



„Wychowanie w Rodzinie” t. XXXI (1/2024)

Submitted: March 13, 2024 – Accepted: May 26, 2024

Joanna DARDA-GRAMATYKA*

Natalia KURJAČKI-GÓRA**

The image of the grandmother in the novel by Pavel Sanaev *Bury me under the floor*

Wizerunek babci w opowiadaniu Pawła Sanajewa
Pochowajcie mnie pod podłogą

Abstract

Aim. The aim of the article was to introduce the character of a grandmother, as sketched by Pavel Sanayev in his short story. Somewhat against the ubiquitous stereotype of a warm, loving figure, who is associated with knitted socks and the smell of baking cake, the authors show that there can also be a grandmother who is cruel, bitter, violent, and who creates a toxic relationship. A grandmother can sometimes be a negative character, although this can be difficult to accept.

* e-mail: joanna.gramatyka@gmail.com

WSB University, Cieplaka 1c, 41-300 Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland

Akademia WSB, Cieplaka 1c, 41-300 Dąbrowa Górnicza, Polska

ORCID: 0000-0003-1151-1984

** e-mail: natalia.kurjacki-gora@up.krakow.pl

University of the National Education Commission, Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Neophilology, Studencka 5, 31-116 Kraków, Poland

Uniwersytet Komisji Edukacji Narodowej w Krakowie, Wydział Nauk Humanistycznych, Instytut Neofilologii, Studencka 5, 31-116 Kraków, Polska

ORCID: 0000-0001-7029-9886

Materials and methods. The material for the study was Pavel Sanaev's short story *Bury me under the floor*. The authors analyze and interpret the text. The analysis of the work was carried out from a hermeneutic perspective, which makes it possible to discover the deeper layers of the work and the unspoken meanings contained in it. It takes into account the viewpoint and value system of the viewer-interpreter himself. When discussing Sanaev's work, the close reading method was also important, promoting analytical reading, focused on the text and its meanings.

Results. The article outlines a picture of a grandmother who was bitter, violent, used passive aggression, used crude words, and formed toxic relationships. A grandmother who made it the mission of her life to take care of her sickly grandson, and who most likely suffered from Münchhausen syndrome by proxy. Analysis and interpretation of Pavel Sanaev's piece *Bury me under the floor* leads to some important conclusions about family dynamics, the impact of toxic relationships on a child's psyche, and the broader social and psychological implications of such experiences.

Conclusion. Man's existence as a social being and part of the family system is closely linked to his biological, emotional, and cultural needs. And while he cannot function in isolation from other people, staying in toxic conditions – as in the case of Sasha, the main character in Sanaev's story, who experienced separation anxiety, passive aggression, and psychosomatic diseases – makes life a string of torment and anguish.

Keywords: grandmother, relationships, grandchild, daughter, family, violence, stereotypes.

Abstrakt

Cel. Celem artykułu było przedstawienie postaci babci, którą naszkicował w swoim opowiadaniu Paweł Sanajew. Trochę na przekór wszechobecnemu stereotypowi ciepłej, pełnej miłości postaci, która kojarzy się z zapachem ciasta i skarpetkami robionymi na drutach, autorki pokazują, że może istnieć także babcia okrutna, zgorzkniała, stosująca przemoc i tworząca toksyczną relację. Babcia bywa postacią negatywną, choć może być to trudne do zaakceptowania.

Materiały i metody. Materiałem do badań było opowiadanie Pawła Sanajewa *Pochowajcie mnie pod podłogą*. Autorki dokonują analizy i interpretacji tekstu. Analiza utworu prowadzona była z perspektywy hermeneutycznej, która umożliwia odkrycie głębszych warstw dzieła i niewyrażonych w sposób jawny sensów w nim zawartych. Uwzględnia ona punkt widzenia i system wartości samego odbiorcy-interpretatora. Przy omawianiu twórczości Sanajewa istotna była też metoda *close reading*, promująca lekturę analityczną, skupioną na tekście i jego znaczeniach.

Wyniki. W artykule nakreślony został obraz babci zgorzkniałej, stosującej przemoc i bierną agresję, używającej niecenzuralnych słów i tworzącej toksyczne relacje. Babcia, która misją własnego życia uczyniła zajmowanie się swoim chorowitym wnukiem i któ-

ra najprawdopodobniej cierpiała na zespół Münchhausena *per procuram*. Analiza i interpretacja utworu Pawła Sanajewa prowadzi do kilku ważnych wniosków dotyczących dynamiki rodzinnej, wpływu toksycznych relacji na psychikę dziecka oraz szerszych społecznych i psychologicznych implikacji takich doświadczeń.

