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Andievs'ka's Concept of Round Time

It would not be an overstatement to say that prose, and particularly the novel, has been the poor cousin of Ukrainian literature in both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. In the twentieth century a few novelists, Vynnychenko, Pidmohyl'ny, Samchuk, Honchar, and Shevchuk, stand out; but Emma Andievs'ka was making a valid point when she said that she "began to write prose because she could not find a complex sentence in Ukrainian."[1] The statement was meant to shock, but there is a great deal of truth in it and much that is germane to the concept of "round time."

The problem of representing time in literature may be compared to that of representing three dimensions on a two-dimensional canvas. Painters succeeded in creating this sense through the laws of perspective. The problem for the writer is rather different because, unlike a painting, a work of literature unfolds in time. The sense of temporal perspective can be conveyed by such devices as flashbacks and flashforwards. But what is of importance here is not a temporal rearrangement.[2] The difficulty for the writer lies rather in creating the sense of simultaneity in a medium that is essentially linear and sequential. How does an author show that events are happening simultaneously when one thing must inevitably be described before or after another? How does he convey the fact that he and his characters are reflecting upon events at the same time as they are unfolding?

These problems can be partially mitigated by the stream of consciousness narrative method. Yet stream of consciousness concerns itself not so much with the flowing of time as with the interrelations between events and thoughts. In novels like those of Emma Andievs'ka, where the narrative voice is that of the omniscient narrator, the stream of consciousness technique does not work.

This brings us to the concept of "round time." After Einstein we are all generally aware of the fact that time is not an absolute but a relative

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1. From an interview with Emma Andievs'ka conducted in Sarcelles, France, 1980.

2. As is the case with modernist novels like Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* where purposeful time shifts retard and obfuscate the plot.

phenomenon. Andievs'ka expands on this and insists on the fluidity of time, on total synchronism, where past, present, and future events intermingle freely. Time is "round" not because it is repetitive, but because as anything which is round it has no beginning, middle, or end, hence no before, now, or after. All is together at the same moment.

Authors have attempted to capture this idea by the use of dreams, as in the Overture to *Swann's Way:*

> . . . in a flash I would traverse centuries of civilisations. . . [and]. . . When a man is asleep, he has in a circle round him the chain of hours, the sequence of years. . .[3]

Many famous dream narratives (Gogol's *Nose* can serve as an example) allow for the shortcircuiting of linear time. The use of dreams, however, *does not really solve the problem, for the author has to have the possibility* of narrating outside the dream state.

Andievs'ka has attempted to overcome these limitations by writing according to the rules of "round time." In conversations and correspondence with me in 1980-81, she made some very interesting observations about her novels *Herostraty* (*Herostrati*) and the diptych: *Roman pro dobru liudynu* (*A Novel About a Good Human Being*) and *Roman pro liuds'ke pryznachennia* (*A Novel About Human Destiny*), and, above all, about the concept of "round time" (*kruhlyi chas*). The term appears to be her own.

> Round time is the unification of activities, impossible in "our" time. For example, in round time birth, life, death are synchronous. That is, in our "logical thinking," nonsense. The time in which we live is linear: a person must be born in order to live and die. That means that the activity is extended into a line of sequential events: birth, life, death. Whereas in round time birth, life, and death are next to each other, something which is not to be comprehended in linear time. Round time is an oxymoron. But it is real. As real as metapsychological phenomena. The human brain is the regulator and delimiter of surrounding reality. In order to grasp and order reality, the brain must extend time into a sequential line. Yet this is a perversion of reality. Round time is reality not perverted.[4]

Andievs'ka describes this phenomenon in her latest novel, *Roman pro liuds'ke pryznachennia*, through the mouth of Nesterenko, the guardian of

3. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* (New York, 1981), Vol. 1, p. 6 and p. 5.

4. Letter to D. Struk, dated Sarcelles, 14 April 1984.

the "spindles of time" (*kotushky chasu*), when he explains to Maryna, who is to be the next guardian of these spindles:

> ". . . the reason that she, Maryna, sees simultaneously the distant and the near comes from the fact that distances fly headlong cutting one another, and they rush headlong for the simple reason that space is one of the derivatives of time which contracts and expands depending on the force with which the spindles of time turn. . ."[5]

Another example from the medium of art may serve as a further illustration of the notion of round time. When painters were faced with the problem of capturing the whole life of a given saint on one icon, they solved it by surrounding the main panel with a series of little panels, each representing an episode in his life. This two-dimensional and nonsequential method of representation is somewhat akin to the way in which Andievs'ka tries to capture the synchronism of events. To take a more contemporary example, some computers can display all the tasks being performed at the same time on one screen: one image can be superimposed upon another or brought to the side or to the top and so on. This enables one to see *simultaneously* the various tasks performed. It is this notion of synchronism that is the corner stone of the concept of round time.

