

A Novel about Human Destiny, or the Andiiievaska Chronicle

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Emma Andiiievaska's third and latest novel, *Roman pro liudske pryznachen-
nia* (A Novel about Human Destiny, 1982; hereafter *RLP*) forms a
thematic and structural diptych with her preceding novel, *Roman pro
dobru liudynu* (A Novel about a Good Person, 1973). Both novels concern
themselves with the Ukrainians displaced by World War II, and both are
written in the centrifugal episodic narrative, which will be discussed
later. Yet there is a fundamental difference between the two works.
Roman pro dobru liudynu is not only shorter by half; it is also much
narrower in scope. In that novel Andiiievaska limits herself to describing
the experiences of one displaced persons camp in Germany after the war.
Roman pro dobru liudynu is an examination of the uprooted Ukrainians'
rites of passage to a new life—a sort of purgatorial existence in the camp.
The heroes of the novel are all fugitives from Stalin's terror (Andiiievaska's
term is "*m'iasorubka*", "meat grinder"), and the episodes described by the
author are firmly anchored in the reality of camp life, with flashbacks to
life in Ukraine.

In *RLP* Andiiievaska has broadened her thematic scope to include not
only the life of the émigrés in their respective new homelands, but also
the life of their children born outside Ukraine, i.e., the entire Ukrainian
diaspora. The real mobility of these characters (travelling from one
continent to another) and the philosophical concept of "round time"
permit Andiiievaska to construct her novel on episodes experienced by
Ukrainians since World War II to the present. She moves freely in time
from one decade to another and mixes various episodes from the
destinies of her characters to produce what may best be termed a
chronicle of the collective experience of the Ukrainian diaspora.

That *RLP* is a chronicle of the Ukrainian collective is further
supported by the epigraph to the book. Citing from Shevchenko's
"Podrazhanniie 11 psalmu" the line "Vozvelychu/ Malykh otykh rabiv

nimykh," Andriievska attempts to do just that (glorify small mute slaves), for, as one of her characters remarks in the novel,

"he could not endure with folded arms that inhuman oppression, that endless horror that has befallen the Ukrainian people, whose misfortune, in the general rat race for a place under the sun, was of no concern to anyone, forcing him for the umpteenth time to remind the soft-hearted, much too unvengeful, much too unclever 'buckwheat-sowers-simpletons' ['hrechkosii-selepky'] that it is only through the sword that we have rights" (p. 104).¹

I believe these sentiments are shared by Andriievska herself; lest Ukrainians never learn this lesson, lest they remain forever small, mute slaves, lest the world remain forever indifferent to the plight of Ukraine, Andriievska sets forth her chronicle. Another reason for seeing the novel as a chronicle is the constant and recurring presence of real persons (Valentyn Moroz, Hryhorii Kruk, Jacques Hnizdovsky, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Mariia Dolnytska, Ivanna Vynnykiv, Volodymyr Kubijovyč, Dariia Siiak, Vasyl Barka, and others) who take no part in the novel but are mentioned as existing in the world of the fictional characters.

The reader might assume that because I have designated *RLP* a chronicle, it is a sequential recording of events. This is not the case. The novel is a chronicle of simultaneous episodes that the omniscient narrator records for us. To understand this one must first of all understand the notion of round time (*kruhlyi chas*). Since Einstein's discovery we have been aware of the fact that time is not a constant, but relative phenomenon. Yet we insist on dealing with time, and this is especially true in works of fiction, in a linear and progressive fashion from the past to the present and into the future. If an author destroys this linear progression, we are sure to note it and describe it as flashback or foreshadowing. Andriievska refuses to follow this convention and insists on the fluidity of time, where past, present, and future events intermingle freely. Andriievska describes this phenomenon through Nesterenko, the guardian of the "spindles of time" ("*kotushky chasu*"), when he explains to Maryna, who is to be the next guardian of these spindles: "the fact that she, Maryna, sees simultaneously the distant and the near comes from the fact that distances rush headlong, cutting across 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

¹ This and all further translations of passages from the novel are by the author of this article. Page references are to *Roman pro liudske pryznachennia* ([Munich]: Suchasnist, 1982).

the spindles of time turn" (p. 386).