Wnioski. Istnienie człowieka jako istoty społecznej i części systemu rodzinnego jest ściśle związane z jego potrzebami biologicznymi, emocjonalnymi i kulturowymi. I choć nie może on funkcjonować w oderwaniu od innych ludzi, przebywanie w toksycznych warunkach – jak w przypadku Saszy, głównego bohatera opowiadania Sanajewa, który doświadczał lęku separacyjnego, biernej agresji, chorób psychosomatycznych – sprawia, że życie staje się pasmem mąk i udręk.

Słowa kluczowe: babcia, relacje, wnuk, córka, rodzina, przemoc, stereotypy.

Introduction

In the *Etymological dictionary of the Polish language* (Brückner, 1927, p. 9), the term *babcia* is designated as a word derived from *baba* and meaning “father’s or mother’s mother,” “married woman” or simply “old woman.” As Beata Zięba-Kołodziej notes

[...] it is worth noting the definition of grandparents proposed by Teresa Kukołowicz. The author considers grandparents to be those people who shape their grandchildren’s family, regional and national identity, pass on the history of their lives, maintain the culture expressed in certain truths of life, contribute to the preservation of various customs in the family, are the centre of family information, as well as moral and material support and assistance to children and grandchildren. The quoted content indicates the socially, traditionally and culturally conditioned image of grandparents; an image that is widely known (Zięba-Kołodziej, 2012, p. 138).

Most people of the authors’ generation associate grandmothers positively – with the smells and tastes of childhood, some perhaps with preserves, and others with the time she had for them and knitted jumpers. It is a stereotype of sorts, a diagram of the role of grandparents, passed down from generation to generation, who previously, in post-figurative cultures, had an extremely important function in maintaining their continuity (Mead, 2000). Contemporary technological change has led to a situation where families have become largely nuclear and “a generational rift has swept the world” (Mead, 2000, p. 99). Grandmothers are spending their time at third-age universities, adding to their knowledge and devoting time to themselves rather than their grandchildren. It is important to remember that they are the elderly, and “the elderly, having only

past experience, [...] cannot provide models for life in the future” (Mead, 2000, pp. 103–104). Of course, not all grandmothers and not all grandfathers are now Facebook friends, although there are those too.

The grandmother, to whom qualities such as caring and patience are most often attributed, is not always a helpful carer bestowing love and attention. Sometimes grandparents’ attitudes towards their grandchildren “[...] are not always positive, as the elderly may not have sufficient patience” (Czepczarz, Czepczarz, 2021, p. 145), which active parents often do not understand, which can generate conflicts in families.

The position and role of the elderly has changed over the centuries – this is a fact. It is also a fact that grandmothers have sometimes been portrayed as negative figures, although this is a far less popular approach than the one presented above. The authors intended to show that it happens to break the stereotype related to the fact that “each social position imposes certain normative expectations, i.e., rules of conduct specific to that position” (Zięba-Kołodziej, 2012, p. 136). Pavel Sanayev’s short story *Pochowajcie mnie pod podłogą* [Bury me under the floor] (written in 1994), translated by Izabela Korybut-Daszkiewicz, is a study of interpersonal relations, character psychology, and the influence of the past on the present, was used as the material for the study (Sanayev, 2009). P. Sanayev (born 1973) is a Russian writer, screenwriter, and film director. He is the author of several novels, short stories and film scripts that have won acclaim both in Russia and abroad. The creator is known for his ironic style and satirical approach to contemporary Russian reality.

P. Sanayev, in *Pochowaj mnie...*, explores themes of an identity crisis, alienation, communication difficulties, and verbal and physical violence. He also explores the very universal and varied theme of love, in its specific dimension –for it is shown as deformed and in some sense pathological – possessive, violent, demanding, unrequited. Through a skilful combination of humour, irony and deep reflection, P. Sanaev creates a multi-layered story that moves the reader on various emotional levels. Interestingly, this is a story based on facts, and the narrator is a several-year-old boy – the *alter ego* of P. Sanayev himself:

My name is Sasha Savilev. I live with my grandmother and grandfather and go to second grade. My mother exchanged me for a dwarf crier and hung me with a millstone from my grandmother’s neck. And so I have been hanging since I was four years old (2009, p. 7).

