and sexism among her colleagues or as part of the system, readers are asked to imagine themselves in the heroine's position, set adrift in the world, suddenly facing a world totally closed off, a world without alternatives. This story also serves as a critique of forced retirement, especially for women in Russia, even today, half a century after the publication of this piece.

While Baranskaya's poetic imagination presents a shockingly realistic image of the real-life plight of an older woman forced to age out of her job and position in life, with nothing to look forward to, Tatyana Tolstaya (1987, 1989) presents a fantasy vision of such a world without alternatives through the vivid imagination of her older male hero, Vassily Mikhailovich, in her story "Krug" (The Circle). The story opens as the hero vividly contemplates his plight in a world dominated by ageism and recoils from the fearfully realistic vision produced by his own pessimistic fantasy:

> The world is ended, the world is distorted, the world is closed, and it is closed around Vassily Mikhailovich.
>
> At sixty, fur coats get heavy, stairs grow steep, and your heart is with you day and night. You've walked and walked, from hill to hill, past shimmering lakes, past radiant islands, white birds overhead, speckled snakes underfoot, and you've arrived here, and this is where you've ended up; it's dark and lonely here, and your collar chokes you and your blood creaks in your veins. *This* is sixty.
>
> This is it, it's over. Here no grass grows. The soil is frozen, the earth is narrow and stony, and ahead only one sign glows: exit.
>
> But Vassily Mikhailovich did not want this. (Tolstaya 1989:63, trans. by Bouis; emphasis in the original)

Tolstaya's story provides a vivid and ironic example of the social construction of the "third age"—a socially determined stereotypical representation of a "closed world," imagined through the eyes of her male protagonist, 60-year old Vassily Mikhailovich.

Whereas Baranskaya's narrative presents a realistic event through the eyes of her older heroine, Tolstaya's tale demonstrates how her older hero's innate fear conjures up the frightening stereotype that the "third age" is but a static "end," an "irreversible" state, or "closed world," in which the function of the elderly is reduced merely to waiting at the exit.

In both stories ageism is thus represented as antithetical to the idea that the last stage of life belongs to an organic process, the natural and therefore complex and dynamic stages of human development. Due to such prevalent ageist stereotypes, retrospection emerges as fear of the end, or, in Eriksonian terms, it evolves as "despair" versus "ego integrity."

Denis Dragunsky's "V gostiakh i doma" (Out Visiting and Back Home) published in 1989 (Dragunsky 1989; Dragunsky 1998, trans. by Hoisington), envisions a rather more elaborate review of the "end." It recasts a theme quite common to narratives of aging: the deathbed scene, where through a life review, the protagonist, usually male, comes to terms with his past in contemplating his life and death. It may be treated traditionally, following Leo Tolstoy's model in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, wherein the protagonist undergoes a life review and comes to realize the meaninglessness of his life before accepting confession, death, and the promise of forgiveness and a new life. On the other hand, the theme of retrospection also incorporates one of the most positive attributes of the "third age"—the gift of free time to take stock of one's life, to evaluate and judge it, to justify it, and to make amends where necessary or to ask forgiveness, in the hope of meeting death with a clean conscience. Such narratives and the life review process involve not merely a confession but an opportunity to face oneself honestly in order ultimately to feel comfortable letting go as the inevitability of death approaches or, in Eriksonian terms, to find "wisdom" and "ego integrity."

In "Out Visiting and Back Home," the struggle of a very old man is extraordinarily well captured as he comes to assess his strengths and admit his failings while gradually recognizing and responding to the significance of his family and home. His musings also convey hope that he will try to pass on his wisdom, love, and pity to remaining family members.

This narrative is an intimate portrayal of a former VIP, a once prominent, highly self-confident, self-satisfied research scientist trying to make sense of his last years, struggling to come to terms with his life, to comprehend his role and function in society, assess his relationships with colleagues, family, and others whom he had earlier subjected to his egotistical whims. He is presented to us as a sickly old man in the awkward position of waiting to die. While we view him through the eyes of an omniscient third-person observer, the focus is centered in the old man's mind, in the process of a life review. He not only reconsiders his proud moments as well as his faults and his role in the family, but subjects memories of his wife and children—all passed away—and thoughts of his grandchildren—now his caregivers—to harsh criticism and negative comparisons to his own perceived stellar life. Nevertheless, we also see that he is being well cared for by his grandchildren. Through his reflections and reminiscences, we recognize how for him, as a VIP, the external world had been his life. Revered by colleagues, he was "the object of special government concern" (Dragun-