Let us see how Andrievska utilizes the concept of round time in her novel. *RLP* is framed by a short prologue and even shorter epilogue. Both consist of a dialogue between two unnamed entities, whom I choose to see as the author and the omniscient narrator (muse). The prologue ends with an exhortation by the narrator to listen: "Open your ears and listen. Well?" After a brief dialogue between Fedir and Ivan Dymytrivch Bezruchko (five pages), the narrator tunes in on the thoughts and reminiscences of Fedir and others, all of whom are linked by a great chain of acquaintance, until the last page of the novel, where Fedir again speaks to Bezruchko—some 450 pages in an instant of time. The epilogue begins with the narrator asking "Well? Are you convinced?" Within round time all that occurs in Fedir's mind and in the minds of the other major characters happens simultaneously, despite the fact that it takes 450 pages to present all of their recollections and musings. They are joined into one narrative chain of approximately forty-three interconnected centrifugal spheres corresponding to the major characters in the novel.

Iurii Sherekh, in writing about Teodosii Osmachka's *Poet*, describes Osmachka's exposition as a "system of chain linkages" ("*systema lantsiu-hovykh zshcheplen*") by which the poet creates a narrative poem whose parts are not a "simple union of a taut ribbon whose fibres ... stretch from end to end. Rather, this is more like the connection of a chain, where each link is coupled with another, yet there is not one thread but an endless alternation of links that simultaneously form a strict system."² Although Sherekh is describing the structure of a narrative poem, his description can be applied to Andrievska's prose. One need but visualize the links not as round metal loops but as open-ended, centrifugal spheres in which a character rotates, as it were, outwardly, as if compelled by a centrifugal force, until his path of activity (rotation) crosses the path of the next major character, thus producing a linkage or "hook-up." When this occurs the centre of gravity shifts immediately to the new character, and the new "character-fugal" sphere begins.

To illustrate this character-fugal structure, let us examine in detail the first two *major* linkages. I stress "major," because the major linkages are separated by innumerable smaller links. Thus when Fedir catches up with Bezruchko, he invites him to come to his house with the chest in which Bezruchko discovered the cure "for the spiritual rejuvenation of humankind and the resurrection of Ukraine," and with Iunona, the goose that,

² Iurii Sherekh, *Ne dlia ditei: Literaturno-krytychni statti i esei* ([Munich:] Proloh, 1964), 290.

at least in Fedir's mind, serves as the live catalyst for Bezruchko's discovery (similar to the cow in *Roman pro dobru liudynu* that served as a catalyst for Dmytryk's conversion). Fedir hears the goose speak to him about Dzyndra's theory of mirrors and thus starts the first character-fugal sphere of the narrative.

Before isolating the elements of the first major sphere, I should cite a small passage to show how intricately the texture of the major sphere is interwoven with minor links.

FEDIR GOT READY TO CONTRADICT the fact that Antin could in any way have cured Vsevolod from paralysis since, even before Antin returned from Africa, Vsevolod, ensnared by the Soviets, who hunted down with particular diligence all unassimilated Ukrainians (this was later divulged to Fedir by Tymko Riaboshapka, Reshetynets's most intimate friend, who left home one morning and was never seen again), committed suicide exactly in the same way as did much later Ihor Kamianetsky, and probably Bezruchko is thinking not of Vsevolod but of Iuras Perehuda, who was really threatened by paralysis, but, in any case, what relevance did this have to Dzyndra's theory of mirrors, about whom Palyvoda previously spoke? BUT BECAUSE THE GOOSE, which Bezruchko was intermittently treating to cognac from his own glass and which was chasing it down with reheated borsch that, in accordance with an old bachelor's habit, Fedir always kept in stock (a whole pot) in the refrigerator, being used to cook for itself, GAVE AN AFFECTED LAUGH, having run up and down [the scale of] two octaves in coloratura staccato (it was then that Fedir finally accepted the notion that perhaps the goose constituted a transitory but nonetheless important link in Bezruchko's discovery—something akin to a live catalyst, even though Bezruchko remained silent on questions posed several times [on this subject])—FEDIR SIMULTANEOUSLY REMEMBERED, having become angry at his own inattentiveness: [while] rushing to treat his guest (in recent times Fedir really had developed a habit of rushing, even when there was nowhere to rush to) THAT HE FORGOT—and Bezruchko, out of politeness, did not remind him of it—TO PREPARE A BATH AND GIVE THE MAN CLEAN CLOTHES before sitting the guest down at the table. (Pp. 13–14.)

Let us now isolate the major link (in capital letters in the above quotation) of the narrative character sphere and join this isolated sphere to the point of linkage with the second narrative character-fugal sphere.

Fedir got ready to contradict ... but because the goose ... gave an affected laugh ... Fedir simultaneously remembered ... he forgot ... to prepare him a bath and to give the man clean clothes ... and having remembered about the bath for Bezruchko Fedir recalled [suddenly] that waiting for him in "Under the Green Rosemary" is Mariika, about whom he had totally forgotten because they had arranged [to meet] a week ago

... and that now for him, Fedir, it would be impolite either to let Mariika down or to abandon Bezruchko alone in the house after he himself had dragged him there out of a yearning for company.