The analysis of the work is conducted from a hermeneutic perspective, which, according to Hans-Georg Gadamer, makes it possible to overcome spiritual distance (Gadamer, 2000; cf. Rosner, 1991), and the creator’s reflection on the protagonist’s condition, as Paul Ricoeur adds, is in effect an attempt to understand himself (Burzyń-

ska, 2006; *cf.* Ricoeur, 1985, 1989). Such a method of interpretation makes it possible to discover the deeper layers of the work and the unspoken meanings contained in it. It takes into account the point of view and value system of the viewer-interpreter himself (*cf.* Pavis, 2002, p. 181; Głowiński, Kostkiewiczowa, Okopień-Sławińska, & Sławiński, 2002, pp. 194–195). It is worth mentioning that when discussing P. Sanaev's work, the method of "close reading," i.e., the art of interpretation with diverse methodological foundations, which promotes analytical reading focused on the text and its meanings, is also important. In "close reading," being close to the text, in addition to attention to analytical detail, rhythm, and phrase melody, it is also important to pay attention to the sensual, somatic dimension of reading. Such an endeavour makes it possible to uncover what is subcutaneous (subtextual), often suppressed in perception by the dominant discourse and sensitises to what is not obvious, sometimes passed over in silence.

Grandmother (and grandfather) in literary imagery – a few words

In literature – especially children's literature – the grandmother and the grandfather accompanying her are usually positive characters. There is a pattern in which they are open and content with life. According to Alicja Zbierzchowska, "Their role in passing on family, religious and national traditions, maintaining social memory, moral and religious development and, above all, surrounding children with love is particularly emphasised" (2019, p. 163). Similarly, Joanna K. Wawrzyniak (2011) believes that from grandparents grandchildren learn certain rules of behaviour, a certain pattern, which they can transfer into adulthood, into their own family. "When grandparents are absent or lose their power to control behaviour, the younger generation may openly ignore adult standards and disregard them" (Mead, 2000, p. 74). Elders make life fuller and richer. They provide valuable experiences and introduce elements of tradition, allowing for a better understanding of social change. Magdalena Pieńkos argues that grandparents:

[...] are very active in caring for the youngest and in shaping their personalities. They [...] are an authority for many young people and are role models for them. They have a lot of experience and life wisdom to share with the younger generation, and their grandchildren can learn from them. Grandmothers and grandfathers pass on their worldviews, values, traditions, history, and practical skills (Pieńkos, 2015, p. 287).

They most often pass on family traditions to their grandchildren, sometimes provide emotional and/or financial support and offer advice.

There are many more examples in the literature of the important and positive role of grandparents. It is worth mentioning, for example, the cultural theory of Margaret Mead, who rightly observes that today

[...] because all people on earth have become part of an interlocking system of connections and information flows [...] young people in every part of the world are faced with a situation that none of the elders have encountered before and never will. Conversely, the older generation can no longer absolutely count on the repetition in their children's lives of their own experience of gradually revealing change, unknown to anyone before them (Mead, 2000, p. 95).

This impacts the ongoing change in the importance of the role of the grandmother, to which we would like to devote this paper.

If we look at the source texts, we discover an extremely diverse and rich image of the grandmother, whose "social role is an extension of that of the mother" (Trzop, 2013, p. 46), organically connected to the child. Grandmothers are often portrayed as figures full of wisdom, love and life experience. In texts, however, they are created as warm, caring figures and as more complex and multidimensional characters. Here are some examples*:

- Grandmother as protector and source of wisdom in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865).

* The figure of the grandmother appears in literature very often. She is usually a caring character who plays a significant role in the lives of her grandchildren. We can find her, among others, in F. Dostoevsky (*The Idiot* – Generalovna, *Crime and Punishment* – Alona Ivanovna, *The Brothers Karamazov* – Maria Kondratievna, *Golden Peasant* – Arina Petrovna Khlestova), N. Gogol (*Dead Souls* – Pulcheria Ivanovna Sobakevich, *The Revisor* – Anna Andreyevna, *The Nose* – Praskovia Osipovna), A. Pushkin (*Eugene Onegin* – Arina Rodionovna, *The Captain's Daughter* – Vasilisa Yegorovna), O. Tokarczuk (*Prawiek and Other Times* – Grandmother Tekla, *The Journalist's House*, *The Jakub Books* – Grandmother Jakub Frank, *Bieguni*), B. Schulz (*Cinnamon Shops* – Schulz's grandmother, known as Mrs. Skowronska), W. Gombrowicz (*Ferdynand* – Mrs. Kister's grandmother, known as the Old Lady), T. Prachett (Grandmother Weatherwax in the *Discworld* series), J. Irving (grandmother in *Puppy Love*), S. A. Allen (grandmother in *Spring Waters*), R. Rowell (grandmother in *Wonder Boy*), and in many others. Since the aim of the article was not to review the characters of grandmothers in literature, the authors limited themselves to showing that, firstly, the grandmother is a significant character, often appearing on the pages of novels and stories, although not always directly (she may be present in memories or be a supporting character, but always important), and secondly, most often the grandmother has a great impact on the lives not only of the grandchildren but also of the whole family.

