

УДК 821.161.2.09:355.01-055.2-053.9(470+571-651.1:477)»20»  
DOI: 10.32589/2411-3883.22.2025.359659

**Anhelina Stolitnia**

PhD Student of Department of Literary Theory and Comparative Literary Studies  
Ivan Franko National University of Lviv  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4356-8048>  
anhelinastolitnia@gmail.com

## **OLD WOMEN BEHIND THE SMOKESCREEN OF MEMORY: LOOKING FOR AGED FEMALE CHARACTERS IN UKRAINIAN LITERATURE ABOUT RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR**

**Abstract.** *This paper examines the representation of aged female characters in contemporary Ukrainian literature about the Russian-Ukrainian war, focusing on themes of memory, home, generational conflict, and the inner challenges of aging. Drawing on cultural gerontology, I approach old age not as a fixed chronological stage but as a social and narrative construct, shaped by how others perceive aging women and how these women navigate their identities. My research investigates how the marginalized status of aged women is affected by war as an existential threat and how these characters try to overcome it.*

*The selected fictional texts include books written before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, showing the early literary responses to the war in diverse genres: play *Bread Truce* by Serhii Zhadan, a play *Bad Roads* by Natalka Vorozhbyt, a novel *Daughter* by Tamara Horikha Zernia, and a novel *Long Hours* by Volodymyr Rafeenko.*

**Key words:** *literary gerontology; female aging; Ukrainian literature; Serhii Zhadan; Natalka Vorozhbyt; Tamara Horikha Zernia; Volodymyr Rafeenko.*

**Ангеліна Столітня**

аспірантка кафедри теорії літератури та порівняльного літературознавства  
Львівського національного університету імені Івана Франка  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4356-8048>  
anhelinastolitnia@gmail.com

## **СТАРІ ЖІНКИ В ТІНІ ПАМ'ЯТІ: У ПОШУКАХ СТАРИХ ПЕРСОНАЖОК В УКРАЇНСЬКІЙ ЛІТЕРАТУРІ ПРО РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКУ ВІЙНУ**

**Анотація.** *У статті досліджено репрезентацію образу старої жінки у сучасній українській літературі про російсько-українську війну. Основний акцент аналізу старих персонажок стоїть на темах пам'яті, дому, міжпоколіннього конфлікту та внутрішніх викликів старіння. Старість в межах роботи розглядається не як фіксований хронологічний етап людського життя, а як соціальний та наративний конструкти, що впливають на способи репрезентації та вибудовування ідентичності. Стаття прописує процеси трансформації маргіналізованої жіночої фігури під впливом війни як екзистенційної загрози, а також стратегії подолання вікової та гендерної маргіналізації.*

*Матеріалом дослідження стали художні тексти, написані до повномасштабного вторгнення Росії в Україну, які відображають ранні літературні реакції на війну в різних жанрах: п'єса «Хлібне перемир'я» Сергія Жадана, п'єса «Погані дороги» Наталки Ворожбит, роман «Доця» Тамари Горіха Зерня та роман «Довгі часи» Володимира Рафеєнка.*

**Ключові слова:** *літературна геронтологія; жіноче старіння; українська література; Сергій Жадан; Наталка Ворожбит; Тамара Горіха Зерня; Володимир Рафеєнка.*

Western youth-oriented culture often overlooks the challenges associated with aging. Some gerontologists suggest that the reluctance to openly discuss the ageing process stems from biological and psychological factors. However, cultural gerontologist Margaret Gullet argues that aging is influenced

not by biology, but primarily by culture (Gullet, 2004, 102). It is culture, in its broadest sense, that defines who qualifies as any old person, when this transition occurs, how others should treat them, and how an older individual is expected to present themselves in Western society.

For most people, aging can be a challenging process due to changes in health, retirement, and the reduction of social networks. However, the experience of aging is not uniform; men and women often enter this stage of life under differing circumstances and with varying degrees of societal pressure. These differences are rooted in deeply embedded cultural and social constructs that shape the expectations, roles, and opportunities available to individuals based on their gender. As a result, exploring the intersection of aging and gender becomes essential to understanding how these factors influence not only the physical and emotional aspects of aging but also the societal perceptions of this process. Therefore, to study a literary image of an aged woman, it is essential to address the gendered aspects of aging.