Andievs'ka, of course, has not yet quite perfected the technique of representing simultaneity though she has managed to impart the sense of synchronism to her narration. The narrative of *Herostraty* is full of long sentences, but it does not contain any attempt at conveying simultaneity. In *Roman pro dobru liudynu*, however, one notices the beginnings of this endeavour: the sentences have grown much longer; there is already some synchronous narrative; but the greater part is still consecutive and linear. One example of this new type of narrative will have to suffice. Towards the end of the novel, when Dmytryk is saying good-bye to his smuggler friends, the following passage occurs:

> Dmytryk said many more things, and the fact that those present listened only to that which each one wanted to hear, and moreover, in as much as it is a known thing, that hearing is expanded by drink and by a jovial atmosphere and finally, more or less (depending on the inner capacity of an individual), captures that which under different circumstances remains unperceivable in everyday-type perception, so it is not impossible

5. Emma Andievs'ka, *Roman pro liuds'ke pryznachennia* (Munich, 1982), pp. 385-86.

that Dmytryk's speech had a totally different meaning than the one which it took on in due course after all the events, especially after the fire in the first barrack where the engineer Taratula perished, who more than anyone else contributed to Dmytryk's new glory in that he assured everyone still on the eve of his death that on this farewell evening Dmytryk was approached by two fiery sheds in which he, Taratula (taught by experience after lengthy experiments in this sphere, discovered while communicating with the other world after his wife's sudden death) immediately recognized higher messengers because they came up to the table at which Taratula was also sitting and as he watched placed into Dmytryk's mouth a cucumber-like voltage arc which turned into Dmytryk's farewell speech from which, because of its extraterrestrial origin (otherwise would it have remained in the memory?) every word was remembered even though from among the accompanying jolly crowd (only Ahapii Koval' was crying, but he always began sobbing after the first drink) no one especially paid any attention to it, for every one diligently exclaimed anything that came into his head, attempting to enlighten his neighbour with his own newly discovered truth, as very often happens during farewell parties, and the general noise and exclamations cut each other in crisscrossing spirals, everything swirled, whistled and became elongated, and kept moving forward with the music until the silhouettes of figures became dissolved, curling in the stratified atmosphere into additional dinner rolls (Kadylo saw with his own eyes quite clearly the head of Berizko, elongated into several meters and therefore in a third dimension, expanding past the second barrack), and everything fell into a more and more intense swirl that slowly whined its way above the camp and, most probably, having reached the speed of light would have been transferred wholly into eternity, if sleep had not begun to thin the ranks of the human stream, throwing out to the sides the most hardy and enduring who maintained a clear and unclouded eye and drank to Dmytryk's health.[6]

In this short excerpt Andievs'ka approaches the narrative technique that she will develop in the next novel and which provides the closest method for embodying her concept of "round time." One such moment comes in the following segment of the long sentence: "*. . . Taratula who more than anyone else contributed to Dmytryk's new glory in that, still on the eve of his death he assured everyone that at this farewell evening Dmytryk was approached by two fiery sheds . . .*" Here Andievs'ka succeeds in blurring the sequential element of narrative time by shifting quickly from the nar-

6. Emma Andievs'ka, *Roman pro dobru liudynu* (Munich, 1973), pp. 287-88.

rative present (Dmytryk delivering his speech) to the future (the fire in the first barrack and Taratula's death, which occurred later yet is here reported in the past). Andievs'ka almost imperceptibly moves into the future by telling the reader that Dmytryk's speech "took on" a different meaning *later* (i.e., in the future) but the verb used by her, *nabralo*, is, of course, the perfective past. Thus everything which occurred later after Dmytryk's speech, as well as during it, is reported in the past. The blurring of tenses is further supported by the use of present adverbial participles which in Ukrainian impart the notion of simultaneity of actions. Thus Taratula on the eve of his death (a future event reported as if it had already occurred) "contributed" (*sprychynyvsia*—perfective past tense, hence completed in the past) when he "assured" everyone (in Ukrainian a present adverbial participle is used, *zapevniaiuchy*) that he "recognized" (*piznav*—perfective past)—a real past from the point of view of the time when Taratula is narrating this, i.e., on the eve of his death and *after* the event of Dmytryk's speech. In this manner one can suggest the idea that all things are—at least from the point of view of the narrator—side-by-side, totally synchronous. There is really no before or after: time is round. To enhance this illusion, Andievs'ka employs longer and longer sentences, as if wishing to underscore the point that all of the events are part of one breath, one instant.