sky 1998:6, trans. by Hoisington), although he had looked down on everyone while enjoying the limelight. As for his family, he seems only to complain about his son's weakness—that he could never emulate his father—and about his grandson—that he would stammer at the funeral office, unable to obtain the best burial arrangements for his grandfather. The old man thus revels in contemplating his own strengths, mental and physical,—though now reduced to being able to bathe himself and go to the bathroom on his own—or reflects on his own powers of persuasion now reduced to obtaining the most unique funeral monument. Nevertheless, his criticisms alternate with positive thoughts: that he could "thank fate for the fact that he was dying so well.... [that] it was happening at an advanced old age, and ... [that] he had a sound mind and a good memory.... A good death, though the old man was a little tired of waiting for it" (6). Retrospection allows him to begin to grasp his faults and weaknesses: he begins to think about how he had become "troublesome," how he even complained to his family that "he considered himself ... a visitor [on this] vale of tears, and somehow he'd stayed too long" (7). Regarding his caregivers, his thinking is highly ambivalent, recognizing that his "grandson and granddaughter dealt with all his whims without complaint, but in this resignation of theirs the old man sensed concealed reproach, and that infuriated him" (8). Now, with time to muse, think, and dream, he begins to show some confusion over the subjects of his dreams. He also meditates on how his "life had been a horrible mistake." Finally, he expresses both anger and regret: he thinks about "how unfair, stupid, illogical" it is that one cannot even forewarn others about living mistakenly, that he cannot ask forgiveness, for "no one's left" (17). In the narrative's conclusion, he suddenly chances to look anew at his granddaughter, taking pity on her. As he attempts to move off his bed, he sees her shocked expression and experiences an epiphany—suddenly realizing his great love for his family and his home space:

> He turned again on his back and looked through the glass door. His granddaughter was still talking on the phone. She got a cigarette.... She began to cough.... What a plain girl, thought the old man sympathetically: a shrunken chest, heavy legs, as if from inferior stock. Who from? You couldn't blame her grandpa or grandma, that's for sure. But, just the same, he felt pity for her, almost to the point of tears. It had never even occurred to the old man that he could feel sorry for this virtually alien, unattractive woman. But he very much wanted to approach her, to utter something especially affectionate, stroke her head. With difficulty, he threw back the afghan, grabbed the leather-covered button on the back of the sofa ... got up, lowered his legs from the sofa, and began searching for his slippers.
>
> Hearing his rustling, the granddaughter turned around and dropped the telephone receiver. The old man saw that she was looking at him with a changed expression on her face. Then and only then did he understand that all that recent talk of his about who was visiting and who was at home, that all this was nonsense.... His home was here. Here, here, here. His loved ones were also here, in his own, favorite dwelling. He didn't want to go away from here ever, not even on a visit, for the dwelling *there* was cold and unknown, and how they'd meet him there ... only God knew. (Dragunsky 1998:17–18, trans. by Hoisington; emphasis in the original)

What images of old age emerge here? What stereotypes? How are they presented, countered, opposed? The image of someone dying a "good death" is somewhat new—in contrast to *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*—although the life review was certainly prominent in Tolstoy (see Harris 2020). In addition, the contemporary issue of caregiving is raised, in an era without servants, in a society where family are expected to care for their elderly. While Tolstoy's servant was juxtaposed against the less than caring family, Dragunsky provides a relatively strong image of informal family caregiving. But since we see this old man primarily through his own eyes, not those of his grandchildren, we cannot know their thoughts. We just observe them and may conclude that they did indeed care for him, visiting often and providing his meals and so on, despite their own multiple commitments to work and family.[3]

From a psychological perspective, we come to understand the ambiguity of the aging mind, the ambivalence of wanting to continue to do things for oneself while recognizing the need for care and assistance, and also the regret of being a burden on others. The old man's pride in his strength and power is undermined by his losses: of his wife and son and, more recently, of his masculine identity, his physical and sexual power. On the other hand, his new status provides him with the unambiguous opportunity to consider his accomplishments, to take pride in his strength, to reminisce about his contributions to society and life of enjoyment, as well as to justify his actions and seek forgiveness.

In direct contrast, Tolstaya's "The Circle" employs wit and gendered fantasy both to allow her older male hero to continue indulging his traditional male fantasies and to escape his wife and family obligations, which help him escape feelings of hopelessness associated with turning 60. His fantasy, however, is neither a newly discovered world of pleasure nor a newfound coping skill nor a learning experience. His resilience is merely a somewhat diminished continuation of his previous escapist life. However, after his fantasy gets out of hand (he imagined seeing an old girlfriend in the park, following her, and then being beaten up by her companions), he has an epiphany—he comes to recognize the insignificance of his life as he initiates a rather painful life review.

Tolstaya thus imagines an older man recognizing the burdens of old age, but also coming to realize that his entire life had been no different and that it will not change now just because he is getting older. His vision allows him to confront the stark truth: it is "not old age" that makes his life sad and worthless but the fact that he is carrying the values and mores of his sad and worthless youth into his "third age." The truth of the unchanging nature of personality is not frequently represented as a norm in literary narratives. Tolstaya, however, suggests that peoples' lives or identities do *not* necessarily change for the better or for the worse as they age. Just because one enters the "third age," foibles and failings, dreams and mistakes, lack of love or ambition may not stop dominating one's life.

What does seem to change for both Dragunsky's and Tolstaya's heroes is that the "third age" offers the protagonist both the time and opportunity to look back, re-

[3] On family or informal caregiving, see Harris (2011).

flect, review, and reevaluate his life, to take stock, and accept blame or make amends if he so chooses. Dragunsky's hero, for example, seems to renounce his past life as a kind of fantasy along with rejecting the fantasy for a unique funeral monument displaying the arrogant epitaph: "I am home, you are just visiting." He is reconciled to the reality of his last days at home with his grandchildren, who have accepted being conscientious caregivers, despite how he treated them or thought of them.

