

GENRE-STYLE TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE ARTISTIC WORK OF TETYANA STUS

ЖАНРОВО-СТИЛЬОВІ ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЇ В ХУДОЖНЬОМУ ДОРОБКУ ТЕТЯНИ СТУС

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Abstract. This article examines the evolution of Tetyana Stus (Shcherbachenko) body of work as a cohesive ecosystem for supporting children. The author explores the writer's artistic world through the metaphor of a "living membrane" that bridges the worlds of adulthood and childhood, and the physical and spiritual. It is revealed that the author's style is underpinned by modern cordocentrism and the idea of "self-fulfilment".

An analysis of educational literature (*Pannochka, Pysmonautyka*) demonstrates a transition from the role of a "navigator" who structures society to that of a facilitator of creativity. Particular attention is paid to the transformation of the child's image: from the "project girl" to the lively, egocentric Darynka (the "Reading Room" cycle), where mischief is legitimised as a stage of self-discovery. It is demonstrated that the emergence of philosophical picture books (*Wilhelm the Hedgehog, Where is Oira?*) marks a transition to intellectual prose. The author transforms complex categories (otherness, introversion) into visual-metaphorical images, introducing "literature of slowing down". A special place is occupied by the book *My Grannie*, which, through the concept of the "house in the heart", acts as a mediator in themes of ageing and loss, harmonising the philosophy of being with the ethics of compassion.

It has been established that the current phase of her work consists of bibliotherapeutic prose (*Secret Stories...*, *The Hugging Workshop*). The author creates a safe space for processing the trauma of war, using personification (the anxious rucksack, the life-saving siren). Her most recent works from 2024–2025 (*The Hugging Workshop, Farewell, First!*) are presented as a synthesis of artistic narrative and practical workbook, teaching social intelligence and gentle adaptation to physiological changes.

It is concluded that Tetyana Stus has charted a path from "instructions for life" to a "space of life", where vulnerability is recognised as a strength and writing becomes an act of "embracing" through words. Her body of work affirms the child as an equal personality, capable of nurturing an "inner garden" in a globalised world.

Keywords: Tetyana Stus, cordocentrism, bibliotherapy, child-centredness, picture book, non-fiction.

INTRODUCTION

Writing about Tetyana Stus's body of work is very difficult, yet fascinating. For each of her texts is a living membrane – between adulthood and childhood, between the inner world and the outer world, between what is physically visible, audible and tangible, and the energies of the spirit, love and conscience. These are very simple and clear books, yet at the same time they are very deep and complex. Enchantingly childlike and entirely adult. In any case, they are genuine, open and self-sufficient. Just like their author, who belongs to the generation of Ukrainian children's writers who came of age during the years of independence (Smiekalova, 2026; Provydnyi skeroovach prostoru, n.d.).

Tetyana Stus has crystallised her own concept of creative heart-centredness, of heartfelnness as a principle of cognition and action, of communication and “self-fulfilment”. Her creative journey is a movement from the external attributes of childhood to its deepest inner meanings, and her writing is a constant search for a language through which one can speak of the complex in a simple and “embracing” way. Today, her books are a safe haven where a child can be themselves and develop, despite the war and the challenges of the world.

Yet throughout her fruitful and vibrant creative journey, the writer has undergone significant transformations of her authorial “self”, which are reflected in the style, themes and subject matter of her works. At the very beginning, she appears as an expert, advisor and guide (structuring the world for the child, providing clear coordinates and rules of the game). Her heroine is a “project girl” who is learning to be flawless (after all, she's still trying to ‘conquer’ the world!), whilst the writer herself acts as a facilitator, imparting knowledge to make the child stronger in society. With the emergence of works about Darynka, the author's tone becomes more playful and psychological. The writer begins to see the world from a “child's perspective”, to look through her eyes, to notice the little things that adults ignore. Her heroine is no longer an idealised model, but a living girl with her own whims and fantasies. Tetyana Stus (then Shcherbachenko) discovers within herself the gift of speaking about a child's egocentrism and “awkwardness” with sincere love and interest. The most profound change (the shift from “how to behave” on the outside to “how to feel” on the inside) occurs when the writer finally abandons didacticism in favour of empathy (*Wilhelm the Hedgehog, Where is Oira?*). She becomes “quiet” (a thinker who is not afraid of pauses, silence and difficult questions). Her texts are filled with air and metaphors, and her characters learn to defend their boundaries, acknowledge their sadness and seek inner light. Recent years, particularly since the outbreak of full-scale war, have crystallised the image of Tetyana Stus as a healer. Now she is a figure who offers safety, whose voice sounds like a warm lullaby (*Listen to Your Heart, My Granie*). She takes on the responsibility of calling painful things by their proper names, but does so as gently as possible. Her characters experience trauma, but find support in love and memory.

