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**REAL AND INVENTED ISLANDS IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY UKRAINIAN  
LITERATURE AS THE ELEMENTS OF EXISTENTIAL IMAGERY**

*Abstract. This article examines the development of mythical chronotopical image of an island in the works dated by the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was a period of not only great historical collisions of both natural and anthropogenous origin, but also experiencing their consequences. Based on George Hegel's hypothesis 'history will teach us nothing,' we find it relevant to turn back to belle-lettres works that can impact the contemporary's consciousness maybe stronger than historical writings. The image of the island is taken as a conceit to outgo far beyond pure geographical terminology and therefore embody an array of archetypal notions, including loneliness, dreams and mystery, separate being, and precisely outlined space. The result of this research is the establishment of the new connotations of the motif of 'an island' as the concentration of archetypal binary oppositions reality / illusion, quietness / anxiety, idyllic existence / survival, comedy / tragedy, internal / external in poetic and prosaic works of the noticed period.*

*Keywords: island, chronotopos, myth, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ukrainian literature, reality, illusion, image.*

The images of existent islands depicted in various works of high Ukrainian modernism (like Sicily in *Praise to Life* or Capri in *On the Island* – both stories by Mykhaylo Kotsiubynsky) are worthy of the profound research. The real vital and spiritual experience of the writer shown in these works is highlighted by the existential of 'secluded' being and therefore turns the chronotopos of an island into

the mythical point of controversy between human and natural, real and illusory, vital and mortal powers.

M. Kotsiubynsky showed the impressionistic dimension of a tragic event in contrast with the symbolic and colorist elements in *Praise to Life (Khvala zhyttiu)*, 1908. The narration is focused on the earthquake which ruined the Sicilian town of Messina and the next year's spring. The narrator hoped to see 'the silence and coolth of the great cemetery,' yet got surprised to see the life going on in the ruined town, despite all difficulties.

The colorist epithet 'black,' regardless of its general symbolic meaning of tragedy and despair, was given, first of all, to the dwellers of Messina [2, 228-229]: *The black figures strolled out of the streets (Z vulyts' vyplyvaly chorni figury)*; *Some women kept walking in long black veils (Yshly yakis' damy v chornykh dovhykh vualyakh)*; the workers went 'dressed in black suits up to crepe ties' (*v chornykh kostyumakh azh do kravatok z krepu*); a woman in black, with 'brune uncovered hair' (*z chornym nepokrytym volossyam*), but otherwise with a child playing on her lap<sup>1</sup>.

Meanwhile, the conceit 'colorful' transformed through various verbal images – both overt and latent – is apparent to be a synonym of death. The characteristic details to prove this are the 'jolly' (*veselen'ki*) wallpapers on the walls of a demolished house; 'mosaic gods beheaded or with halves of faces' on the ruins of a cathedral. The colorist detail to show the contract between vital and mortal is a tuft of onions waved by a 'black gentleman,' which 'crossed the grey ruins and shone green on the blue sky'.

Furthermore, the narrator turns the reader's attention back to the image of black color with the future Wendepunkt hidden [2, 230]: the 'black flock of bees' (*chorny bdzholynyi riy*) of people, mostly women, having gathered around a man in white dickey. First of all, to the narrator this man seemed a preacher talking about the temporality of all the live entities. Along with that, the narrator felt relief and then the slight ironical surprise on himself due to the fact that the man was merely a salesman trading the 'miraculous' cosmetics to bring eternal youth to the women:

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<sup>1</sup> All translations hereinafter are my own unless indicated otherwise.

*“This cream is the most reliable means to save your youth and beauty. If you put a thin layer of it on your faces before sleep, next morning you’ll get up fresh like a rose in dew!”* [2, 232].

Therefore, ‘colorful’ got the optimistic expression in the narrator, ‘*Suddenly I saw the faraway green mountains lighted with joyous sun, the orange orchards, and the endless silky space of the blue sea,*’ and his soul was so touched by the scene of cosmetics trading, pretty strange on the background of the disaster, that ‘sang the praise to life over this cemetery.’ As Yu. Kuznetsov observed in his research on Ukrainian impressionist literature, “the writer, with undoubted mastery of a painter, gives a detailed depiction, in pointillist manner, of the street, the square, the ruins, the crowd, and the separate people, and all of these impressionist strokes get subsequently joined in the holistic image of a town” [3, 112].

The next (and, moreover, the last) work by M. Kotsiubynsky with a speaking title, *On the Island (Na ostrovi)*, showed more alert attempts (in comparison to *Khvala zhyttiu*) to get rid of the power of a strict plot and to give a cascade of visual, audible, and tactile impressions. Depictions of certain events gave place to the pure expressiveness of sounds, smells, and colors concentrated in a local chronotopos of an island. According to logical conclusion by Volodymyr Pohrebennyk, “the plot connections had been losing their weight during late Kotsiubynsky’s novelistic style development, until they reached the autonomy of separate episodes of lyrical-psychological prose in *On the Island*” [7, 66].

The description of events as it is and the controversies of different views on them are of no greater importance than the ambiguity of the impressions to be evoked, and the uniqueness of the character’s individual perception of what one is seeing. The elements of various languages are the additional esthetic factor to show this ambiguity:

*“The American women are passing by. They are all disguising, meager, and wide-mouthed; they are all dressed in white knitted jackets and yellow slippers.*

– *Shall we have time before breakfast?*

– *O, yes!..*

*...Children are driving the dog on the piazza, from one place to another. The dog is jumping and throwing himself under a stranger's feet.*

*The steamboat is appearing from behind the white columns – two bare masts and the black chimney.*

*All the bored people have gathered together and bent themselves across the barrier. It's interesting to anyone” [2, 238].*

Then, the narration includes an array of sketches: about the abandoned garden, about the old, ever-singing fisherman named Giuseppe, about the character's platonic love to an American woman, an occasional guest on the Capri; all of these episodes may also be called 'islets,' or the symbols of the narrator's secluded life. The lines dedicated to agave are the final chord of *On the Island*, as well as of the entire Kotsiubynsky's creativity:

*“The flower on its high stem greets the sun and the sea, the rocks and the distant moist winds, with proud and hopeless hello of sentenced to death untimely.*

*Opening the window in the morning, I see a row of blooming agaves time to time. They stand so slender and tall, with the crown of death on their forehead, and greet the distant sea:*

*– Ave, mare, morituri te salutant!..” [2, 248]*

This was the way the novelty tradition of the artistic synthesis developed on the background of man's natural-philosophical comprehension of one's environment and one's place in it. Ukrainian impressionistic literature was subsequently turning into the special verbal 'postimpressionism,' which became the imagery and stylistic dominant for the majority of writers. Just like its predecessor, postimpressionism intended to fix the transient impression by a word and therefore to concentrate the significant symbolic-metaphorical and mythical potentials in it.

It is expedient to make an insight into Ukrainian literature of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to research the works revealing Kotsiubynsky's traditions; they are, for example, 'Italian' poems by Ihor Kachurovsky (1918-2013). His sonnet *Sicily. II* refers to numerous myths and legends dedicated to the origin of various flowers.

According to the lyrical narration, Celtic sailors, while searching the Promised Land, discovered this island where

*...the hills and dales turn into one big flower  
of centripetal ornaments so far*

(v sutsil'nu kvitku pahorby y dolyny / zlyvayut'sia v ochakh viddaleky).

Multicolor Sicilian flowers – the light-blue borage (*blakytyni ohiroshnyk*), vermilion splash of clover (*hustochervonyi spalakh konyushyny*), aloe fires (*vohni aloe*), wisteria grapes (*kytytsi hlitsyniy*), violet-blue salvia (*shavliya fialkovo-synia*), agave bloom (*ahavy tsvit*; See *On the Island*), and yellow-flowered stems of anis (*hanusu steblyny zhovtokviti*) – seem to the narrator some mythical heroes transformed into flowers, but otherwise able to constant metamorphoses [5, 294]:

*Whether you got reborn in mythic story,*

*Or, maybe, 'twas the myth to give you birth?* [1, 105]

(Chy vidtvorylys' vy u davnim miti, / chy, mozhe, vas stvoryv tsei samyi mit?)

The precedent name of White Islands (Bili ostrovy) in early Maksym Rylsky's poems is the symbolist embodiment of the studied chronotopos, outlined by conceits of 'dream' and 'serenity':

*The immeasurably heavenly blue ocean*

*Spread high above the earth,*

*With clouds islands floating in this ocean.*

*Floating white islands as though made of snow –*

*I fly at you... at least in my thoughts,*

*So that you could shelter my heart with serenity's dreams*

[transl. by Michael Naydan. 9, 39].

(Blakytyni okean nebesnyi nezmiryannyi / Rozkynuvsvya vysoko nad zemleyu, / I khmary-ostrovy plyvut' v tim okeani... / Plyvuchi ostrovy, nenache z snihu, bili – / Na vas lechu... khoch dumkoyu svozeyu, / Schob sertse charamy spokoyu vy ukryly...)

The chronotopos of an island joined the meditative and ironic intonations of Rylsky's later verse, *To My Grandson* (1931). This work has got some prophetic

sounding – although this prophecy dealt with ‘the red Paradise’ announced by the strike of ‘the tenth wave.’ Such intention of the verse got conditioned by the listed below allusions to Biblical myths [4, 99], now antithetic, now consonant.

Particularly, these are images of the Paradise lost: *We liked so many things in our lives: / The scents of green, green grasses, / Long eyelashes on blushing children’s faces, / Song in the evening mist, / Desiring hands of passion / In swinging of the night...*

(My bahato choho lyubyly na sviti: / Pakhoschi zillya i travy, / Dovhi viyi na lychkakh rummyanykh ditey, / Pisniu v vechirnim tumani, / Prystrasti ruky zhahuchi / V kolykhanni nichnomu...)

Then, The Book of Prophet Isaiah: *The lamb... did not play with the lion / who was wicked no more...*

(Yahnya... ne hralosya z levom, / uzhe ne suvorym...)

Retrospectively, The Promised Land and its lush fruits from The Book of Numbers: *Light-hearted islanders / in their happy idleness / did not pick grapes / as gild as made of pure gold...*

(Ostrivyany bezhurny / ne zryvaly v nerobstvi schaslyvim / zolotykh, yak zoloto, hron...)

Finally, the leading motif of redemption by blood and salvation: *The red circle was spreading / from high, starry letters, / when the fire sprung out of them / to the seas and the isles and the continents...*

(Rozlyvalosya kolo chervone / od vysokykh, zirchastykh liter, / yak od nykh pereskochyv vohon’ / na morya, ostrovy, kontynenty...) [10, 46]

“Something undiscovered, mysterious, and exciting must remain in any dream as one of the most important factors of its existence,” asserted V. Romenets’, the contemporary Ukrainian researcher of creativity psychology [8, 102-103]. The dreams about travels full of adventures and discoveries of the new lands were prominent among other children’s and youth’s dreams in any time.

The game is a well-known factor to connect human forces in their activity needed for creation: a model of creativity, the way to get aimed at it, and its forecasts.

Playing ‘a ruler of my own country’ sometimes may be a great help to schoolchildren in learning geography, biology, social sciences, foreign languages and so on.

We may suppose that the invented children’s lands are mostly islands, rarely large continents. Encircled with water, they make the illusion of an individual, private space to be arranged by a child as one wishes (regarding one’s desire to keep temporarily aloof from the collective – should it be family, kindergarten, or school). What is more, for the dwellers of temperate zones (including Ukraine), the tropical latitudes seem to be the most attractive in order to set up the fictitious island over there. Yevhen Pluzhnyk, in his neoromantic verse collection *Early Autumn (Rannya osin’)* marked with dreaming about travels to unknown shores, takes the hamlet for the chronotopos:

*To hamlet I’m again. The murmur of the groves  
Has lulled down everything indoors and on the yard...*

(Ya znov na khutori. Shovkovyi shum hayiv / Pryspav use nadvori i v hospodi...) [6, 138]

Such an island-like chronotopos helps the poet to create the idyllic miniature built on contrasts:

*A little boy, while his old-aged nanny  
Was sleeping o’er the knitting in the shade,  
Lived in the groves, and furrowed ocean waves,  
And set up the new borders of the lands –  
Non-trodden pathies where two would not pass*

(Male khlopya, doky staren’kiy nyani / U kholodku drimalos’ nad shytvom, / Zhylo v lisakh, bulo na okeani, / I vzhe zemli novi znachylo hrani / Na stezhtsi, de... ne rozmynutys’ dvom).

As Jesus Christ told in the Book of Marc, «...*anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it*» (Marc 10 : 15). This allusion is relevant by far because a child of any age has got *the ability to see*. The grown-up reader can appeal to one’s infant experience, when one also felt cramped in one’s yard or apartment, and therefore one was also imagining travels across forests or

oceans, drawing the contours of the new lands, and overtaking the obstacles (non-trodden pathies where two would not pass).

Both the boy and his old nanny abide in illusory space; however, it has got different traits for each of them. The nanny travels the magic lands as well, but her world tends to be more quotidian – *soft feather-bed, / some tepid tea, a lemon, and halva* (myaka peryna, / teplen'kyi chay, tsytrynka i khalva). Despite the deliberate verse form (two five-lined stanzas and one monostich for a coda), cited Pluzhnyk's poem resembles the sonnet due to its internal dramaturgy: two stanzas contrasting to each other (thesis – the child's world, and antithesis – the nanny's world) get along in the last line which sounds like the sonnet synthesis: *Indeed, unstoppable is our life! (Voyistynu zhyttia ne znaye spynu!)* [6, 167].

The motif of neoromantic dreamings became the base for the next Pluzhnyk's verse, *There Are Some Isles Not Drawn on Any Map* (Ye ostrovy, yakykh nema y na mapi...). Its target is the superficiality of the certain travelers who do not only know the names of the continents, but also who they are (...*knyh mors'kykh perechytavshy tonnu, / Ne znayut' navit' nazv materykiv*) [6, 175]. However, such people can outgo their everyday existence just for a while; they are opposed to those who stroke roots into their quotidian life too strongly, or, as the speaker of the poem says, devote their days to nap (dni... viddayut' kanapi). Therefore, the rhymed words of the first stanza (*mapi – kanapi*, in Ukrainian, or *map – nap* in a possible English translation) can be interpreted as binary opposition of ordinary / extraordinary, calmness / movement. Anyway, the isles not drawn on any map forever remain the archetype of virtual reality, but with a chance to get actualized.

To summarize, it is noteworthy the island, thanks to its geographical essence (separate part of the land all encircled with water), always attracted the people's attention as the potential symbol of a lone and secluded being, on the one hand, and of an unexplored and thereby happy place, on the other hand. The authors of both folklore and written literary works tended to show the island as a place to hide treasures and magic accessories – therefore, the character should apply the great effort to get them. Insular lifestyle gets as well imprinted in the people's worldview.



Upon developing their plot on the strictly outlined and otherwise (due to the author's imagination) immense chronotopos of an island, the writers set up the atmosphere of the game. This is why this spatial image in the literary works by Ukrainian modernists had turned into the core place of symbolic connection between reality and fantasy. Their texts usually have the dreamer hero for a speaker or the main character, and the imagery gets created from the binary oppositions of the past and the present, the life and the acting, the serious and the ironic, the great and the small.

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