In reading these stories we also come to appreciate the ambiguity of the aging mind, the ambivalence of the desire to be self-sufficient, and feelings of being a burden on others, while recognizing the pressing need for care and assistance.

ALTERNATIVES TO AGEIST STEREOTYPES

Nevertheless, while certain writers seem to reflect anticipated stereotypes and reproduce the expected, reductive images we may be so familiar with that we do not even recognize their negative implications, others endeavor to resist such prototypes of ageism and aging, subjecting them to review or ridicule in order to reject, dispute, or re-characterize them, thereby countering or even challenging some of the limitations, barriers, and boundaries such socially determined categories may inflict on the human mind.

For example, it is illuminating to consider how writers imagine an array of alternatives to the stereotypical ageist image of the elderly as inherently helpless, feeble, frail, and passive victims. While Dragunsky's and Tolstaya's male personalities are characterized as having elements of both victim and victimizer, two stories by Ludmila Ulitskaya and Irina Muravyova repudiate the imagery of the older woman as but a weak and passive victim, instead imagining older female characters as self-absorbed egocentric victimizers. Indeed, Ulitskaya's 1998 "Pikovaia dama" (The Queen of Spades; Ulitskaya 2007, 2011) focuses on the provocative image of Mur, while Muravyova introduces a similarly self-centered personality type—Anna Petrovna—as the heroine of "Na Kropotkinskoi ulitse" (In Kropotkinskaya Street; Muravyova 1996). Both older women are characterized as haughty, snobbish, demanding, and selfish "grand dames," disdainfully keeping their emotional distance from their own family members.[4]

Similar to Alexander Pushkin's old Countess from the short story of the same name, Ulitskaya's victimizer, Mur, wields an uncanny power over others. Although going on 90, she remains a domineering, egocentric matriarch, nostalgically recalling an era long gone when she was celebrated for her beauty, independence, and numerous love affairs. Now, however, this elderly woman is presented as a foul-mouthed prima donna, who persists in behaving as if she were still the same young celebrity ever at the center of attention, taking pleasure in subjecting those around her to her whims and tantrums, ignoring the consequences. She expresses her power through perpetual demands, large and small, considering her own daughter no better than a mistreated servant. Not merely insensitive to others' needs or desires, she refuses to

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[4] See Savkina (2011) for a more detailed list of alternative types.

recognize their existence. We find that Mur has not only ruined her daughter Anna's life, but made impossible any normal family relationships.

The plot of Ulitskaya's "The Queen of Spades" centers around the sudden, unexpected visit of Anna's former husband, who after years of living in emigration, hopes to renew his family bonds and fulfill his role as father and grandfather. His visit allows the children of the family to realize what they have missed due to the old woman's selfish and erratic behavior. This provides the opportunity for them to begin to rebel against her, to disregard her requests, and even to show her disrespect, as the father seems to usurp her place at the center of family attention. Nevertheless, at the end of the story, Mur's uncanny power seems to prevail. When Anna tries to trick her into believing the family will be going to the dacha instead of preparing for a family vacation with their father in Greece, Mur's whims—a petty demand for milk in her morning coffee—not only results in Anna's hospitalization but potentially thwarts the dream of a family reunion.[5]

Muravyova's "In Kropotkinskaya Street" contains a similar personality type as her heroine; however, her end differs substantially from Mur's. Depicted as the story's egocentric, elitist matriarch, Anna Petrovna's haughty sense of dignity, elegant manners, and old-fashioned turns of phrase reflect a bygone era which she desperately endeavors to preserve; her pride and snobbery are turned against her daughter-in-law, whom she treats with disdain, never allowing the possibility of developing a close family relationship, even with her grandchildren. Although Anna Petrovna physically lives under the same roof with her husband, daughter-in-law, and grandchild, her superiority complex isolates her psychologically and deprives her of meaningful contact.

The plot centers on the old woman's efforts to exchange her large apartment near the Arbat in Moscow for two smaller ones, so that she will no longer occupy the same space as her daughter-in-law. In the course of the narrative, we learn that her two beloved sons have died, after marrying women she considered socially inferior. Thus, much like Ulitskaya's "Queen," Anna Petrovna lives in a world of her own making, empowered by the sense of her own superiority, looking down on all those who might have enriched her life, while making their lives miserable in the process.

However, in this story the plot of the failed apartment exchange is enclosed by an introduction and conclusion set outside the apartment, in the public space of the nearby Café Prague, where the neighborhood poor—the impoverished older women from the Arbat district—gather, seeking refuge in the inviting warmth while swiping the tasty leftovers from children's orders of apple tarts. As the story ends some years later, we witness how Anna Petrovna is rescued from disgracing herself stealing leftovers in the café by her daughter-in-law, who is still sharing the same apartment. Thus, on the story's last page, she is no longer a victimizer but has become a victim of her own elitist mentality. She has lost her pride and dignity and been reduced to anonymity—to one of the ordinary old women haunting the Café Prague:

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[5] See Skomp and Sutcliffe (2015) for a more comprehensive assessment of Ulitskaya's fiction.