- Grandmother as a symbolic figure, representing the old Russian intelligentsia, rooted in tradition but at the same time inadequate to the changing world, conservative but also caring and loving in Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* (1867).
- Grandmother as a source of tradition and family history in Svetlana Aleksievich's *Chernobyl Prayer* – a character who narrates the past, traditions and experiences (1997), which is important because

[...] the continuity of all cultures is based on the living co-presence of at least three generations [...] In the past, before life expectancy lengthened, living great-grandparents and grandparents were rare. Representatives of the longest-lived culture, who were role models for those younger than themselves and by a mere tone of voice or gesture could praise or condemn their entire way of life, were few [...] (Mead, 2000, p. 25).

- The grandmother is a complex and multidimensional heroine, a character with her weaknesses, worries, and problems in Isabel Allende's book *Grandmother* – a woman with a turbulent past who tries to deal with her own demons (1997).

The multidimensional role of the grandmother

In the Russian writer's story, the figure of the grandmother has an important and multi-dimensional function*. She is not just a traditional caregiver who can "pass a corrective exam of previous parental mistakes" (Trzop, 2013, p. 47). Still, she is an important piece of the relational puzzle, influencing the fate of the other family members and the relations between them. However, her presence does not necessarily provide a sense of security and foster a serene atmosphere. It is used to believe that the grandmother represents the wisdom flowing from years of experience, is the guardian of the home hearth, provides advice, example, a good word or, as M. Pieńkos (2015) notes, fulfils recreational, social and cultural needs, and plays a significant role in fulfilling emotional needs. She shares a very strong bond with her grandchildren and is a support for them. In P. Sanaev's story, it is different. The grandmother is portrayed as a bitter person, using violence and passive aggression, using uncensored words, and forming toxic relationships. The woman has made it her life's mission to take care of her sickly grandson, who, according to the grandmother, could not count on adequate care at his mother's home. However, it should be emphasised

* In the original, P. Sanaev uses the words *бабушка*, *баба*, *бабка*, and *бабонька* interchangeably to describe grandmothers, which, it seems, given the context of their use, are used as synonyms.

that the boy's illness was to a large extent projected onto him and sustained precisely by the grandmother. In psychology, such a phenomenon, when a caregiver tries to keep his child ill (in this case his grandson), is called Münchausen syndrome *per procuram*:

Münchausen syndrome in proxy (MSBP) is a psychiatric disorder, a potentially lethal form of maltreatment of children (Friedman, Resnick, 2007) or others, including adults, in the care of a person with the syndrome described. A pathological emotional relationship most often binds the MSBP-suffering biological mother and her child victim of MSBP. The seemingly caring and loving mother in reality does not accept her child. She feels an inner need to be seen by others as an affected person. The interest and sympathy due to the families of genuinely sick children is a kind of psychological reward for her. The mother triggers the victim's illness symptoms, e.g., by administering poison, starvation, inducing infection, suffocating to the point of unconsciousness, and, in milder forms of MSBP, telling the doctor imaginary symptoms of the illness [...]. These actions are undertaken in a planned manner, with particular care to avoid unmasking (Berent, Florkowski, & Gałecki, 2012, p. 95).

Thus, the grandmother constantly projected her illness onto her grandson, and he lived in the belief that his infirmity was an immanent part of his life and functioning in the world. The boy recalls this time and his grandmother's treatment of him in this way (Sanayev, 2009):

I used to get sick often, and I treated myself incessantly. And I completely didn't understand why I was constantly treating myself and still being sick. When I asked my grandmother about it, she said: "If you hadn't been treated, you would have died a long time ago." - and she would give me some tablets (p. 109).