In essence, Tetyana Stus has journeyed from creating wonderful “instructions for life” to nurturing a “space for life” within her texts and in each of her readers. Whereas she once taught children how to expand their world, she now enables them to accept and preserve its inner integrity, to “fill themselves with themselves” and to grow.

REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS IN THE WORKS OF TETYANA STUS

The writer’s creative (and personal) world, the focus of her spiritual and intellectual attention, and the perspective from which she views life, are surprisingly fully reflected in the characters of her works. Tetyana Stus’s characters are usually inquisitive, sometimes capricious, but very sincere children (such as Darynka) or anthropomorphic figures (Wilhelm the Hedgehog, Oira the dog, colourful cats), who serve as guides into the world of emotions. Their common trait is, above all, inner reflection and a “quiet voice”. Her characters perform “inner feats”: they think deeply, listen to their feelings and seek answers within themselves. Saving the world through external actions, “Marvel-style superheroism” – that’s not for them. Furthermore, almost every one of her characters goes through a phase of realising their own uniqueness (self-discovery through “otherness”). They do not try to be “like everyone else”, but learn to accept their own uniqueness (such as Wilhelm or Oira). Moreover, Tanya Stus’s characters have the right to be vulnerable. They can feel sad, afraid, or lost. This unites them in a shared humanistic space, where vulnerability is seen as a strength, not a flaw. Ultimately, every one of the writer’s characters embodies the idea that the world around us depends on what we have nurtured within ourselves (“the inner garden”). These are observer-characters who appreciate the details (the light of streetlamps, the warmth of an embrace, the scent of books), are unafraid of emotions, and are capable of restoring and accumulating strength for Good.

Two major strands are evident in Tetyana Stus’s work: the cognitive (non-fiction) and the artistic-therapeutic. Yet her authorial style is always defined by the absence of didacticism, the structure and thoughtfulness of all the book’s expressive devices, a light, organic, contemporary language, metaphorical imagery, and an atmosphere of calm and security, with the child at the centre of attention as an equal individual.

Educational and practical literature for children and teenagers

In Tetyana Stus’s work, this genre is represented by the encyclopaedia for 21st-century girls *Pannochka* (Krains Mriy, 2007), the guidebook *How Not to Get Lost in the Web* (The Old Lion Publishing House, 2013) and the creative writing course for children *Pysmonavyka* (Pabulum, 2017).

Pannochka (2007) is Ukraine's first encyclopaedic reference book for teenage girls, distinctly national in both structure and content. Amidst a glut of translated and Russian-language publications of a similar nature, it became a unique "bridge" between traditional culture and a modern worldview and way of life. The book was Tetyana Shcherbachenko's first foray into literature for children and teenagers. And a surprisingly successful one at that! The book remains a Ukrainian bestseller to this day, and several generations of young women have grown up with this guide for girls, which, for the first time in the history of Ukrainian children's literature, responded so fully and vividly to the needs of the nationally conscious section of society.

"In *Pannochka*, there was a lot of folklore and tradition (mmm, my grandmother's recipe for 'zatirka'!) and, at the same time – in terms of the plot and characters – I presented a modern take on traditional culture, ancient mythology, the structure of the world, leisure activities, and traditional cuisine..." (Stakhovsky, 2018) – recalls the writer. And she admits that to the same extent, *Pannochka* was an attempt to fully 'have' those conversations with her own daughter – conversations so important to her development, for which there had been neither time nor resources – through the "table book" ("She was just entering her pre-teen years at the time, I worked from morning till night, and really couldn't teach her any strategies, look for psychological approaches to communicating with others or resolving arguments" (Stakhovsky, 2018).

Even in this book, one can clearly discern the traits that would later become defining features of Tanya Stus's entire body of work: the expression of personal experience, a "mentoring" approach and a distinct practical element, as well as a reader-centred focus, an understanding of their needs and communicative practices. It is at this point that her style begins to take shape – light-hearted, yet full of respect for her audience. The book also introduces the first major symbolic figure. Although she is more of a role model than a fictional character, *Pannochka* has become a symbol of "modern traditionalism". She embodies the idea that a girl can be at once a homemaker, an intellectual and a guardian of the family – and to exactly the extent that she herself wishes.

Tetyana Stus (Shcherbachenko) was also one of the first in Ukrainian children's literature to treat gadgets as an integral part of life, creating an innovative "anti-textbook" on internet safety, *How Not to Get Lost on the Web* (2013). This publication legitimised the internet as a natural environment for children, introducing an ethic of digital communication in place of outdated practices of prohibition and intimidation. It is the first modern popular science book about the internet that is truly Ukrainian not only in language (thanks to wittily chosen equivalents such as "workshop", "search engine", "browser", "attachments") but also in spirit.