> "What are you doing here again, Anna Petrovna?" she hissed in a loud whisper, pulling the old woman again sharply around to face her. "I rang home, but there was no answer, so I thought: that's it, she's out polishing off leftovers again—must have felt like a bit of something sweet. As if I'd begrudge you a bun, for heaven's sake! Come on, we're going now. I had to take time off work, and I've run all the way here…" (Muravyova 1996:156)

While many contemporary narratives show that the elderly do manage to find resilience in their different social and economic environments, "In Kropotkinskaya Street" concludes with the total loss of a coping mechanism. Anna Petrovna ends up completely dependent on her daughter-in-law for care. The family caregiver theme is thus raised here as well, but only in the context of the old woman's loss of her former dignity and power. The caregiver burden is suggested but not developed, although the family is again shown to be the ultimate caregiving resource.

In both stories images of older women are envisioned confronting the standard ageist stereotype of the meek, weak "old woman," but also refusing to face the inevitable changes that accompany maturing and aging. Instead, they endeavor to remain resilient on their own terms, seeking to hold on to their former self-images as long as possible. Attachment to the past therefore controls their later lives, often burdening their families. Mur's independent, sexy, whimsically provocative, and demanding persona permits her to destroy her own daughter. Likewise, Anna Petrovna's haughty elitist self-image permits her to treat her daughter-in-law with disdain. Unlike Dragunsky's older hero's behavior, theirs results in isolating and diminishing them in old age. Both emerge as disgruntled old women, whose only purpose seems to be to make others' lives miserable. Thus, these two stories reject the standard ageist stereotype of the older woman as victim, even though the choice of an alternative image leads to painful outcomes. In both instances, their own victims feel obliged to fulfill their obligations as dutiful daughters, paying attention to their elderly relatives providing them with care.

Another contemporary work that directly challenges the ageist stereotype of the helpless, feeble passivity of the old woman as victim is imagined in a totally different mode. Aleksandra Marinina's detective novel *Prizrak muzyki* (The Spector of Music; Marinina 1999) creates a radically different alternative for Russia of the post-socialist new economic policy. Indeed, this story reveals a radically new portrait of an older woman who takes full advantage of the new capitalist system of the 1990s simply by adhering to expectations associated with the stereotype of an old woman, as Baba Klava.

Klavdiia Nikolaevna Romanova is at first introduced in typical ageist terms as an older homebody, a kindly, helpful, and inquisitive elderly neighbor. Later she is referred to as a "mysterious pensioner," and subsequently as a frightened old woman who falls sick and faints during an inquiry at the police station. It is not until her apartment is searched in conjunction with her neighbor's untimely death that her status is revealed as extraordinary. The revelation is that she is involved in Moscow's illicit drug trade, fully enjoying its perks, taking advantage of its rewards to buy herself a wealth of expensive luxury goods.

The plot reveals that when Klavdiia Nikolaevna's neighbor came across the hall as he usually did to use her telephone, he suddenly collapsed and died under suspicious circumstances. Naturally, she called an ambulance. When it was discovered that he had been poisoned, she was summoned to the police station to identify photos of visitors to his apartment to help pinpoint his potential murderer. He had been a dealer, trading both in illegal music cassettes and narcotics. Since the killer happened to be present during her interrogation, just as she was about to sign a statement identifying his photo, he threatened her and she collapsed: "the pen fell out of her hand. She began to gasp for air, her face turned purple, and she fell to the floor like a formless sack" (Marinina 1999:236). At the hospital the doctor requested the police send someone to her home to pick up her night clothes and toiletries. However, while gathering her things, the police inspector was surprised to find the anticipated ageist stereotype of an impoverished old pensioner shattered. Instead, the investigator stumbles across a contrary image: Baba Klava, the little old lady who fainted in the police station, is not only *not* impoverished, but is the owner of closets full of beautiful clothes, including an elegant new fur coat, a bathroom cabinet holding expensive toiletries, a brand new TV set, and kitchen shelves displaying new china.

While Baba Klava managed to share her comfortable lifestyle with her neighbors and friends who considered her a generous friend, they never suspected her of criminal activities. They explained her status in terms of the new capitalist age, convinced that her children became very successful and sent her funds to purchase whatever her heart desired. Nevertheless, the police suspect and eventually reveal more sinister reasons.

While she lies in her hospital bed, the police do a further investigation, sending out not only the younger members of their squad but calling back into service Lidiia Ivanovna, an older former specialist in criminal investigation, even though she had retired five years earlier. Assigned to stake out Baba Klava's apartment, she answers her telephone and the door buzzer in the hope of tracking visitors and acquaintances. In this way, we gradually learn that Klavdiia Nikolaevna has been involved for three years in a complex scheme, acting as a pusher, taking full advantage of the new economic system, and benefitting immensely from her ill-gotten gains.