You will probably be surprised why I did not wash myself. Well, because a shithead like me is incapable of doing anything on his own. This shithead has been abandoned by his mother and he is still rotting and a bath can exacerbate all his shitty diseases. This is how my grandmother explained [...] (p. 9).

Interestingly, Sasha emphasises that his being ill also had positive overtones, as it caused his grandmother to give him attention:

Thanks to my illness, I received what even flawless homework could not give me – my grandmother's favour. Of course, my grandmother didn't praise me for being ill, but she acted as if I was a bad boy as if I had really distinguished myself with something and finally deserved to be treated well (p. 117).

P. Sanaev's multi-generational Savilev family takes on the characteristics of a dysfunctional family – disorganised, destructive, with caring and educational difficulties. The storyline, based on the stories of real-life characters, features grandmother Nina (Lidia Sanaeva), grandfather Semyon (Vsevolod Sanaeva – a prominent film and theatre actor), their daughter Olga (Yelena Sanaeva – a well-known Russian actress), her partner Tola (Rolan Bykov – an accomplished actor and director), and grandson Sasha (Pavel Sanaeva). The boy was brutally taken away from his mother because she was not responsible enough to take care of her son and, in addition, she got involved with an unsuitable – according to his grandmother – man:

Vera Petrovna, there is a wise saying: children pay for the sins of their parents. He is paying for the whore, his mother (p. 34).

What kind of dwarf? Well, maybe not a dwarf, but oh - such a height! – Grandpa raised his hand a metre off the ground. – An artist, the devil made him! A drunkard, penniless, and you know where from? From Sochi! (p. 49).

The author has made the grandmother the protagonist of the story – she is the one who sets the tone for family relations. Her life, she recalls, is a string of torment and anguish, which, one can assume, shaped her view of the world and her character. Her memories of her youth are harrowing – full of pain, unfulfillment, rejection, misunderstanding, and bad choices. Her dreams of becoming an actress, of reciprocated love and a happy life proved to be flimsy:

I studied the best, I was always the soul of the company, witty, intelligent – grandmother complained, picking mould from the teapot – the boys adored me: “Where’s Ninka? Will there be a Ninka?” They took me with them on all their trips, on all their rallies... And I was such a limited idiot – my God, for what? He made me look like an idiot (p. 14).

I [...] dreamed of being an actress, became a secretary and then a housewife. Not a bad career, huh? I sat with that bastard, I hammered roles into his head. He couldn't learn his own, and I already knew them all by heart – Czacki, Tsar Boris, and the Devil in the Mortar. That was all my acting (p. 137).

I didn't know, stupidly, that he was getting married, because he assumed. He had a woman in Moscow, ten years his senior, he quarrelled with her and bet that he would find a better one in Kyiv. And he found an idiot! We went to the office, showed my father the paper and left. My father ran all over the platform behind

the train and called out: “Don’t leave, daughter!” How he felt that nothing but tears awaited me there! I shouldn’t have left my parents, left Kyiv. I was a fool. May God show me for it! (pp. 135–136).

Another not-easy experience for her was the physical loss of her beloved son Alyosha, who died at a very young age:

And here Alyosha fell ill... What a boy he was, Vera Petrovna, what a baby! Barely a year old, he was already talking! Fair hair, doll-like face, huge grey-blue eyes. I loved him so much that it took my breath away. And it was in that cellar that he fell ill with diphtheria and measles and developed an ulcer on his lung – an abscess. The doctor immediately stated that he would not survive. I shed tears over him, and he tells me: “Don’t cry, Mum, I’m not going to die. Don’t cry.” He coughs and chokes and comforts me. Are there still children like that in the world? And the next day he died... I carried him in my arms myself to the graveyard, I buried him myself. And since the child is no longer there, they banished me from that cellar, gave the place to a cleaner (p. 138),

and the metaphorical loss of her daughter. After such traumatic events, Nina gradually began to lose her mind, and although her husband tried to help her, to find her proper care, in her eyes the stay in the psychiatric hospital appeared as something unnecessary, something that broke her, changed her, maimed her, and finally – as a betrayal:

They locked me sneakily in the hospital – they said they were going to put me in a sanatorium, but they put me in the chumps. I started crying and they started stabbing me like a dangerous madwoman. My skin became covered with blisters, I cried day and night, and the neighbours in the hall said: “Look at her, she’s scared, a scumbag, that they’ll put her in jail, and she’s pretending to be abnormal.” Sienią would come, and I would beg him: “Get me out of here, I’m dying.” He took me away, but too late – they made me a cripple, mentally ill. Oh no, that betrayal, that hospital where, with my wits and character, I became a crippled mediocrity – I cannot forgive him for that. For him the actors, the performances, the applause, for me – illness, fear and humiliation all my life. And I have read so many books in my life that he didn’t even dream of! (p. 141).