Most probably because of [this] anxiety Fedir's brain mistakenly produced such a surplus of brain energy ... and although he did not let a word drop to betray these thoughts, they managed, en masse, to get into the guest's head, for when Bezruchko's wet voice ... reached Fedir's ... hearing, Fedir concluded with surprise that he, God knows when, managed to arrange it so that after bathing all of them together will go to [meet] Mariika in the café ... "Under the Green Rosemary," where Fedir was first brought by Perekotyhora after the performance of *Oedipus* that then completely ruined Fedir's mood. (Pp. 13–16.)

Here the second part of the first major character sphere begins, for with the introduction of Perekotyhora, Andrievska sets the scene for the transition to the second major character-fugal sphere, which will start some pages later. Nonetheless, the first major character-fugal sphere, with Fedir as the main protagonist, continues and resumes after ten pages.

It was then that Fedir noticed ... that Ilko's eyes were phosphorescing exactly in the same way as the eyes of Taras Nahirny when the latter and Fedir, having barely managed to shove Mariika, Oryshka Kozelets, and Bezruchko, with his extract-containing drum and goose, into the only available taxi ... themselves jumped into an underground garage behind the corner, from which ... they came out in front of the Ukrainian Catholic church. (P. 26.)

Then, returning to a minor sub-link that joins Fedir and Perekotyhora at the police station where they were giving evidence in the death of Ihor Kamianetsky (p. 23), Andrievska sets up the transfer into the second character-fugal narrative sphere.

... that then at the police [station] Perekotyhora was suffering, but not so much for himself, as it seemed to Fedir, but for him, Fedir, so that in the end he would not break down and explain details about Ihor that could be told only by someone who saw the deceased during the last minute [of his life].

Actually then, when Perekotyhora noticed that Fedir was not himself ... he struggled 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 Bezborodko had not seen and had not listened when Perekotyhora, together with Lelko Pohoretsky, was painting the murals in the subterranean restaurant The Crescent Moon in Schwabing.* (Pp. 38–9.)

With the introduction of Slavko Bezborodko, Fedir disappears from the narrative (he appears again only at the end of the novel). A new major character sphere commences. The character for the character-fugal

sphere is now Slavko, and the linkage with Fedir's sphere is accomplished through Perekotyhora, who is common to both. As can be imagined from the passages cited above from pages 13 to 39 of the novel—the duration of the first character-fugal sphere—many minor links form the fabric of the narrative and fill it with innumerable secondary characters. They appear sometimes only as names; at other times the names are linked with whole episodes from their lives.

This is especially true if the secondary characters interact in any way with the major sphere-centred characters, or if they, as is the case with Perekotyhora, serve as transitions from one character sphere to another. Their presence in the text is a Gogolian feature,³ which enables Andrievska to fill out her chronicle of the Ukrainian collective experience and to give the broadest picture with the utmost economy. Andrievska covers the gamut of experiences: political, social, aesthetic, marital, philosophical, and spiritual. The scope of *RLP* is so enormous it could never fit into 450 pages of a conventional novel. Only the concept of round time and the narrative manner based on the linkages of character-fugal spheres permit Andrievska to accomplish this design.

Returning to Sherekh's observations about Osmachka's *Poet*, we see that they are once again applicable to Andrievska. Sherekh notes that "We have become more accustomed to works with a linear composition. But the chain-like [manner] has its own indisputable advantages for a work of a complicated philosophical nature."⁴ *RLP* certainly is such a work.

The basic philosophical underpinnings of *RLP* are Zoroastrian. Evil and good are equally present in the world and in constant struggle with each other. Herein lies the "destiny" of the characters in the novel. In the most general terms Andrievska introduces this notion in the very first pages of *RLP*: "it is precisely in this striving—battering [with] one's head through walls to the unattainable—that human destiny is contained" (p.10). This statement receives individual and particular clarification throughout the novel; this can be seen, for example, in the Naumyk sphere, where Naumyk, the organ player, is suddenly possessed by devils that intrude into his music. He explains this as his "destiny," his personal struggle with the forces of evil:

³ See the excellent passage on Gogol's homunculi in Vladimir Nabokov's *Nikolai Gogol* (New York: New Directions, 1944), 43–8. Gogolian features in Andrievska's works deserve special study. It is interesting to note, however, that the Gogolian humorous elements present in *Roman pro dobru liudynu* are conspicuously absent in *RLP*.