Lidiia Ivanovna and the rest of the investigative team gradually come to understand the complexities of the narcotics operation. While Baba Klava kept no drugs in her apartment, she would conceal packets in secret spaces in the neighborhood. Clients knew to come to her apartment to pay her cash in exchange for information about the secret locations. Since Baba Klava had access to the buildings in her neighborhood where friends and acquaintances lived, she came and went freely without causing suspicion, placing drug packets in entryways, behind radiators, and such without being considered an intruder.[6]

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[6] See Nepomnyashchy (1999) and Trofimova (2002) for details on Marinina's novels.

THE POETIC IMAGINATION AS AGENCY

After reading these stories we might begin to ask if in order to counter ageist stereotypes of victimized older persons, it is necessary to be a victimizer.

However, both Ludmila Ulitskaya's 1994 story "Vtorogo marta togo zhe goda" (March Second of That Year; Ulitskaya 1998, 2007) and Ludmilla Petrushevskaya's 1995 story "Most Vaterloo" (Waterloo Bridge; Petrushevskaya 1995) cleverly provide positive alternative images, employing forms of the poetic imagination—the active imaginary and fantasy—as agency, indeed as key to overcoming biological, psychological, and theoretical legacies of determinism shaped by societal and historical forces dominating society's culturally constructed stereotypes.

Ulitskaya's narrative suggests a significant and active role for her elderly hero, great-grandfather Aaron, despite the fact that he is bedridden and dying. While physically immobile, he is endowed with a positive outlook on life and an inspired imagination.

His son "admired the quiet fortitude of a father who in his entire ninety-year existence had not complained about anything nor ever been resentful" (Ulitskaya 1998:209–210, trans. Hoisington). In this tale involving respectful, close, and loving family relationships, great-grandfather's illness hardly prevents him from telling old legends and Bible tales to comfort, entertain, and enlighten his great-granddaughter who is suffering from her own age-related trials and traumas of adolescence and puberty. According to Gaston Bachelard (1994:33),

> Great images have both a history and a prehistory; they are always a blend of memory and legend, with the result that we never experience an image directly. Indeed, every great image has an unfathomable oneiric depth to which the personal past adds special color. Consequently, it is not until late in life that we really revere an image, when we discover that its roots plunge well beyond the history that is fixed in our memories.

Thus, in direct contrast to society's ageist stereotypes, in this story the oldest of the old still functions as an active participant in family life, passing on revered memories and legends, despite being confined to his bed. Indeed, old Aaron's bed provides a warm, comforting, and loving space for his great-grandchild, as she snuggles trustingly and lovingly up next to him, making her request: "So tell me a story."

> And old Aaron would tell a story, about Daniel or about Gideon, or about bogatyrs, beautiful women, sages, and tsars with hard to pronounce names. All were their kin who had died long ago, but the little girl was under the impression that Great-grandfather Aaron, because he was so old, had known and remembered some of them. (Ulitskaya 1998:210, trans. Hoisington)

Moreover, "aging" and the aging process are cleverly represented here by juxtaposing two prominent but contrasting developmental stages in the aging process: a great-grandparent's end-of-life issues and a great-grandchild's anxieties over the growing pains of puberty.

Highly significant is the timely imposition of mind over matter, poetic imagination over harsh reality that may come "late in life." Despite his failing body, old Aaron's mind, in the form of his vivid imagination, memory, intellect, and love, provides agency, wields power, indeed renews previously untapped powers to bring true joy and solace when most desperately needed into the heart of the family in extremis. In this story the family crisis trumps, even mutes, the historical crisis of "March of that year" (Joseph Stalin's death in 1953). Instead, this story offers a poetic tribute to the power of family love at any age during the worst of circumstances. Ageist stereotypes are challenged by ignoring or reversing them. Each character is perceived as fulfilling a role in this family drama set against a background of extreme historical trauma. There is no place for ageist exclusion.

Thus, both Ulitskaya and Dragunsky imagine rather uplifting images of elderly male protagonists. Having lived long, useful lives, both are perceived as capable of coping with death and dying and are worthy of the love and respect of their families. Courageously and honestly facing life at its end, both are represented as deserving "good deaths." This is in direct contrast to Tolstaya's protagonist of "The Circle," who having just turned 60, is weathering the shock of facing his own mortality for the first time. He can only see himself as a victim of his own life choices. Moreover, his life review is unsatisfactory—it brings neither peace of mind nor a sense of pride; he reverts to his conditioned reflexes and usual resource. The story concludes with the ironic image of him standing in line yet again, "gratefully accepting from gentle hands his well-earned cup of hemlock" (Tolstaya 1987:104).

On the other hand, while Petrushevskaya's "Waterloo Bridge" opens with ageist imagery, the narrative resolves in a positive fantasy vision. The narrator observes the life of her lonely older heroine, known as "Granny Olia," who experiences a retrospective vision of what her life "might have been" and then rejoices in a kind of Gogolian fantastic as she comes to reimagine it and live in the fantasy of a new love and new life. The opening lines define the heroine through the eyes of the public: "By now everyone called her 'Granny' on public transport and on the street" (Petrushevskaya 1995:10).[7]

Here we see the external narrator's empirical focus, the allegedly "objective" public view of an older woman perceived through a familiar ageist concept, immediately recognizable to "everyone." Externally, she looks and behaves as society expects, deprived of agency. However, the narrator's empirical observations of this older woman are juxtaposed to the heroine's subjective experience, her emotional determination to change her life. She then rejoices not in mere retrospection but in imagining and discovering "all her dreams" on a movie screen.