One of the prominent voices significant for the beginning of cultural gerontology was Susan Sontag. In her essay *The Double Standard of Aging*, Sontag emphasizes that male and female aging is perceived differently in Western society. While her views on women and their problems have since been revisited, Sontag still highlights one of the greatest issues of aging – the gender aspect (Sontag, 2024, 7). For men, old age has historically been associated with wisdom and maturity, from ancient times to the present (Heath, 2009, 1). In contrast, for women, old age is described as «always a miniature ordeal» (Sontag, 2024, 4) because female aging was considered a taboo – a dirty secret. Women had to mask their faces and bodies to hide their age or even avoid talking about it. It was deemed inappropriate for a woman to grow old (Sontag, 2024, 5). This spotlights the importance of examining the female experience of aging as marginal in a sociocultural way.

Therefore, old age, mainly female, must be critically analyzed in an interdisciplinary context as a complex of physiological, cognitive, mental, social, historical, and cultural phenomena. In the Western context, society often offers aging women only a limited range of roles, with the most socially accepted being that of a family member – a caring grandmother. But what happens if she does not wish to live this way? How is she perceived outside the family that is still again tied to the reproductive context?

Faced with such expectations, an aged woman may find herself isolated and constrained within this experience, lacking the agency to challenge

societal norms. This lack of autonomy reinforces feelings of enclosure and loneliness, leaving her with not many alternatives to redefine her identity beyond the familial sphere.

In this case, literary texts can provide a whole gallery of experiences, illustrating issues and an extensive range of cultural symbols and metaphors attached to aging. One of the most common associative metaphors used for aging, especially female aging, is the mirror, as only a mirror can provide an image of aging at its early stages. It becomes the Other, reflecting even the smallest changes in a woman's face and causing numerous anxieties about her appearance. The idea of a mirror as a metaphor for the female body stems from Susan Sontag who claims that in societal imagination, a woman tends to always stare at her reflection in the mirror. Thus, the mirror can be perceived as a reflection and extension of a woman's body itself. Kathleen Woodward further develops Sontag's argument by exploring elderly women through the intellectual lens of psychoanalysis. She uses Jacques Lacan's notion of the mirror stage to analyze the split of the Self (Woodward, 2006, 168). The woman in the mirror sees an old, decrepit body and perceives this body not as the Self but as the Other. Woodward makes a distinction between the social and the physiological body, which are in constant conflict.

Therefore, literary fiction is not a replica or a mirror that merely reflects reality, but rather an analytical tool that can become a cornerstone for understanding the experiences of this internal conflict of female aging in Western society which is heavily focused on women's appearance. As for the Ukrainian literary canon, the prevailing tendency is to treat aging women with sympathy for their infirmity or sentimentalisation as an archetype of the Mother. The representation of aged women remains conventional, i.e., an almost folkloric image of the grandmother that demonstrates how persistent the connection between the female and the family sphere is, even when a woman loses reproductive functions, taking on domestic functions (Gurven, Kaplan 2008, 55). Ukrainian literature still needs a full-fledged first-person novel that could be included in the age autobiography genre, as conceptualised by Kathleen Woodward, so-called Her-story (Woodward 2006, 180).

In this respect, Ukrainian military literature, which was reanimated at the beginning of Russia's

war against Ukraine in 2014, demonstrates rather negative trends in depicting women's old age. However, unlike the Western war prose of the twentieth century, which was centered around male figures (*Death of a Hero* by Richard Aldington, *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Ernest Hemingway), contemporary Ukrainian literature displays a range of women's experiences. The characters in the texts are warrioresses, volunteers, doctors, and wives on the home front who are waiting for their husbands to return from the frontline. These Ukrainian texts focus heavily on the female characters' inner experiences of the war and their perception of a new reality.

Contrarily, aged women in these texts still fall into the trap of invisibility and voicelessness. The depiction of women's old age in the texts about war is always fragmentary, barely perceptible. There is no clear depiction or even signs of the old body in the endangered war landscapes. In peaceful times, one of the most important problems for an old woman might be the aging process and masking her aging body. However, during wartime, the discourse of anti-aging is pushed to the backseat. Instead, the older woman tries to survive in a freeze mode. She is no longer frightened by aging as a precursor to death. Now, it is not her external appearance but the situation around her that becomes an immediate sign of death. Under these circumstances, the old woman hides her body literally (in basements and different kinds of shelters) not to forget about death, but to avoid it.