The emotionally immature and even labile Nina manifested her powerlessness, but also her frustration, bitterness, aggression, lack of purpose in life and inability to take care of herself, on the level of language – with notorious threats, challenges, and insults, which were coupled with a sense of powerlessness. It was caused by her concern for her grandchild, who had become, as it were, a “substitute goal in life”:

That the heavens should curse thee, that God, earth, birds, fish, men, sea, and air should curse thee! [...]. That misfortunes themselves should come upon your head! So that, apart from divine punishment, you will experience nothing in this world! (p. 11).

You stinker, you stinking bastard! (p. 10).

Be accursed, vile traitor! (p. 45).

You have sweated... Mother of God, you have sweated again, you dung! O merciful God, save me! I'll beat your face in, you bastard! (p. 22).

Didn't you see that moron of mine? Why a moron at first... He looks like a pretty bright lad. He only looks that way! The staphylococcus has long since gnawed all his brains out (Sanaev, 2009, p. 27).

The woman is constantly troubled by fear for her grandson, fear for his physical health, stemming from devotion, which she understands in a specific way – as being unconditionally (in this pejorative overtone) for her grandson, being attached to him. One might even assume that this is her obsession:

I don't love anyone like that and never have! He, a silly boy, thinks his mother loves him more, but how can she love him more if she hasn't suffered so much for him? Bring a toy once a month – that's called love. And I live it, I breathe it! (p. 142).

I only shout at him when I am afraid of something, and I curse myself for it later (pp. 142–143).

I only open my eyes for him in the morning. I would be happy to close them forever if I were not convinced that I am needed by him, that I can relieve his suffering... (p. 143).

It seems that a grandmother can only love with a toxic, despotic, morbid, addictive, demanding, excessive love:

He is, only in metric, his mother's son. But as far as maternal feelings are concerned, no man in the world loves him as I do. By blood, this child is connected to me (p. 142).

He is my last love, I die without him (p. 203).

The boy lives in the world that his grandmother has formed for him: [...] it seemed

to me that there had never been and would never be another life. In this life, the focal point was the grandmother and very rarely did the mother appear in it, with the grandmother's permission (p. 66).

It is the grandmother who creates his way of thinking, his perception of reality, it is from her that life advice flows:

Your mother was constantly hammered in the head: "Study, be independent," too how many times I repeat it – and all in vain... You will be just like her. The same shit, dependent on everyone [...] (p. 37).

My grandmother often explained to me what to say and when to say it. She taught me that speech is silver and silence is gold; that there is a sacred lie and sometimes it is better not to tell the truth. [...] She adhered to the principle of the sacred lie unconditionally (p. 53).

In the story's finale, bullied by her parents, unsure of her role, once lost and stifled, the mother plucks up the courage to take her son to live with her, which is a terrible shock to the grandmother:

Be cursed! That you may experience nothing more in life but black despair! That they all renounce you, that they leave you alone for the rest of your life! Open the door! Let me go to him... – Grandma started banging her feet on the door. – Did you lock it? I wish they'd lock you in a coffin-like that soon! I curse you! I curse you and I will curse you! I wriggled at this door like a snake for you to open it for me, and instead of opening it, you crushed my heart with it! I don't need your forgiveness, bitch, but my pain at least understands! Understand that it would have been better for me to have died as a child than to have lived my whole life without love. I was constantly sacrificing myself for others, I hoped I deserved it! I loved myself to the point of madness, and people fled from me like the plague, spitting on me! And you, and your father, and that miserable cripple of yours. Only Alosha loved me, but he was still a crumb, gone from this world (p. 202).

How emotionally difficult this decision was for Olga is demonstrated by the following passage:

And the real reason is that I am afraid of her! I have only now realised how scared I am of her! When I took it away, I felt like a thief. As if it wasn't my child, but someone else's property that I wasn't even allowed to touch (p. 193).