Minimal superficial biographical details regarding her home life, work, and living situation are all presented from the viewpoint of a casual but objective outside observer, based on the stereotypical images of loneliness, indifference, and domestic dysfunction common to Petrushevskaya's writing: women abandoned by their spous-

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[7] For a full examination of "Granny" types, see Savkina (2011); see Smith (1999) for more on Petrushevskaya's prose.

es, living under the same roof as their offspring, but with little meaningful family contact.

Granny Olia's personality is thus initially defined in traditional gendered and ageist terms—as a motherly type who devotes herself to others: "an extremely kind soul, forever fussing over someone, dragging herself with bags to every moldy relative, hanging about hospitals, even going to tidy up graves, all by herself" (Petrushevskaya 1995:10).

Only subsequently does the narrator take the reader into Granny Olia's inner consciousness; then we begin to realize that she has a mind of her own, a personality, which emerges fully and forcefully when the plot finds this lonely older woman making the rash decision to go to the movies alone: "one day she just couldn't stand the burden and trouble and futility of ringing the doorbells of strangers and suddenly found herself at a movie theatre—solely for her own enjoyment" (Petrushevskaya 1995:11).

Her transformation occurs gradually. First, she begins to observe the other moviegoers, recognizing similarities to her own pensioner status: "a large number of women her age stood by the entrance, just like her, with their handbags" (Petrushevskaya 1995:11), but she repudiates that model, resisting it as inapplicable. Then, after surprising herself again by indulging in expensive snacks, she rejoices in her new discovery on the screen: "On the screen Granny Olia saw all her dreams—herself, young, slender as a reed … and also saw her husband, as he should have been, and that life which, for some reason, she had not lived" (11).

Finally, on her way home she "suddenly" has a vision: "as in a dream she saw before her, full of tenderness and concern, the face of Robert Taylor" (Petrushevskaya 1995:11). For the first time in her life, she has both the time and the will to treat herself to personal pleasure—the psychological and sexual fantasies of an ideal romance with the film star, Robert Taylor. Fantasies replace the memories of a failed marriage and lonely existence. Not only does she enjoy herself, but, like Baba Klava in Marinina's novel, she also finds a new calling, which she is determined to share with others, for they too have a right to happiness. As she defines her new role in life, she "abandons all conventions" and begins to preach to her clients:

> And finally, Granny Olia found her place in life once and for all. She cast aside all conventions. No longer did she consider insurance and collecting premiums to be her most important task; rather, it was inspiring customers who were submerged in the dust of the earth, inspiring them with the thought that there exists another life, another, unearthly, higher one, of picture shows, say, at 7 and 9 p.m., at the Screen of Life Cinema on Sadovo-Karetnaia Street. As she expounded this, her eyes shone through her thick glasses…. why she was doing this, Granny Olia did not know herself, but she knew that she had to bring people happiness, new happiness…. and she experienced toward her rare recruits (male and female alike) a mother's tenderness—but also a mother's strictness, for she was their guide in that world… (Petrushevskaya 1995:12)

Thus, fantasy and indeed the fantastic endow her life with new meaning. Petrushevskaya's wit and empathy allow her Granny heroine not only romance but also the opportunity to revive her traditional maternal role, though with a difference, specifically adapted to the "third age." Therefore, we may ask: Does she achieve her version of Eriksonian "wisdom"? Or is this another, alternative form of resilience?

The story concludes with an ending reminiscent of Nikolay Gogol's "Shinel'" (The Overcoat), suspending disbelief, allowing for the fantastic, the strange, and in that, all range of possibility: "And she began to understand, having seen Taylor one more time, who it was that met her on the dark street after the movie, who had walked alongside her … sick and neglected, miserable, unshaven but with a mustache" (Petrushevskaya 1995:13).

Indeed, the last paragraph echoes Gogol's narrator in insisting that anything is possible:

> And you know, if you really think about it, who else could have dragged himself out to seek his beloved when the whole world had forgotten her, who else could be out there … what poor sick shadow in an undersized overcoat, abandoned by everyone would be wandering, in order to appear on Waterloo Bridge before that very last soul, forgotten by all… (Petrushevskaya 1995:13)

This story thus seems to suggest some adherence to Erikson's theory: it posits Granny Olia's crisis—her struggle with the challenge of aging—as well as her achievement of a positive outcome, a certain ego integrity and wisdom. She arrives at this stage, however, through agency—through her capacity both to take a chance to do something on her own and to appropriate fantasy as her new reality, as the source of happiness, a form of resilience, which she then feels obliged to share with others in order to help them alter their miserable lives. Whether this retrospective act is a positive or negative resolution in Eriksonian terms is highly ambiguous and left up to the reader's imagination. However, from a feminist perspective, aging has been viewed as an opportunity for some women to liberate themselves from their socially determined roles, offering them a chance to contemplate their own identity and to renew and redefine their roles in society. For example, Barbara Frey Waxman in "Fiction of Ripening" (1990) called the act of "growing old" a "journey," comparing it to Erikson's psychosocial stages of development, which "lead to new self-definitions."