At its core, *How Not to Get Lost on the Web* is a comprehensive guide covering the technical, ethical and legal aspects of the internet. The author deliberately eschews a patronising tone in favour of an equal dialogue: this allows young readers

to structure their own experiences, and adults to fill gaps in their digital literacy. The book offers a calm and rational perspective on the virtual space. For Tanya Stus, the Internet is not the “enemy of reading” or a treacherous parallel world, but an organic part of modern reality with its own history, geography and rules (Marchenko, 2013).

The author deliberately avoids using “scare stories” about addiction or threats. Instead of scaring children with “otherworldly” dangers, she draws a apt analogy with the street: moving around the city also carries risks, but we do not “protect” children from it through complete isolation; rather, we teach them safety rules. The author views a total restriction of access to the Internet as an obstacle to the harmonious development of the individual.

Despite the absence of moralising, the book contains a solid foundation of practical knowledge regarding technical protection (viruses, spam), privacy, the use of virtual currencies, and communication etiquette on social media. The book helps parents and teachers adopt a constructive perspective: not to warn children against the digital world, but to teach them to navigate the internet with the same confidence as we teach them how to behave on public transport or in the mountains.

The creative writing course for children, *Pysnomavtyka* (2017), holds a special place in Tanya Stus’s body of work as an innovative workbook that transforms dry literary theory into an engaging interactive game. It is not simply a textbook, but an “anti-textbook”, where the core school curriculum is presented through the prism of voluntary participation and partnership in creative writing, alongside an adapted literary glossary. The author deliberately eschews a mentoring approach, inviting the reader to choose their own goal: from the desire to become famous to the simple ability to articulate thoughts clearly.

The book functions as a personal creative diary and workbook, where one is allowed to write, draw and even cut things out. The structure of the book is geared towards a specific result: by completing step-by-step tasks, the child, without even realising it, creates an idea, a synopsis or a fully-fledged plot for their own story. Concise explanations of how to build suspense, create a vivid character or write a “powerful” opening sentence are complemented by real-life tips from contemporary Ukrainian writers.

The visual concept by Anna Ivanenko reinforces the idea of “navigating” the creative sea. Stylish illustrations transform the book into a cohesive interactive space. Thanks to an honest dialogue about royalties, letters to publishers and the professional side of the business, *Pysmonavtyka* becomes a window (or porthole) for children into the world of real literature. This publication not only teaches writing but also stimulates creative boldness, proving that creating one’s own worlds is within everyone’s reach (Semenchenko, n. d.).

Tanya Stus’s non-fiction has become a unique phenomenon in Ukrainian literature, filling the niche of the practical book with nationally conscious content that harmoniously combines ethnic roots with the challenges of the digital age. The writer transforms the traditional “teaching through lecturing” approach into a strategy of

“gentle guidance” and equal dialogue, where the child is a full partner. Her texts not only provide practical knowledge on psychology, safety or writing, but also legitimise the child’s right to their own feelings, choices and subjectivity.

The main value of these publications lies in their profound sincerity and practicality, which stem from the author’s personal experience as a mother and a specialist. Tanya Stus creates a comprehensive toolkit for children that helps them not only adapt to the demands of the modern world but also build inner resilience. As a result, her non-fiction becomes a safe space for the formation of a personality capable of navigating the globalised world freely and responsibly, whilst maintaining a connection with their own cultural identity.

Fiction for younger primary school students

The author’s shift towards creative fiction based on a child-centred approach is marked by the short story collection *The Navel of the Earth, or How Darynka Saved the World* (Hrani-T, 2007). At the heart of the plot is the inquisitive and energetic little girl Darynka, whose perception of the world becomes the main driving force of the narrative. The book’s themes encompass adventures that seem mundane at first glance: from attempts to slow down time to the curious sight of a piglet grazing on her grandfather’s tie. However, behind this everyday setting lies an important authorial stance: children are individuals equal to adults, possessing a unique gift for seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary – something adults often forget.

Tetyana Stus’s writing style in this collection is characterised by light humour, dynamism and an absence of moralising. The author skilfully blends the real world with elements of magical realism (such as conversations with the cat Pannotsky or the presence of the fairy-tale creatures Veselyk and Burmosyk), which corresponds to a child’s natural tendency to mythologise their surroundings. The language of the stories is lively and contemporary, enriched with educational elements – the author integrates interesting facts from geography or history into the text (the “Guess the Word” game), turning entertainment into unobtrusive learning.

The book’s themes focus on the understanding between the worlds of children and adults. Darynka emerges as an active, independent heroine whose actions (even the absurd or mischievous ones) always have an internal logic and a sincere intention – to bring joy or “save the world”. Although the stories are self-contained and do not always show linear character development, they create a cohesive image of the “child inventor”. For young readers, the book becomes a mirror of their own fantasies, whilst for adults it serves as a reminder of the need to see, behind the “mischief”, the deep emotional need of children to be heard and to feel significant in their own little world.

A new phase in the mischievous heroine’s life – the publication of the “Reading Room” series by Ranok Publishing: *Birthday* (2017), *Secret Conspiracy* (2018) and *Inventors’ Horses* (2019) – was not merely another appearance of a familiar

character, but the result of the painstaking work of Tanya Stus (by then already a recognised expert in children's reading) on adapting the literary text to the educational needs of a beginner reader. Guided by the principle that, to spark a genuine interest in a book, the text must feel “familiar” – recognisable, dynamic and witty – the author simultaneously imbued each story with practical content and life wisdom. In this way, “level-based reading” has become a fully-fledged experience of emotional and intellectual growth (Shulga, 2014).

Indeed, the psychology of otherness is explored in the story *Birthday*. In this book, Darynka finds herself in a situation that seems absurd at first glance – a present in the form of a hen named Myshka, who believes herself to be a rooster. The theme of the work extends far beyond the celebration: it is a story about accepting those who do not fit the mould. The issue of the “strange” hen, who feels out of place, mirrors children's fears of being misunderstood. The author's stance here is free of didacticism – through Darynka, Stus teaches empathy and responsibility for those we have “tamed”, whilst the dynamic plot involving the search for Myshka keeps the reader's attention until the very last page.

The story *Secret Conspiracy* is a classic “children's detective story”, where the events unfold on a train. The themes of social safety and interacting with strangers are presented through the protagonist's experiences, and advice from her mother is organically woven into the plot. The writing style here is as functional as possible: large font, short paragraphs and illustrations by Iryna Panarina, which help to visualise the investigation. The book teaches critical thinking: not to take things at face value and to trust one's own instincts, whilst remaining a captivating travel story.

Another book in the *Inventors' Horses* series focuses on invention as a way of interacting with the world. Darynka appears here not merely as an observer, but as an active creator of meaning. This is ‘nurturing’ literature that encourages children to be creative themselves (a point reinforced by special activities at the end). The author's style here is at its most playful; it legitimises children's imagination as serious intellectual work.

Tetyana Stus's return to the character of Darynka is deeply symbolic. The girl is the “archetype” of the writer's artistic world (whose prototype was her own daughter), retaining all its fundamental intentions, yet in “The Reading Room” she is already blossoming with the strength of the author's acquired experience. Darynka is a living, rather than a two-dimensional, character; an emotionally nuanced figure. She makes mistakes, misbehaves and doubts, which makes her the ideal companion for a child overcoming the difficulties of early reading. The character reinforces the books' child-centred focus, effectively becoming a pedagogical tool: Stus uses a child's subjective perspective to make the learning process feel natural. To some extent, a sense of comforting “familiarity” also comes into play. A reader who previously heard about Darynka from an adult now feels a sense of triumph reading about her independently. I think that for the writer, this character is the most honest way to

“connect” with the Little Person on equal terms, showing respect for their inner world through high-quality, professionally crafted literature.

Philosophical and reflective picture books

A special place in the work of Tetyana Stus is occupied by the philosophical and reflective picture books of the series “Little Miracle” published by “Vivat”: *Wilhelm the Hedgehog: dedicated to V. Kotarbinsky* (Vivat, 2016) and *Where is Oira?* (Vivat, 2017), as well as the picture book of the series “Listen to your heart” published by “Ranok”: *My Granny* (Ranok, 2018).

The transition from pragmatic non-fiction and playful realism to intellectual prose, where symbolism, deep metaphor and cultural references prevail, was symbolised by the publication of the book *Wilhelm the Hedgehog* (2016) – a philosophical tale about the search for light and the acceptance of one’s own “otherness”, which introduces children to the world of art and teaches them not to be afraid of being different. “In this story, “meditative reflections” (H. Tkachuk) are combined with a simple fairy-tale plot and artistic allusions” (Kachak, 2025, p. 366).

The main character – a hedgehog named Wilhelm – embodies the “strange” artist, dreamer and intellectual who falls out of step with the general rhythm of mercantile city life. Whilst his relatives search for food, Wilhelm explores the nature of shadows and sources of light. This is a story about the right to be different, about tolerance (embodied in the image of the delicate crow Fedora) and about friendship that helps make dreams come true. The story of this most philosophical character in Tanya Stus’s oeuvre is a manifesto of otherness. It has become the ‘face’ of Ukrainian book therapy, proving that the light within is more important than the thorns on the outside.