This method of recreating simultaneity by blurring the sequential delimiters of narrative time and by destroying the conventions of present, future, and past time zones has been developed much further in Andievs'ka's third novel. She has structured her novel within the notion of round time and within the confines of conventional grammar (Andievs'ka insists on the idea that one has to respect the rules of grammar and despite the long sentences tries to avoid synesis as much as possible).[7] Having destroyed the linear sequence of events, however, she was faced with another problem, that of cohesion. She had to devise a way of connecting the episodes that form her novel into a single whole. Normally an author can always rely on the inherent logic of a linear sequential presentation, even if he may periodically avail himself of a flashforward or a flashback. In a structure where events can exist side-by-side a different method had to be discovered. Besides the long sentences, with the blurring of temporal perspective, Andievs'ka devised a peculiar episodic narrative mode.

Roman pro liuds'ke pryznachennia is framed by a short prologue and

7. In the letter cited in note 4 above.

an even shorter epilogue. Both are fundamental to Andievs'ka's structure. They serve as the frame that is to mark the "real" time, the time of the present, the two points in a dialogue between which timelessness can be glimpsed. Both prologue and epilogue consist of a dialogue between two unnamed entities whom I would see as the author and the omniscient narrator (or muse). The prologue ends with an exhortation by the narrator to listen: "Open your ears and listen. Well?"[8] The reader hears a brief dialogue between Fedir and Ivan Dmytrovych Bezruchko (five pages) and then the narrator turns to the thoughts, contemplations, and reminiscences of Fedir and others until some 450 pages later when Fedir again speaks to Bezruchko. The epilogue begins with the narrator asking: "Well? Are you convinced?"[9] All the events, everything that has occurred in Fedir's mind and the minds of the other major characters, all this has happened simultaneously, in an instant.

To understand this one needs to visualize an elaborate system of interconnected circles where a character who serves as the narrative focus in one rotates, as it were, until his path crosses that of the next major character. When this occurs the centre of "narrative gravity" shifts to the new character. Within these episodes there is no differentiation between before and after. A character can and does recall the future as if it were the past.

To illustrate this structure let us examine the first such major linkage in the novel. I stress the word "major" because in between the major linkages there are innumerable smaller links. Thus when Fedir catches up with Bezruchko and invites him to his house we encounter Bezruchko's chest containing the discovery "for the spiritual rejuvenation of mankind and the resurrection of Ukraine," and Iunona, the goose, who, at least in Fedir's mind, serves as the catalyst for the implementation of Bezruchko's discovery (let us recall the cow in *Roman pro dobru liudynu* that served as a catalyst for Dmytryk's conversion). Fedir than hears the goose speak to him about Dzyndra's theory of mirrors and the first circle of the narrative begins.

To isolate the elements of the first major sphere one must cite a small portion of the narrative to show how intricately the texture of the major sphere is interwoven with minor links:

8. *Roman pro liuds'ke pryznachennia*, p. 7.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 454.

FEDIR GOT READY TO CONTRADICT the idea that Antin *could in any way* have cured Vsevolod of paralysis since, even before Antin returned from Africa, Vsevolod, ensnared by the Soviets, who hunted down with great diligence all non-assimilated Ukrainians (this was later revealed to Fedir by Tymko Riaboshapka, the most intimate friend of Reshetynets', who one day left home and was never seen again)—committed suicide in exactly the same way as Ihor Kam'ianets'ky did some time later, and most certainly Bezruchko is thinking not of Vsevolod but of Juras' Perehuda, who was really threatened by paralysis, but, in any case, what relevance did this have to the theory of mirrors of Dzyndra of which Palyvoda had previously spoken?—BUT BECAUSE THE GOOSE, whom Bezruchko was intermittently treating to cognac from his own glass, cognac with which he was chasing down the reheated borshch which, in accordance with the habit of an old bachelor, Fedir always kept in stock (a whole pot full) in the refrigerator, being used to cook for himself, GAVE AN AFFECTED LAUGH, having run up and down the scale of two octaves with coloratura staccato (it was then that Fedir conceived the notion that perhaps the goose formed a transitional but nonetheless important link in Bezruchko's discovery—something akin to a live catalyst, even though Bezruchko did not answer several questions on this subject)—FEDIR SIMULTANEOUSLY REMEMBERED, angry at his own inattentiveness, rushing to treat his guest (in recent times Fedir really got into the habit of rushing, even when there was no apparent place to rush to) THAT HE HAD FORGOTTEN—and Bezruchko, out of politeness, did not remind him of it, TO PREPARE A BATH AND TO GIVE HIM CLEAN CLOTHES, before sitting the man down at the table. . .[10]

The main thread (in capitals in the quotation above) runs as follows: *Fedir got ready to contradict but because the goose gave an affected laugh, Fedir simultaneously remembered that he had forgotten to prepare a bath and to give him [Bezruchko] clean clothes.* As *if to ensure that the* complex sentence will henceforth exist in Ukrainian prose, Andievs'ka complicates it as far as possible. Her aim is, of course, to capture all the events and thoughts that are occurring in that brief moment. Thus between the first and second segments of this compound sentence, between *Fedir got ready to contradict* and *but because the goose,* several episodes are touched on: Vsevolod's paralysis; Antin's failure to cure him; Antin's return from Africa; Vsevolod's ensnarement by the Soviets; the Soviet manhunt for non-assimilated Ukrainians; Reshetynets's disappearance; Riaboshapka's retelling of this disappearance (here a future in the past); Vsevolod's suicide; Kam'ianets'ky's suicide (future event in the past); Vsevolod

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

being mistaken for Perehuda; Perehuda's paralysis; Dzyndra's theory of mirrors; and Palyvoda's reservations about this theory. Although the episodes are still presented linearly the illusion of synchronism is achieved through a total absence of any notion of sequentiality. This is the method by which Andievs'ka tries to give the illusion of the temporal perspective, of the "roundness of time."

This episode with Fedir as the main protagonist continues up to p. 39. On p. 38 a new character, Slavko Bezborod'ko, appears and he thereupon becomes the protagonist for the next episode; the link with Fedir is accomplished through Perekotyhora, common to both. Fedir himself disappears until the very end of the novel, thus emphasizing the fact that the novel is but a tiny segment of "round time."

The linkage itself evolves over several pages and episodes. Starting with a minor sub-link which joined Fedir and Perekotyhora at the police station where they were giving evidence in the death of Ihor Kam'ianets'ky (p. 23), Andievs'ka sets up the transfer into the second narrative sphere:

> . . . that then at the police station Perekotyhora was struggling not so much for himself, as it seemed to Fedir, but for Fedir, so that he, Fedir, in the end not betray himself, by explaining details about Ihor which could be told only by someone who saw the dead man at the last moment. Actually then, when Perekotyhora noticed that Fedir was not quite himself. . . he tried to signal Fedir that he, Perekotyhora, would testify in such a way as to nullify all the other . . . witnesses . . . but Fedir was stunned and did not see anything and did not listen JUST AS SLAVKO BEZBOROD'KO DID NOT SEE AND DID NOT LISTEN AT THE TIME WHEN PEREKOTYHORA TOGETHER WITH LEL'KO POHORETS'KY WERE COLOURING THE WALLS IN THE SUBTERRANEAN RESTAURANT "The Notched Moon" IN THE SCHWABING. . .[11]

As can be seen from the above, Andievs'ka accomplishes the linkage (in capital letters) between two narrative circles by an intermediary character common to both. It is through Perekotyhora's perception of Fedir's behaviour, so similar to that of Slavko Bezborod'ko, that the two narrative circles—Fedir's and Bezborod'ko's—are linked. The grammatical device is a simple comparative *just as.*

One could go on word by word and illustrate this method throughout the whole novel. These short examples should suffice to illuminate the way in which Andievs'ka uses the concept of round time as a narrative method.

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11. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

Her use of round time implies and emphasizes the idea of an omniscient narrator. The narrator is actually God, all powerful, ever present, and all knowing, for whom there is no past, no future, and no present. For him everything exists at the same time and everything is in his grasp. By composing *Roman pro liuds'ke pryznachennia* on the basis of large character linkages the omniscient author encompasses the whole of the Ukrainian diaspora and indeed the whole world. Whereas in *Roman pro dobru liudynu* Andievs'ka limits herself to the experiences of one D.P. camp in Germany after the war, in *Roman pro liuds'ke pryznachennia* the thematic scope is broadened to include not only the life of the emigres in their new homelands but also the lives of their children born outside Ukraine. The real mobility of these characters (travelling from one continent to another) and the philosophical concept of "round time" with its synchronous future and past permit Andievs'ka to construct her novel on episodes experienced by Ukrainians from World War II to the present. She moves freely from one decade to another, she mixes the future with the past, and skilfully blends various episodes from the destinies of her characters to produce what may best be termed a chronicle of the collective experience of the Ukrainians in the diaspora.

Andievs'ka covers the whole gamut of experiences: political, social, aesthetic, marital, philosophical, and spiritual, but with the greatest economy. *Roman pro liuds'ke pryznachennia* is so enormous it could never fit into 450 pages of a conventional novel. Only the concept of round time and the narrative technique based on the linkages of episodes centred on different characters permit her to accomplish this design. With this novel Emma Andievs'ka has found a means of depicting synchronicity even though the medium of writing necessarily imposes a sequential and linear mode of narration.

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