What Petrushevskaya adds, and what seems most significant in this case, is the emphasis on the poetic imagination, or indeed the Gogolian fantastic, as a source of agency. It is offered as a fundamental coping mechanism of old age in much of her writing about older characters, serving as a subjective means to overcome all limitations. In Granny Olia's case, allowing her imagination full reign not only lets her "enjoy" herself for the first time in her life, experience new feelings of liberation and joy, unrepressed sexual feelings she could not name, but it also revitalizes her socially oriented, maternal self to guide others in a motherly fashion to a better, happier life. Granny Olia's feelings of empowerment allow her to disassociate herself from the ageist stereotype of lonely old women haunting movie theatres—to overcome the stereotype of a pensioner. Indeed, in her mind her fantasy lover views her

as *forever young*, as she imagines him accompanying her around the city. And again, according to Bachelard, "In the realm of absolute imagination we remain young late in life. But we must lose our earthly Paradise in order actually to live in it, to experience it in the reality of its images, in the absolute sublimation that transcends all passion" (1994:33).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we see that the poetic imagination as reflected in literary discourse, in perceptions and representations of older characters and ageist images as well as in attitudes toward the dilemmas of aging, ranges widely in late twentieth-century Russian prose narratives—for, as Krasnova (2005) aptly noted, "the elderly are not a homogeneous grouping."

It should not be surprising that fictional narratives question norms at every level of representation. Indeed, essential questions are raised concerning differences between norms and stereotypes as readers are urged to consider what is appropriate or normal behavior for older persons in Russian society. In addition, we may wonder how norms may become stereotypes, or vice versa, and, indeed, what constitutes the source of differences between norms and stereotypes, or when does a norm become a stereotype.

Thus, we find that creative writers employ the poetic imagination variously to question, and often to defy, those norms associated with socially and culturally constructed stereotypes of old age and aging, in particular those expressed so deeply in the national consciousness that they inhabit the very linguistic basis of the Russian language, even defining the proverbial "old man" or "old woman," such as "*Starost' ne radost'!*"

In this essay, three instances of psychological, social, and biological norms are referenced as examples of discourses representing the ongoing discussion of theoretical norms pertaining to aging. Erik Erikson and Joan Erikson focus on retrospection as a key developmental and psychological task or developmental norm. Ol'ga Krasnova promotes the essential idea of difference among elderly people. And the UN *World Report on Aging and Health* emphasizes the need for society to focus on resilience, the human capacity to act or make choices at any stage of life, as essential to empower older adults.

This essay attempts to show through a variety of texts how and where Russian writers of the late twentieth century confront ageism and the dilemmas of aging and thereby dispute, deny, reject, repudiate, or transform such social constructions. While selective, this survey is an effort to illuminate the great variety of fictional responses and alternatives to ageism and to confront the dilemmas of aging, essentially continuing to promote the expansive and enduring, indeed the eternal values of the Russian literary tradition. It highlights more than three decades of the poetic imagination employed to "face down despair" and provide a semblance of "hope" in Joan Erikson's wise words (Erikson 1997), by contemplating and resisting the stereotypes of aging in Russian society, the prevalent "norms" referenced for understanding older people. Equally important, it attempts to reinforce Krasnova's (2005) extraordi-

narily apt and succinct statement that “the elderly are not a homogeneous grouping” and therefore show how greatly responses to aging may differ. And no less important, it endeavors to demonstrate the relevance of the UN *World Report on Aging and Health* (2015), which addresses key issues of aging but focuses on empowering older people to adapt and consider “different forms of resiliency.” Thus, this essay strongly suggests that the theoretical discourses expressed in these references are often exemplified, considered, assessed, and both challenged and reified in late twentieth-century Russian fiction.

If the premise of literature and the poetic imagination is not to express norms but rather to confront and question them and, in particular, static or established socially and culturally constructed stereotypes, more often than not exposing, disputing, or repudiating them, fiction serves an essential intellectual, psychological, and cultural function. While literary fiction may identify some common patterns, it then tends to focus on reactions, resistance, or efforts to reimagine or reframe society’s socially constructed norms. Indeed, the mere representation of vitality of mind or choice-making or individuality in an older person resists the persistent stereotype of frail, burdensome elderly.

Examples demonstrate various forms of resistance. From Baranskaya to Petrushevskaya, we can recognize stories unfolding, ranging from shock and pain to unexpected resilience. Baranskaya’s “Retirement Party” exposes the hypocrisy of the very premise of the socially accepted ritual of the retirement party, showing how society attempts to normalize an extremely painful experience. Petrushevskaya’s “Waterloo Bridge” shows how resilience can “free” an older woman, can take the form of actual as well as poetically imagined resistance to the norms or stereotypes expressed in the narrator’s initial introduction of her heroine: “Everyone called her ‘Granny.’” Freeing herself from the burden of norms, she goes to the movies on her own and imagines sexual pleasure for herself; later, she exhibits her maternal drive to share her discoveries with her clients.

On the other hand, while we are introduced to different forms and responses to retrospective analysis and the ambiguities of the aging mind in the writings of Dragunsky, Tolstaya, and Ulitskaya, we are surprised by the unexpected forms of agency and resistance expressed in various and variant forms in the works of Ulitskaya, Muravyova, and Marinina.

Literary fiction may thus identify some common patterns, but it then tends to focus on reactions, promoting perspectives ranging from pity and disgust to respect and honor, from awe and admiration to dismay and disbelief, with some characters inviting both pity and admiration, forcing us as readers to reconsider how and what we traditionally consider normative strengths and weaknesses, how we judge various types of compensatory behaviors and forms of resilience, coping mechanisms or strategies for survival, and above all, perhaps, how we respond emotionally and imaginatively, and indeed ironically, to the complexities of the lives of older people and the conundrum of aging when faced with alternative ageist images of the elderly, the aging process, and the “third age.” In a word, fiction “notices” differences as well as similarities, deviations as well as norms.

The poetic imagination therefore captures minor as well as major changes, the variety of unexpected, unanticipated thoughts, feelings, actions, and behaviors of older persons. Narrators notice and voice not only the pain and suffering, regrets and longings, or the frailties associated with aging stereotypes, but the excitement, joy, delight, intelligence, humor, and even the morally questionable or "wicked" decisions, needs and values not previously or usually expressed, coping mechanisms that deviate from the accepted social norms of the day as well as potential strategies yielding variant unexpected behavior and thinking.

Thus, the poetic imagination we confront in these highly imaginative fictional pieces helps us as readers to gain awareness that all elderly are *not* alike, that they are *not* all burdensome, frail, weak, and needy, but rather value independence, resistance, resilience, and offer numerous gifts, if only we are willing to notice and listen carefully.

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ПРОТИВОСТОЯНИЕ ЭЙДЖИЗМУ И ДИЛЕММА СТАРЕНИЯ. ЛИТЕРАТУРНАЯ ГЕРОНТОЛОГИЯ И ПОЭТИЧЕСКОЕ ВООБРАЖЕНИЕ: ОТ БАРАНСКОЙ ДО МАРИНИНОЙ

Джейн Гэри Харрис

Джейн Гэри Харрис, факультет славянских языков и литературы, Питтсбургский университет. Адрес для переписки: 8 East 8th Street, Apt 3-A, New York, NY 10003, USA. jpgharris2003@yahoo.com.

Литературная геронтология – сравнительно новая область науки, которая занимается осмыслением, анализом и изучением социальных, культурных и биологических ожиданий и эйджистских стереотипов, связанных со старением и старостью. Эта область подвергает сомнению существующие репрезентации старения и старости, дряхлости и деменции, повседневного опыта пожилых людей, форм их виктимизации, а также семейных отношений, бросая вызов искаженным представлениям об этих явлениях. Исследования в сфере литературной геронтологии предполагают изучение как внешних, так и внутренних перспектив социальной геронтологии и их воплощения в литературной и лингвистической формах. С одной стороны, данные перспективы могут включать в себя дистанцированные теоретические дискурсы – представления с точки зрения геронтологии, биологии, демографии, психологии, философии и т. д. С другой стороны, рассматриваются и дискурсы, в основе которых лежит субъективное и эвристическое знание: дневники, автобиографии, проза, поэзия, а также распространенные поговорки и афоризмы.

В данной статье российские культурные стереотипы, связанные с конструктами старения, рассматриваются через призму эриксоновской психосоциальной теории, разоблачающих эйджистские заблуждения идей Ольги Красновой, положений Всемирного доклада ООН о старении и здоровье, а также поэтического воображения, которое находит отражение в литературном и лингвистическом дискурсах. Литературный дискурс представлений о старении проявляется в характере ярких художественных образов – пожилых мужских и женских персонажей художественной литературы. Лингвистический же дискурс представлен на таком материале, как пословицы и поговорки. Так, например, в рассказе Натальи Баранской «Проводы» (1968) читателям предлагается оценить, какое влияние выход на пенсию оказывает на идентичность героини. Роман Александры Марининой «Призрак музыки», опубликованный в 1999 году, демонстрирует радикальную альтернативу образу пожилой женщины-жертвы. У Ирины Муравьевой и Людмилы Улицкой пожилые женщины представлены как мучительницы. В то же время в рассказе Людмилы Петрушевской «Мост Ватерлоо», (1995) (как и у Людмилы Улицкой в рассказе «Второго марта того же года», 1991) поэтическое воображение предстает как агентность и вызов эйджистским стереотипам, навязанным культурой общества. Нарративы же Дениса Драгунского и Татьяны Толстой демонстрируют, как пожилые персонажи-мужчины воображают альтернативы старения и умирания, мысленно обращаясь к прошлому и будущему.

Ключевые слова: литературная геронтология; эйджизм; агентность; биологический детерминизм; мудрость; поэтическое воображение; размышления о прошлом; целостность Я