The genre of the picture book is realised here through the inseparable unity of text and visuals: Anna Sarvira’s concise, ‘rough-hewn’ and stylish illustrations do not merely complement the plot, but convey an atmosphere of melancholy, searching, and a tremulous anticipation of Light. The author’s language becomes more poetic and reflective, rich in nuances, compelling the reader (both child and adult) to slow down and immerse themselves in the protagonist’s inner world. The book’s atmosphere is cosy, somewhat autumnal and intimate; it teaches children contemplation – the ability to see beauty in the little things and not to be afraid to ask “difficult” questions about the structure of the world.

Another distinctive feature of *Wilhelm the Hedgehog* is that it presents itself as an unconventional form of biography for children. It is not a biography in the classical sense, but an artistic interpretation of the spirit and worldview of the outstanding artist Wilhelm Kotarbinski. Tanya Stus creates a metaphorical genesis of creativity, answering the question: “What turns a child into a Great Artist?”. Through the image of a hedgehog, the author introduces young children to sacred art and academicism, offering them the chance to experience the creator’s emotional journey

rather than dry facts. In this way, the book becomes an ideal tool for aesthetic education and family philosophical reflection.

The picture book *Where is Oira?* (2017) continues the philosophical thread in Tanya Stus's work, transforming complex existential concepts into images accessible to children. The artistic world of the book is built around the concept of "self-fulfilment", borrowed from the intellectual legacy of Vasyl Stus. Through an everyday situation – the little girl Orisa's search for her dog in the garden – the author explores the importance of inner life and personal space. The dog Oira is not merely a pet, but a symbol of introversion and psychological boundaries, teaching the child the right to solitude and a "space of one's own".

Autobiographical elements occupy a special place in the book, manifested through a deeply personal exploration of the theme of parental support. Tanya Stus legitimises a mother's right to rest and silence, emphasising that for healthy family relationships, everyone must "tend their own garden". This is not merely a story for children, but a meditative message to adults about the value of the "slow life" – slowing down the pace of life for the sake of contemplation and preserving the integrity of the soul. The author's worldview here intertwines with family values, where respect for another's solitude is the highest expression of love.

The genre of the book as a meditative picture book is enhanced by the visual language of Nadiya Kushnir (Nadyozhna). Instead of the brightness typical of children's books, the illustrator uses a limited, kaleidoscopic palette (blue, orange, white), which creates an atmosphere of calm and focuses attention on the characters' inner states. This combination of text and image teaches the child not only to follow the plot, but also to sense the mood, recognise their own emotions, and even overcome fears through laughter and understanding. The book becomes an unconventional form of "life writing", where the biographical subtext of the Stus family (the image of a mother who "knows how to shine") serves as an ethical guide for new generations (Marchenko, 2010).

The book *My Granny* (2018) marks an important transition in Tanya Stus's work – from intellectually contemplative picture books (*Wilhelm the Hedgehog*, *Where is Oira?*) to the "Listen to Your Heart" series, which focuses on a deep exploration of complex emotional states and trauma. Whilst her earlier philosophical works offered children an aesthetic distance and metaphorical "self-fulfilment", *My Granny* reaches a level of extreme candour. This is no longer merely an observation of the world, but a therapeutic mediator that helps one navigate the experience of ageing, frailty and the inevitable farewell to loved ones.

What sets this book apart from its predecessors is a shift in perspective: the author dispenses with grammatical markers of the narrator's gender and age, making the story universal for any reader. At the heart of the plot is a walk with a granddaughter and her grandmother, who moves about on crutches and is hard of hearing. There is no "romanticisation" of old age here; instead, through games such as "Turtle" or "Supersonic Plane", Tanya Stus legitimises physical frailty,

transforming it into a space for shared creativity and unconditional love. This marks a shift from the philosophy of existence to the ethics of compassion and acceptance.

The concept of the “little house in the heart” takes on particular significance. This is an unconventional way for children’s literature to speak of the finitude of life without using the word “death”. Whereas in *Where is Oira?* loneliness was a resource, in *My Granny* it is transformed into memory. The author’s stance here is exceptionally bold: she does not ‘spare’ the child from a difficult subject, but gives them the “keys” to understanding that love endures even when shared walks become impossible. This is a comforting book that lays the groundwork for coming to terms with loss, filling this process with hope and tenderness.

Nadiya Kushnir’s visual language in this book becomes more fluid and watercolour-like, reminiscent of a child’s diary entries. This artistic choice reinforces the autobiographical nature of the text: the author admits that she was describing her own grandmother, her experience as a future “Granny”, and her daughters’ experiences all at once. *My Granny* definitively establishes Tanya Stus as a master of “complex themes”, whose texts require not merely reading, but shared family discussion, becoming a bridge between generations in life’s most fragile moments.

Tanya Stus’s meditative and therapeutic picture books mark a transition from pragmatic learning to a subtle emotional sensibility and philosophical dialogue with the child. Their key feature is the transformation of complex existential categories – such as introversion (*Where is Oira?*), artistic exploration (*Wilhelm the Hedgehog*) or the transience of life (*My Granny*) – into visual and metaphorical images that are understandable to young children. The author deliberately eschews didacticism in favour of a shared experience, where text and image function as a single psychological tool. This is “slowing-down” literature, which teaches children contemplation, respect for their own and others’ boundaries, and the ethics of accepting difference.

These publications also emerge as unconventional forms of “life-writing” as a social dialogue, where the author’s personal experience and cultural codes become the foundation for soul therapy. The writer legitimises a child’s right to sadness, silence and solitude, transforming them from states of anxiety into resources. The books also serve as an emotional bridge between generations: they help adults to hear the “child” within themselves, and children to gain the “keys” to understanding the complexities of the “adult” world.

Bibliotherapeutic prose

The author does not “treat” the child with moralising lectures, but creates a safe psychological space where the child’s feelings are recognised as legitimate and important (so-called “gentle therapy”, which operates on the level of emotional resonance). It is precisely this bibliotherapeutic approach that currently defines Tetyana Stus’s work and is most clearly evident in the collections *White, Blue and*

Others (The Old Lion Publishing House, 2014) and ***Secret Stories of Small and Great Victories*** (Knyholav, 2023)

The writer's first foray into fairy-tale therapy was the collection about coloured cats, *White, Blue and Others* (2014), where each story is a metaphor for finding one's place in the world and identifying one's own feelings. In some ways, the book served as a bridge between the playful prose about Darynka and the deeply philosophical picture books. It differs from her previous works in its unique structure: it consists of five standalone short stories, in which a comprehensive programme of children's self-identification unfolds through the imagery of coloured cats. Whereas in *The Navel of the World* the author focused on external adventures, here she delves into the inner world, where each cat is a metaphor for a particular personality type or stage of a child's development.

The book's therapeutic value lies in its gentle exploration of complex social and personal challenges. Through the story of the Blue Cat who flies, the author teaches children not to inherit others' experiences of failure, but to believe in their own dreams. Strikey helps the little one find the answer to the question "Who am I?", whilst the drama of the Black Cat becomes a tool for overcoming the fear of rejection and breaking down social stereotypes. This is true fairy-tale therapy, which does not dictate rules but offers the child safe models of behaviour through play and empathy for the characters.

A distinctive feature of the book is its incredible linguistic flexibility. Tanya Stus's language here becomes "meowy": it is warm, cosy, full of the author's neologisms that mimic children's speech and create an atmosphere of unconditional motherly love. In terms of genre, this is an "intellectual fairy tale", where educational facts about nature (the properties of grass or the first snow) are organically interwoven with ethical lessons. Zhenya Myronyuk's vivid and dynamic illustrations stand on equal footing with the text, transforming every page into a living space where "out-of-the-box thinking" becomes the core value.

A landmark collection of therapeutic wartime tales, ***Secret Stories of Small and Great Victories*** (2023), has become a tool for navigating difficult experiences, helping children and parents find the words to talk about what they have been through. Tanya Stus has accomplished an incredibly difficult task: she has found a way to put into words an experience that is often unspeakable even for adults.

The book is structured as a series of stories about several Ukrainian families, where everyday realities (evacuation, air raid alerts, loss of homes) are interwoven with profound philosophical fables and parables. The author "explores themes of losing one's home, relocation, adaptation, emotional turmoil, aggression, longing for familiar things, mine safety, perceptions of disability or the deaths of soldiers, and the anticipation of victory through the prism of a fairy-tale perspective" (Kachak & Blyznyuk, 2024).

The genre structure of the collection revives the form of the "novel in short stories" with a distinct Skovoroda-esque subtext (Marchenko, 2022). Each story has a

“power” – a moral or psychological key that helps the child process stress. A distinctive feature is that the adult characters here act as exemplary role models: they know how to explain their tears, support the child appropriately, and convey calm. This makes the book an indispensable tool for family therapy, where the narrative text becomes a catalyst for healing dialogue between generations.

The author’s greatest innovation is the personification of the anxiety-inducing objects of war. The “anxious” rucksack becomes a life-lover, hugging mum around the shoulders; the siren transforms into a magical saviour from an ancient myth, whilst a rocket fragment or an old clock deliver thoughtful monologues on choice and time. Even the physical pain in the real-life story of veteran Sashko Chaika is transformed into “Healing”. This approach allows the child to replace fear of the unknown with an understanding of the inner essence of things, making the surrounding world more acceptable and less frightening.

The philosophical core of the collection is the idea of Humanity as the measure of all that exists. By revealing the interconnectedness of the world, the author leads the reader to an understanding of the inevitability of light’s victory over darkness. The book teaches children (and reminds adults) the most important thing: even in the midst of war, one can and must remain human – to love, to create, to remember, and to cherish life in every moment.

Standing somewhat apart, yet entirely in harmony with the author’s entire body of work, are the books *Close/Different People* (The Old Lion Publishing House, 2019), *The Hugging Workshop* (Silpo-Food Ltd, 2024) and *Farewell, First!* (Yulia Slyvka Publishing House, 2025).

The book *Close/Different People* (2019) is a concise yet richly concentrated manifesto of tolerance and acceptance. In terms of genre, this publication strikes a balance between a poetic picture book and a wimmelbook, where the visual elements complement the text, encouraging prolonged contemplation and reflection. Whereas in her previous therapeutic tales the author engaged in a lengthy dialogue with the child, here she adopts a “simple yet profound” style, where the short, rhythmic verse serves as a framework for discussing deep-seated social themes: from wealth inequality and loneliness to national differences and psychological states.

Stylistically, the book is characterised by existential richness. Despite the brevity of the text, every phrase is a pithy aphorism encompassing the whole spectrum of human experience (“People can be lonely... Rich or poor”). This continues the author’s “child-centred” approach, where the world is presented without embellishment or excessive moralising, but with an emphasis on respect for the uniqueness of each individual. In the context of the author’s other books, *Close/Different People* is a logical continuation of the philosophy of *Where is Oira?* and *My Granny*, yet here the focus shifts from the intimate family circle to the scale of the entire planet – as “millions of individuals” who must learn to coexist.

The therapeutic effect of the book lies in legitimising the right “to be whatever you are”. Tanya Stus creates a space where “ferocity” or “rage” are recognised as just

as natural states as tenderness, helping children to overcome their fear of negative emotions. The book serves as a tool for parents when faced with “awkward questions”, offering a visual metaphor of humanity as a large, diverse yet united family instead of complex lectures. This marks a shift from individual fairy-tale therapy to the development of social intelligence, making the publication a key step in Stus’s transition to large-scale socio-educational projects.

This is precisely the nature of the project *The Hugging Workshop* (2024), which serves as both a logical continuation and a significant expansion of the author’s fairy-tale therapeutic approach, as established in her previous picture books *Wilhelm the Hedgehog* and *Where is Oira?*. Whereas in *Wilhelm* the author taught children to notice their inner light, and in *Oira* to nurture their psychological space (“self-fulfilment”), *The Hugging Workshop* transfers this knowledge into the realm of active socio-emotional interaction. This is no longer simply meditation, but a comprehensive toolkit of ‘wise love’, developed in collaboration with psychologist Svitlana Roiz, where metaphorical images of animals help children master the art of support and respect for boundaries.

The therapeutic continuity here is evident: Stus once again uses the images of “other” characters (the anxious Little Wildie, the short-sighted Little Mole, the Wolf Cub whose father is at the front) to legitimise the child’s complex feelings. However, in the *Workshop*, the focus shifts to the diversity of forms of closeness. The author explains that a hug is not just physical contact, but also “hugs with words” or actions (such as a comforting cup of tea or croissants). This is a direct extension of the theme of psychological safety: whilst *Oira* taught children to say “I need some time alone”, the characters in the *Workshop* teach them to ask permission before touching and to experience “hugs from a distance”, which is critically important for children in times of war.

In terms of genre, *The Hugging Workshop* is an interactive adventure story that combines a fictional narrative with a practical workbook packed with hands-on activities (stickers, recipes, and insights into anandamide from neurobiology). Maryna Shuturma’s fictional world, filled with the Mountains of Strength and the Lake of Joy, creates a safe ‘haven of security’ where children gain not only aesthetic pleasure but also real-life self-soothing techniques.

A prime example of therapeutic literature that straddles the line between fiction and practical non-fiction is Tanya Stus’s latest book, *Farewell, First Tooth!* (2025). As a work of fiction, the book offers a heart-warming family story, brimming with lively humour and psychological authenticity. The main character experiences entirely real childhood anxieties: from physical worry over a wobbly tooth to comical concerns about the “financial solvency” of the tooth fairy. The lively exchanges with his mum and sister Nastya, as well as the ironic plot twist, make the book a captivating read, where every member of the family will find something to laugh about.

At the same time, the book contains a strong non-fiction element, serving as an educational guide to the world of physiological changes. Tanya Stus subtly weaves

educational facts into the narrative: from historical background on the origins of the Tooth Fairy to explanations about the need for braces or visits to the dentist. The book serves as a tool for a gentle transition to school, normalising bodily changes as a sign of growing up. Thanks to the concise text and visual highlights by Marta Leshak, the book becomes a practical workbook for learning to read, helping the child not only to overcome their fear of change but also to experience the sense of achievement from reading their first story independently.

CONCLUSIONS

Tetyana Stus's work is truly a marvellous "living membrane" that does not divide but sensitively connects different worlds, allowing meanings to vibrate freely and flow from one to the other. Throughout her creative journey, the author constructs a unique coordinate system where each text becomes a point of contact between the physical and the spiritual, between the fragile sincerity of a child and the mature responsibility of an adult.

This "membranousness" is best manifested in the genre and stylistic flexibility of her work, based on the author's concept of modern cordocentrism. Her writing is not merely literature, but an act of "embracing" through words. She masterfully translates complex physiological changes (*Farewell, First!*), existential challenges (*Where is Oira?*) and even the tragedy of war (*Secret Stories...*) into a language that does not wound, but heals. Every one of her phrases is a sensitive receptor that responds to the slightest fluctuations of a child's soul, transforming fear into knowledge and loneliness into a resource for "self-fulfilment".

A special place in this system is occupied by the synthesis of artistry and functionality. Tetyana Stus's books function as interactive guides: they offer the child not only a story, but also a safe space for self-discovery – through visual metaphors, tactile sensations and "soft" neologisms that sound like an echo of a mother's voice. The author boldly pushes the boundaries of children's literature, introducing themes that have long been silenced: from ageism and death to otherness and inclusion. She does not lecture from the lofty heights of adult experience, but stands alongside the child, offering them a "little house in the heart" as a reliable foundation for growth.

Today, looking back on this 50-year journey through life and creativity, we see not just collections of fairy tales, but a powerful ecosystem of support. Tetyana Stus's work is a membrane that withstands the pressure of the harshest reality, filtering out the pain and leaving only pure Light. Her books teach the greatest art of all – to be a Human being who knows how to listen with the heart, to tend one's inner garden, and to dream fearlessly even when the sky seems too heavy. This is literature that grants permission for joy and closeness, affirming that as long as we are able to embrace the world with our attention and love, we remain invincible.

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Марченко, Н. (2025). Жанрово-стильові трансформації в художньому доробку Тетяни Стус. *Дитяча література: інтердисциплінарний дискурс*, 3 (1), 64 – 79.

У статті досліджено еволюцію творчого доробку Тетяни Стус як цілісної екосистеми підтримки дитини. Авторка розглядає художній світ письменниці через метафору “живої мембрани”, що з’єднує світи дорослості й дитинства, фізичного та духовного. Виявлено, що в основі авторського стилю лежить модерний кордоцентризм та ідея “самособоюнаповнення”.

Аналіз пізнавальної літератури (“Панночка”, “Письмонавтика”) демонструє перехід від ролі “навігатора”, що структурує соціум, до фасилітатора креативності. Окрему увагу приділено трансформації образу дитини: від “дівчинки-проєкту” до живої, егоцентричної Даринки (цикл “Читальня”), де бешкетування легітимізується як етап самопізнання.

Доведено, що поява філософських книжок-картинок (“Іжак Вільгельм”, “Де Ойра?”) знаменує перехід до інтелектуальної прози. Письменниця трансформує складні категорії (інакшість, інтроверсія) у візуально-метафоричні образи, запроваджуючи “літературу сповільнення”. Особливе місце посідає книжка “Моя Ба”, яка через концепцію “будиночка в серці” стає медіатором у темах старіння та втрати, замінюючи філософію буття етикою співчуття.

Визначено, що сучасний етап творчості – це бібліотерапевтична проза (“Темні історії...”, “Майстерня обіймів”). Авторка створює безпечний простір для опрацювання травм війни, використовуючи персоніфікацію (тривожний рюкзак, сирена-рятівниця). Найновіші твори 2024–2025 рр. (“Майстерня обіймів”, “Прощавай, перший!”) представлені як синтез художнього наративу та прикладного воркбуку, що вчать соціальному інтелекту та м’якій адаптації до фізіологічних змін.

Зроблено висновок, що Тетяна Стус вибудувала шлях від “інструкцій до життя” до “простору життя”, де вразливість визнається силою, а письмо стає актом “обіймання” словом. Її доробок утверджує дитину як рівноцінну особистість, здатну плекати “внутрішній сад” у глобалізованому світі.

Ключові слова: Тетяна Стус, кордоцентризм, бібліотерапія, дитиноцентризм, книжка-картинка, нонфікшн.

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