⁴ Sherekh, 290.

these were the results of his, Naumyk's, fight with the devil, who is trying fruitlessly by [means of] disgrace and infamy to break Naumyk's will, which, however—be it in the most circuitous way, according to a sign from the most merciful Almighty—slowly but resolutely leads him, Iurko [Naumyk] to the light he is finally beginning to see before him. (P. 146.)

Andiievaska transforms the personal destiny of individual characters into the collective destiny of all Ukrainians. In that system of duality, Ukraine is the suffering good that is being constantly attacked by the ever-present "meat grinder" ("*m'iasorubka*"), "backbone pulverizer" ("*khrebtotroshchylnia*"), "bully Moloch" ("*derzhymordnyi molokh*"), "grave-stone cast-iron Black-Hundreds all-Russianism" ("*mohylna plyta, chavunnochornosotenna vserosiishchyna*"), and so on (Andiievaska does not lack epithets), whose main aim is to obliterate the Ukrainians and Ukraine. It is therefore the duty and destiny of every righteous Ukrainian to "duel with evil" (p. 30). Andiievaska does not limit herself only to Ukrainians. Her philosophy is universal. Only in the struggle against evil do flesh and spirit undergo an anthropomorphosis.

Related to this Zoroastrian worldview and to the evil-fighting destiny of humankind are several leitmotifs that crisscross the novel and unify it. Two of the leitmotifs are related. The first is the notion that Soviet agents are everywhere and are trying to ensnare Ukrainian émigrés. The second consists of the idea that Russia and Russians, whether tsarist or Soviet, wanted and still want to destroy all traces of Ukraine, its culture, its history, and its people. A third leitmotif is an extension of the second: it consists of the antimaterialistic stance of the narrator, who sees in the high living standard and wealth enjoyed by the children of émigrés the causes of the disappearance of interest in Ukraine's plight.

All three leitmotifs run through the novel. They appear in the various links of the narrative and thus serve to strengthen the notion of a collective chronicle and to unify the novel. Another unifying element is found in the character of Ivan Dymytrivych Bezruchko, a sort of reincarnation of the People's Malakhii without, however, the humorous messianism with which Mykola Kulish invests his character. The resemblance rests only in that both characters have "patents" for reforming humankind. One is not quite sure from the novel what to make of Bezruchko. Is he a saint, an incarnation of all that is good in humans, or a saintly fool? Most likely he is the latter. He appears at the start of the novel with Iunona the goose and his "extract for reforming humankind and reinstating Ukraine." (For Andiievaska the second goal is impossible without the first.) He reappears several times throughout the novel.

First Bezruchko materializes in Tadzo's character-fugal sphere to assist (more precisely to cut the umbilical cord) at the sudden birth of Lina Babatiuk's child in Rome after she and her husband are attacked by a crowd of juvenile delinquents. In the same sphere Bezruchko is seen by Tadzo as the keeper of round time, which is ensconced in the urn containing the ashes of Bezruchko's wife and son.

Bezruchko is also the one who reveals to Tadzo human destiny (another clarification of the aforementioned): that is, to accept "one's cross so that from a pile of meat the spirit can emerge" (p.71). Bezruchko next appears in the character-fugal sphere of Ivan Dolyunnyk, a character who is run down by the horse of his wife, who prefers horseback riding to being with him. Bezruchko visits him in the hospital and agrees to spin his wheel of fate. Next Bezruchko steps forth into the life of Lyzhny, who has been miraculously extracted from the POW camp in Rimini by an uncle who emigrated to Great Britain before the war and whose daughter Bezruchko supposedly married. Bezruchko tests Lyzhny's sight by changing the colour of his own eyes to see if Lyzhny notices things others do not. Lyzhny wonders if Bezruchko is not an incarnation of Hermes (p. 283)! Finally Bezruchko is there to console Fedir after Fedir is stabbed by a hooligan in a restaurant while defending Olha at the very end of the novel.

"I always knew you were my last source of help," whispers Fedir closing his eyes, but Bezruchko does not allow him to close them, blowing so comically into his pupils that Fedir quite easily jumps to his feet and notices that Bezruchko is twisting the horizon into a rope similar to one kids use for jumping, and laughing invites Fedir to step across it, which the latter, hesitating somewhat because of lack of experience, does, [and is] suddenly filled with the conviction that from today on he will walk only forward in Bezruchko's footsteps. (P. 454.)