The boy sketches, in a very moving and poignant way, the space where meetings with his beloved mother could take place, meetings that, as it turned out, were the meaning of his life:

The rare encounters with my mother were the most joyful events of my life. It was only with my mother that I felt good and happy. She was the only one who told me the kind of things you wanted to hear, the only one who gave me the kind of presents you really wanted to get (p. 70).

Unfortunately, the moments spent together with my mother were not without the presence of my grandmother:

Mum usually came for two hours, but I only managed to spend a few minutes with her the way I wanted. The rest passed as Grandma wanted it to. She would sit down next to us and embracing Mum would become embarrassing; she would start some topics of her own and I could no longer talk to Mum; she would act as if I was not there, and there was nothing left for me to do but look at mum with all my might, so that at least with my eyes I could make up for the words and embraces I was deprived of (p. 171).

The grandmother, the domineering Nina, also influenced her husband quite strongly, father of the lost and frightened Ola, grandfather of the ailing, abandoned little Sasha:

And all my life I have been wrong, angry... At first, I thought I would get used to it, then I realised I wouldn't, but what to do, after all, I couldn't take her back to Kyiv. Then Alyosha was born, what is there to think about... We fit together or not – the child is here, we have to live. And I resigned myself to staying that way. And then the war. Alyosha died, and Ola was born. I lived simply, I even thought I was used to it. And after the hospital, when I took her away in the fiftieth – the end, life was over. From morning to night resentment, cursing. Just running away! (p. 146).

As the text shows, Nina dominated her husband, and deprived him of all qualities, including bravery; in the eyes of the family, he was a loser, a wicked man and a traitor. This is how both Sasha and Olga perceive him:

And you nod, you nod! [...] All you've done all your life is nod and shrug (p. 18).

[...] Grandma is out of humour today. The reason for this state of affairs was the "old stinker," or – translated from grandma's language – my grandfather (p. 13).

Forty years alone, with no help from anyone! I've raised one child, and now I'm raising another, I'm barely alive and all you can think about is concerts, cars, fish and you're so tired! I cursed the day and hour when I left Kyiv! I was stupid, I thought you were a guy! But it turned out to be a shit, not a guy, and for forty years I've been finding that out day after day. God, what are you punishing me for? [...] Go away, go away, you neutered cat! You don't even have anywhere to go. You don't even have mates like normal guys (p. 132).

And my grandfather cheated on me all my life (p. 135).

The desire to dominate and control, emotional manipulation, lack of empathy or excessiveness are the qualities with which the author has equipped the main character. Although this is a story of difficult family relations, the inability to communicate, and the desolation of wrongs, P. Sanaev – through the use of such artistic tricks as irony, comedy, humour, paradox, and sarcasm – gives the story a symbolic dimension and makes it possible to take up the challenge of confronting oneself and one's emotions with the help of art:

Grandma, and if I die, could I be buried at my mother's house under the floor? Grandma replied that I was a complete idiot and could only be buried in the back of the psychiatric clinic (p.108).

Interestingly, this is the title P. Sanaev gave to his short story – the phrase “bury me under the floor” is, it seems, a child's desperate cry to be close to his mother, even after death, whose imminent arrival is constantly announced to him by his grandmother.

Her grandmother referred to her daughter as the ‘smoke plague’, a disease that develops in the human body after being bitten by an infected flea. Sasha referred to her fondly as the Plague:

I loved the Dzumka [Plague], I loved only her, no one else. If she were suddenly gone, I would be forever parted from that feeling, and if she were gone, I wouldn't know that feeling at all, I would think that life was just for doing homework, going to doctors and limping away from grandma's screams. But it would be awful and how good it is that it's not. Life is to wait out the doctors, endure the homework and granny's screams and live to see the Plague I loved so much (p.156).

Everything my mother gave me was simply part of my Dzumka [Plague], and I was terribly afraid of losing or spoiling any of her gifts (p. 170).

Conclusion

Grandmothers – according to Magdalena Stankowska – “have to learn their role, they have the right to experience frustrations and negative emotions” (2013, p. 75). The role of the grandmother is not an easy one, which, in our opinion, is demonstrated in the short story analysed by Pavel Sanayev. We are socially accustomed to the grandmother being a caregiver who looks after her grandchildren (wakes them up in the morning, takes them to kindergarten, prepares food, and responds to the child’s needs). She understands their needs, supports them, accompanies them and explains the world to them (Zbierzchowska, 2019).