In contemporary Ukrainian literature about the war, an endangered home becomes one of the most essential parts of a female existence. Metaphorically speaking, the physical home replaces the biological body of an aged woman. It holds memories, connects her with the previous generations, and becomes a symbolic shelter. A key point in Ukrainian military plots is that home, body, and memory are unreliable, but the aged woman tries to rely on them. Even when displaced, aged women still live in their homes through the phenomenon of nostalgia and their attachment to memories of youth.

Contemporary Ukrainian military prose depicts aged female characters in war conditions in diverse ways. Some of the analyzed texts portray an old woman as a madwoman, while others emphasize her family ties or religious aspects of life. I chose these particular texts because they all focus on the

experiences of old women living under Russian occupation or near the frontline, highlighting how they navigate war realities by relying on memory to build resilience. Since this is one of the first studies of the image of aged women in contemporary Ukrainian literature, I have deliberately focused on a small selection of texts that most vividly illustrate the central arguments of my research. However, this topic undoubtedly requires further exploration, and I hope my work will spark interest in this important yet underrepresented subject.

### Unreliable Memory

The play *Bread Truce* by Serhii Zhadan demonstrates the comic remains of a trope of the old woman as a chatterbox, the trope rooted in folklore-inspired literary texts such as *Baba Paraska and Baba Palazka* by Ivan Nechuj-Levytskii and *The Witch of Konotop* by Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko, while portraying three women in an absurdist setting. Among women, there is a strict hierarchy in which only the oldest, Aunt Shura, has the right to speak. Aunt Shura represents a suspicious old-aged female, a gossip who, nevertheless, has an apparent desire to care and help. It is only the first, outer layer of her character. This external layer conceals Aunt Shura's real power status because the events of the play occur directly in the war space, right in the middle of the ever-changing frontline. Her city is surrounded by fire, authority shifts constantly, and characters frequently refer to the «new» and «old» authority without naming them directly. In this unstable environment, Aunt Shura assumes the role of a steady, local authority. She embodies the figure of a powerful matriarch (Walker, 1985, 13), possessing knowledge and holding secrets.

Aunt Shura's memory as an aged woman is slippery and ambiguous. Using her social and political authority and the fact that she is the oldest, she can change the narrative of memories, using them to her advantage. Because the play's focalization is external, first-hand character's experiences remain unattainable and their thoughts and feelings stay outside the narrative. In addition, the aged woman carefully hides her internal self, bringing her old age and life experience as a substitute for her true identity. The fact that she outlived everyone in her street makes her a heroine and an ironically depicted great martyr. This experience provides her with the right to assist in burying the deceased mother of the main

characters, whose body has been lying in the house for several days. Aunt Shura knows about the funerary rites and rituals – the fact that allows her to act decisively; she is old in name only. In practice, her movements are precise and measured.

Nevertheless, Aunt Shura does not answer any questions. Her speech is not as comical and excessive as her behaviour, and she is often silent pretending she is not there. Aunt Shura uses numerous pauses in her speech because she is terrified of saying something wrong. The language during wartime transforms and can become a symbolic dangerous zone. The old woman is an observer of history. She sees how her neighbors die and how the city is destroyed but she doesn't have the proper language to talk about these events. In her situation, having any language means choosing her side. However, Aunt Shura prefers to exist in a space of liminality, caught in between.

Aunt Shura constantly eavesdrops and listens to what others say, but she is discreet. Aunt Shura herself notices the language disruption that occurred at the beginning of the war. She claims that all the words have ended because as reality has broken down, collapsed and no longer functions properly, so have the words lost all of their meaning. This issue touches upon the question of understanding, which is the issue that underlies the language of the whole play, that is, the fragility and uncertainty of language as a support structure. «Words are lacking. Words were the first to break. Everything fell apart – everyone speaks their own way, but no one understands, no one listens, no one hears (Zhadan, 2020, 114)».

Her existence is limited by the space of war, such as the small town, the street, and the house where she has to perform a funeral rite. The text pushes the aged woman to active actions because Aunt Shura represents the unique traits ultimately attributed to old women. At the same time, due to the war, she neglects the conventional duties of women. Firstly, as an old woman having passed the reproductive age (Lock 1993, 57) she is no longer under the control of society, but instead decides to be in control of it to some extent. Secondly, Aunt Shura is wanted and passively utilised by the «new» authority to maintain the local order and control; this image of an old woman as a war criminal does not fit into the common image of an aged woman. Thirdly, Aunt Shura does not talk about her family because she is responsible for herself, and the

family does not determine her value or her relatives are already dead. From a pragmatic point of view, this silence about family, or more precisely herself, could have saved the life of an old woman during wartime. She might have been a collaborator or an agent, but no one knows much about her and her ties to the different authorities. Her marginalized position in the literary text renders her invisible, suggesting that invisibility may have been crucial for her survival.

Due to her unreliability as a character, her memory is also inconsistent and contradictory. Although the old woman relies on certain material objects to validate her stories, the question remains: to what extent can her narrative be considered true? At the same time, Aunt Shura's memory is also rooted in a material place, the local post office, which is not consistent anymore (it was burned down due to military actions). As a result, the state of war destroys everything that could be valuable for the aged woman, including the physical spaces of personal memory. Instead, Aunt Shura's pre-war memories remain alive, accessible, and easy to articulate. At the same time, the reader cannot be certain of the truthfulness of these memories. Aunt Shura's recollections might be distorted or even entirely fictitious. Nevertheless, her significance as a character lies in the creation of a completely new trope: an old, controversial woman who, even during wartime, strives to preserve her agency and transitions from the margins of the text to one of its central roles.

### Caring Memory

Natalka Vorozhbyt proposes another model of female aging in her play *Bad Roads*. There is no coherent image of an aged woman in this text. The text consists of separate plots that eventually merge into one. Old women present in the different sections of the play represent one essentially consistent strategy of female aging during the war. It is the grandmother-housewife trope meaning that, according to this trope, the main aim of an old woman's life is caring for others, not just for her grandchildren but also treating young people as a part of the family and perceiving all of them as relatives.

This trope relates to the so-called grandmother hypothesis, which presumes that human life expectancy after the end of reproductive age has increased due to evolution. According to that hy-

pothesis, women in the post-fertile period take care of their grandchildren and pass on their life experiences to them which globally helped humanity to evolve (Hawkes, Coxworth 2013, 299).

A character who appears sporadically in the text is an aged woman who treats volunteers with homemade canned food. Even though she and her husband were under recurring missile strikes, the woman used to come out of the basement to pick up cucumbers from her vegetable patch to preserve them later. Such a minor and casual remark about this old woman confirms that she is already used to war; her life has adapted to the new conditions, which does not prevent her from farming. Due to this gastronomic code – a set of culinary practices with an affective element that shapes the structures of everyday life – the old woman transformed the traumatic memory of the bombing into a part of her daily experience. For this old woman, everyday life serves as both an escape and a coping mechanism in the context of war.

Another less episodic old female character appears in the text through the contrast with her young granddaughter. The difference between these female characters is very noticeable: an old woman with grey hair, an old discoloured bag and a tired face arouses her granddaughter's antipathy and the latter wants to hide and move away from the grandmother. An aged woman tries to establish a dialogue with her granddaughter, who pushes her away in every way and stubbornly refuses to listen to the elderly because of her firm positioning in «youth gaze», as Kathleen Woodward names it, «the youthful structure of the look» (Woodward 2006, 86). Their conversation seems more to be a phone conversation with short lines than real-life communication. The grandmother is the girl's only guardian, and they are both essentially lonely; I tentatively suggest that it might be one of or contribute to the reasons why they did not even get names in the text. The young character is ashamed of her grandmother's old age and her care, nevertheless, the grandmother looks after her granddaughter, feeds her, and tells stories about the past that existed in this area before the war, creating a comfortable atmosphere of security for her, all while explosions are heard in the background.

The old woman in the novel *Daughter* by Tamar Horikha Zernia performs a similar function. Her role in the text is clearly defined: Olha must take care of raising her granddaughter. However, when

the war begins in Donetsk, Olha's granddaughter is already an adult woman. Before military actions they were isolated while remaining in the same space. The story about the war unravels through the perspective of the young nameless character, who also observes her elderly guardian. Even when the granddaughter communicates with other people and evaluates a specific situation, throughout the text, she always expresses her personal view on the matter along with her grandmother's view, and she knows and projects how the grandmother could have reacted or responded to the event in question. Therefore, the grandmother's presence in her granddaughter's life is permanent, both implicit and explicit.

In Horikha Zernia's text, the premonition of war changes an aged woman. She becomes silent and withdrawn. Her entire existence is reduced to the space of the apartment and sleep, where she hides to escape reality. Chris Gilleard argues that aging as a process can be described as a period of loss (Gilleard, 2007, 88), and here the character of Olha also loses the ground under her feet. Without a plan of action, the old woman first falls into a state of anabiosis and decides not to talk to her granddaughter about the disturbing war events that are beginning to take place in the city.

It is evident that Olha refuses to evacuate and makes a deliberate choice to stay at home. As a result, two women remain at the war's epicentre: a young woman and an aged woman. The old woman does not go to a safe place because Donetsk is her home, which she cannot leave and the young woman wants revenge. She does not leave home because she feels she can be helpful there. Both women feel no fear when hostilities begin. Both are determined, they do not need to talk about what is happening, and they have already realized what role they have to play in this war.

The young woman chooses the role of a volunteer, and the old woman's choice falls upon the role of a grandmother. In this role, old Olha can help the Ukrainian soldiers by deceiving the separatists and can use the stolen property only to benefit her granddaughter and her volunteer activity. Therefore, the aged woman consciously chooses to use the «privileges» of old age in living an outwardly single life, but in fact, she is still guided by her principles and does not betray them. The old woman intentionally fashions herself and strangers into the categories of the family circle, calling the latter sons

and daughters in order to avoid danger and receive what she wants. In contrast to Aunt Shura from *Bread Truce* by Serhii Zhadan, Olha from *Daughter* possesses a solid position and a stable personality. She supports Ukrainian soldiers and actively seeks to help them. Despite her strong identity, the old woman remains almost invisible in the text, as her old age allows her to avoid drawing attention. This narrative and actual invisibility enable her to act freely without becoming a target for Russian forces. Both Aunt Shura and Olha, thanks to their marginality, gain certain benefits. However, Olha does this for her granddaughter, creating intergenerational links even in the midst of wartime.

Old age in this text is also important because it connects several generations of women while uniting them under challenging circumstances (Gurven, Kaplan 2008, 58). Grandmother Olha is a reservoir of family memories. She is the guardian of women's memory because she tells her granddaughter about how her whole family survived the Second World War. This focus of the old woman's narrative explains the behaviour of the novel's characters, which can be interpreted as postmemory, (a unique traumatic link between generations, where the younger generation perceives the traumatic experience of their ancestors as their own through old generations' narratives (Hirsch, 2012, 31). The identities of the leading female characters are built on what disasters their family has experienced in the past, with their trauma re-emerging later in each generation. Moreover, old age in the text contributes to the feminization of memory: old women, embodying the Crone archetype, which is deeply interconnected with the transmission of memory through narrative (Walker, 1985, 59), possess the accumulated experience and knowledge of the past necessary to survive in the present. These women are the ones who can articulate memory and apply it in practice. Marianne Hirsch argues that female storytelling can be seen as an act of resilience while simultaneously acknowledging vulnerability, thus expanding the discourse on trauma (Altynay et al., 2019, 14).

One of the most common expressions of old age, particularly female old age, is nostalgia. However, these memories are not always reliable enough to be trusted. In the case of older characters, nostalgia can become a form of duplicate memory, where the real past transforms over time into a restructured version, a kind of imagined reality that does not align with the historical 'truth.' This type of memory ex-

isting outside linear time prevents older characters from accepting new realities, often leaving them with a persistent sense of being stuck in time and focusing on a fixed space (Gergov, Stoyanova 2013, 358). Instead, the war conditions in *Dotsia* crystallize memory stripping old women of their illusions and nostalgia. Olha is an example of an aged woman being here and now. She has no sentiments about the Soviet past or a pro-Russian position. However, Olha never explicitly verbalizes her political position. For her, the main purpose is to emphasize the concept of home and territory that she marks as her own. The character accepts all the changes that occur in space, thus, from an adaptive perspective, her aging could be called successful. According to Chris Gilleard, successful aging is defined as «aging without age» (Gilleard, 2007, 83), which emphasizes focusing on life rather than the inevitability of death. However, this perspective warrants critical revision, as it still imposes societal expectations on how individuals should age and defines success through a socially constructed lens. This approach can create undue pressure and fails to account for the negative aspects and challenges of aging.

As I have mentioned before, Olha acquires complete subjectivity with her realization that there is no physical place to go. Escapism in nostalgic memory is not her script, so she comes out of the state of anabiosis quite quickly, does not break her social contacts, but bears through the war now with her granddaughter and then with her friend.

However, the reader needs a more complete picture of Olha's aging, as the text does not provide a detailed image of her experience of aging. Her age appears as a monolith, and the reader is not given access to her anxieties or thoughts, particularly those related to her age. The old woman again appears on the social margins, unable to fully experience this essential stage of her life. She cares, cooks, feeds, and shares her experience with her granddaughter but Olha does not speak directly for herself in the novel. Generally, this generation of old women who aged during the war is virtually voiceless. Other, more critical and pressing historical events always overshadow women's old age. Olha dissolves into the background of these circumstances, and although her granddaughter sees her grandmother as a kind of warrior who constantly fights and defends her own, the aged woman disappears from the text's horizon as soon as she is forced to leave her home due to the impending danger and

constant shelling. Consequently, Olha begins living in a shelter with other old women, forming her own small community in the warzone.

### Absent Memory

The novel *Long Hours* by Volodymyr Rafeenko presents a similarly externalized image of women's old age portrayed from the perspective of a male narrator in a manner that is slightly absurd and tinged with terror. An aged couple lives in a city that is constantly under Russian fire. Their existence describes the space in which they exist. Old age and war are symbolically and frequently literally interchangeable here, that is, the couple's apartment resembles a museum surrounded by the space ruined by the war, and the things in the house show more similarities with the museum exhibits than household items. Among all the analyzed texts in this research, this text is the first one to describe the appearance of an old woman. In *Long Hours*, the nameless old woman receives such visual traits as a bedridden, toothless figure, which significantly influences her manner of speaking. Her corporal existence is limited to the maximum and reduced to horizontal position. After getting used to her old age, a woman also gets used to the new 'body politics' (Macdonald 1995, 196). She is not ashamed to use a bedpan in front of strangers. Therefore, old age repels young observers causing disgust and fear.

The character finds the strength to make fun of her husband and keeps smiling telling a story about the death of her son. The woman does not remain completely indifferent to the war that is unraveling outside her window. She reflects upon the representation of the war on the TV screen and upon the so-called fascists, which brings back memories of her childhood spent during the previous war. Similarly to the character of the novel *Daughter*, the old woman already experienced once the loss of her home and the regime of occupation. Her entire life unfolded between these two wars, and these wars overshadowed her existence so profoundly that she cannot remember a time when her life was not defined by war. The layers of childhood and old age are symbolically interconnected, as the feeble-minded smile blends with a memory of personal tragedy, both of which, in the smile and the memories, phenomenologically form a unified whole.

In this context of waiting for a future life, the image of religious female aging is also quite in-

teresting. The other old female character named Clytemnestra built her identity around the church; therefore, her aging is dedicated to Christianity. Visiting the sacred places becomes a form of ritual for her, which she never oversteps. This helps the female character build a messianic image – one moment, she could ecstatically shout out quotes from the Bible and then immediately change and turn into an ordinary old woman. The aged woman is assertive, talkative, and ironic in her relationships with younger people.

This elderly woman portrayed as a religious fanatic embodies the image of religious aging that provides her with inner peace. Having endured the war, she maintains her faith in God and adheres to divine commandments. However, the war nullifies the miraculous comfort of religion in her life, as her religious devotion does not spare her from a Russian missile that strikes her house. An aged woman, who knows what love and forgiveness are, turns out to be powerless against the ultimate evil.

In light of my research findings, it is clear that female aging and memory embodiment in contemporary Ukrainian literature about the Russian-Ukrainian war have quite an extensive range of scenarios, despite the marginality of the topic itself. In the Ukrainian literary canon, particularly in war texts, aged women often embody the Mother archetype, positioned between sympathy and demonization. In analyzed contemporary fictional war text, old women are portrayed as invisible to the point of not even being given names. This lack of verbal representation not only erases aged female characters from the textual narrative but also positions them in the margins, which, paradoxically, could create new opportunities for their presence. Memory, in this context, becomes the foundation upon which old women construct their identities and existence during the war.

It is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of this analysis, as it is based on a relatively small selection of texts. This, however, should be seen as a starting point for further, more comprehensive research on the topic. Future studies should aim to include a broader range of texts that feature aging female characters and identify possible diachronic trends. For example, even within Ukrainian military literature, distinct stages can already be observed (2014–2022 and 2022–2024) when considering the Russian-Ukrainian war. Additionally, it is essential to examine not only war-time literature

but also broader works depicting wartime conditions where such characters may appear.

Furthermore, the ongoing active phase of the war will likely inspire the creation of an increasing number of texts reflecting this experience. This growing body of literature will undoubtedly provide new opportunities for exploring the representation of elderly women and their role in the cultural and narrative context of war. As Ukrainian literature continues to evolve under these conditions, the image of the aging woman may become a key lens for understanding the intersections of aging, gender, and a memory conflict.

### Конфлікт інтересів

Автор не має потенційного конфлікту інтересів, який би міг вплинути на рішення про опублікування цієї статті.

### Використання штучного інтелекту

Штучний інтелект у дослідженні не застосовано.

### REFERENCES

- Altynay, A. G., Contreras, M. J., Hirsch, M., Howard, J., Karaca, B., & Solomon, A. (Eds.). (2019). *Women mobilizing memory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gergov, T., & Stoyanova, S. (2013). Sentimentality and nostalgia in elderly people: Psychometric properties of a new questionnaire. *Psychological Thought*, 6(2), 358–375.  
<https://doi.org/10.5964/psycct.v6i2.90>
- Gilleard, C. (2007). Old age in ancient Greece: Narratives of desire, narratives of disgust. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 21(1), 81–92.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2006.02.002>
- Gullette, M. M. (2004). *Aged by culture*. Bibliovault OAI Repository. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Gurven, M., & Kaplan, H. (2008). Beyond the grandmother hypothesis: Evolutionary models of human longevity. In J. Sokolovsky (ed.), *The Cultural Context of Aging: Worldwide perspectives*. Praeger Publishers/Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008. P. 53–66.
- Hawkes, K., & Coxworth, J. E. (2013). Grandmothers and the evolution of human longevity: A review of findings and future directions. *Evolutionary Anthropology*, 22(6), 294–302.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/evan.21382>
- Heath, K. (2009). *Aging by the book: The emergence of midlife in Victorian Britain*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Hirsch, M. (2012). *The generation of postmemory: Writing and visual culture after the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lock, M. (1993). Ideology, female midlife, and the greying of Japan. *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 19(1), 43–62.
- Macdonald, M. (1995). *Representing women: Myths of femininity in the popular media*. London; New York.
- Sontag, S. (2024). *On women*. New York.
- Walker, B. G. (1985). *The crone: Woman of age, wisdom, and power*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Woodward, K. (2006). Performing age, performing gender. *NWSA Journal*, 18(1), 162–189.  
<https://doi.org/10.1353/nwsa.2006.0023>
- Zhadan, S. (2020). *Khlibne peremyria* [Bread truce]. Kharkiv.



CC Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Комп'ютерна верстка: Григоренко О. Г.

Підписано до друку 01.12.2025 р. Формат 60x84 1/8  
Папір друк. № 1 Спосіб друку офсетний. Обл.-вид. арк. 8,97 Умовн. друк. арк. 9,08  
Наклад 100. Зам. № 25-054

Видавничий центр КНЛУ  
Свідоцтво: серія ДК 1596 від 08.12.2003 р.

Виготовлювач: ТОВ "Видавництво Ліра-К"  
Свідоцтво № 3981, серія ДК.  
03142, м. Київ, вул. С. Чобану, 24  
тел.: (050) 462-95-48; (067) 820-84-77  
Сайт: [lira-k.com.ua](http://lira-k.com.ua), редакція: [zv\\_lira@ukr.net](mailto:zv_lira@ukr.net)