Bezruchko's sudden appearances and disappearances quite outside the normal character-fugal spheres, his almost supernatural powers, make him an enigmatic character, to say the least. Is he, perhaps, Andrievska's version of the *kozak-kharakternyk*, whose strange and ascetic behavior in a rather materialistic world makes him appear to the other characters, and hence to the reader, as an extraordinary man?⁵ Andrievska uses Bezruchko as a unifying exemplar of the nonmaterialistic spiritual qualities of individuals in tune with their destinies and therefore at peace

⁵ A separate study should be made of Andrievska's *kharakternyky*, for there are other such characters, though not as ubiquitous as Bezruchko, in the novel: e.g., Dzyndra, Pylypenchykha, Viktor Platonovych Kentaur, and Nesterenko.

with themselves—a state of being as close, perhaps, to the divine as mortals are capable of achieving.

Another unifying element in *RLP* is the narrative voice. Except for the short dialogue at the start of the novel between Bezruchko and Fedir and the two-page folkloristic dialogue (pp. 164–6) between Tsyzo and the one who dwells in the sea, *RLP* is a virtually uninterrupted third-person narrative. It is not narrated, however, in the usual third-person manner: the narrator does not make any distinction between the characters' actions, words, or thoughts. To put it another way, the narration is once-removed; it is a retelling. The narrator heard the episodes from the various characters—their statements, thoughts, and deeds—and is now retelling them in a uniform manner. Furthermore, the narrator is omniscient; acting within the concept of round time, he/she knows everything about the characters' past, present, and future from any point in their lives. It is as if the narrator were an omniscient, omnipresent, and eternal god who knows everything—not only what happened, was thought, or was said, but also what will happen, be thought, or be said by any character at any time.

As interesting and as useful this device is for narrative unity, it has serious drawbacks. The problem with the narrative voice in *RLP* is that it has homogenized all of the characters. Though their names change, with the exception of Bezruchko any one character could be any other. They have their own episodes, but not their own personalities. Moreover, the narrator's language is uniform for all of the characters. Finally, the narrator is by no means a neutral observer, but has very strong personal convictions that are imparted to all of the characters. Thus it is not surprising that the Zoroastrian philosophy or leitmotifs mentioned above occur throughout the novel. They form part of the worldview of the narrator, who in turn imparts them to his characters.

One can bemoan this fact or one can see it as supporting the initial idea of the nature of *RLP*: it is after all, a chronicle of the *collective* experience. But it is also a novel by an author who is first and foremost a poet and who, moreover, does not use poetry as a vehicle for social commentary (with very few exceptions). To express her opinions freely about ethics, aesthetics, mores, politics, national aspirations, and the like, Andiiivska has turned to prose. By ascribing these views to her alter-ego—her narrator, and through the latter to her characters, she manages to express her views yet stand outside the conflict that these views might produce. There are moments when the narrator's voice is a bit too shrill. For example, one senses in the extreme anger levied against Ukrainian youth—"a spoiled piece of heartless meat" ("*rozvezenyi kusen bezserdechnoho m'iasa*", p. 17)—who have chosen the easy, materialistic

path and do not care about what happened or happens to Ukraine, that the narrator is trying to proselytize the reader. In moments such as this, despite the fact that the sentiments seem to be those of a character, the reader is left with the impression that he or she is reading a scorching social pamphlet instead of a novel. The same may be said of the various versions of the meat-grinder leitmotif.

Other views imparted by Andiiievskia to her narrator are much more stimulating. There is the concept of “long and short roots of words” (pp. 333–4), Dzyndra’s theory of mirrors (pp. 114–15), the philosophy of landscapes (p. 380), cosmogony (p. 403), and the rococo garden and notion that humankind’s control over nature is a necessity of culture and a weapon against chaos (p. 430). There is also an excellent fairy tale (so like Andiiievskia’s earlier fanciful, morally didactic tales) about the egg that grows heavier and heavier (pp. 360–1). And there is a great power of visual observation, to which we have already become accustomed in Andiiievskia’s poetry, and her supreme control, use, and wealth of language.⁶

Andiiievskia’s last two novels show that she has mastered a new narrative manner, at least in Ukrainian literature. Her narrative style based on interlinked character-fugal spheres is well suited for dealing with her extremely broad subject matter. She is the first author to have created a full chronicle—the Andiiievskia Chronicle—of the collective experience of the postwar Ukrainian diaspora. By writing *RLP* and recording therein the fates of various Ukrainians, she has produced a fascinating work of fiction.

⁶ Andiiievskia likes to have her prose read out loud, for it is then that her extremely fine instrumentation, not only alliterative but also syntactic, can truly be appreciated. Once again, this aspect of her creativity is a topic that requires a separate study.