P. Sanaev has shown that she can also be so frustrated with her life and unhappy that her grandchild, someone she should by definition love very much, becomes the person she hurts the most. Perhaps this is how she shows her feelings. The piece draws attention to emotional violence as a form of abuse that is often more difficult to identify and acknowledge than physical violence, but equally destructive. The grandmother in the story uses emotional violence against Sasha, which leads to his psychological problems. The protagonist experiences separation anxiety, passive aggression and psychosomatic illness.

The existence of the human being as a social being and an integral part of the family system shows itself as a complex system of biological, emotional and cultural needs. The individual was not only born into society but also evolved to function within close family relationships. Despite this natural inclination towards communal beings, the reality of being in toxic conditions can dramatically reverse this original purpose, as we observe in the case of Sasha, the main character in P. Sanaev’s story.

References

- Berent, D., Florkowski, A., & Gałecki, P. (2012). Przeniesiony zespół Münchause-na [Münchhausen syndrome in proxy]. *Dziecko Krzywdzone*, 2(39), 95–103.
- Brückner, A. (1927). *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego* [Etymological dictionary of the Polish language]. Kraków: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza.
- Burzyńska, A., Markowski, M. P. (2006). *Teorie literatury XX wieku: Podręcznik* [Theories of twentieth-century literature: A handbook]. Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak.
- Czepczarz, J., Czepczarz, A. (2021). Znaczenie opieki nad wnukami w jakości życia osób w podeszłym wieku [The significance of caring for grandchildren for the quality of life of elderly people]. *Wychowanie w Rodzinie*, 25(2), 139–153. DOI: 10.34616/wwr.2021.2.139.153.

- Gadamer, H. G. (2000). *Rozum, słowo, dzieje: Szkice wybrane* [Reason, word, history: Selected sketches]. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Głowiński, M., Kostkiewiczowa, T., Okopień-Sławińska, A., & Sławiński, J. (2002). *Słownik terminów literackich* [Glossary of literary terms]. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- Mead, M. (2000). *Kultura i tożsamość: Studium dystansu międzypokoleniowego* [Culture and identity: A study of intergenerational distance]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Pavis, P. (2002). *Słownik terminów teatralnych* [Glossary of theatre terms]. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- Pieńkos, M. (2015). Dziadkowie w wychowaniu wnuków na podstawie opinii osób młodych i starszych [The role of grandparents in upbringing – based on young and elder people's opinions]. *Forum Pedagogiczne*, 2, 279–289.
- Ricoeur, P. (1985). Konflikt hermeneutyk: Epistemologia interpretacji [Conflicting hermeneutics: The epistemology of interpretation]. In: P. Ricoeur (Ed.), *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka: Rozprawy o metodzie*. Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax.
- Ricoeur, P. (1989). *Język, tekst, interpretacja: Wybór pism* [Language, text, and interpretation: A selection of writings]. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Rosner, K. (1991). *Hermeneutyka jako krytyka kultury: Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur* [Hermeneutics as cultural criticism: Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur]. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Sanajew, P. (2009). *Pochowajcie mnie pod podłogą* [Bury me under the floor]. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Stankowska, M. (2013). Nowe trendy w pełnieniu roli babci [New trends in the role of the grandmother]. In: A. Kotlarska-Michalska (Ed.), *Stary człowiek w rodzinie i społeczeństwie* (pp. 64–82). Poznań: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza.
- Trzop, B. (2013). Rola rodzinna babci i matki dorosłych dzieci jako społeczny komponent tożsamości współczesnych kobiet dojrzałych [The family role of grandmother and mother of adult children as a social component of the identity of contemporary mature women]. In: A. Kotlarska-Michalska (Ed.), *Stary człowiek w rodzinie i społeczeństwie* (pp. 41–63). Poznań: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza.
- Wawrzyniak, J. K. (2011). Opiekuńczo-wychowawcza rola dziadków w rodzinie [The caring and educational role of grandparents in the family]. *Pedagogika Rodziny*, 1(2), 95–103.
- Zbierzchowska, A. (2019). Obraz roli babci i dziadka we współczesnej literaturze dziecięcej [An image of the role of grandmother and grandfather in a contemporary children's books]. *Pedagogika Społeczna*, 1(71), 161–179. DOI: 10.35464/1642-672X.PS.2019.1.10.
- Zięba-Kołodziej, B. (2012). Rola dziadków w życiu rodziny [The role of grandparents in family life]. In: D. Sreduńska (Ed.), *Uczestnictwo społeczne w średniej i późnej dorosłości* (pp. 136–151). Bydgoszcz: Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego.