

# Summary

## Beauty Reflected in Existence

### Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi in Ukrainian Culture

The author of the book analyzes the life and creative work of Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi (1864–1913), who was a prominent modernist of Ukrainian literature. This study reflects three important aspects: biographical, aesthetic and social. The writer's biography, worldview and private relations, which cause controversial tension in literary criticism, are presented in the book. In Kotsiubynskyi's literary works, we can observe bright examples of creative evolution, art syncretism, European idea and national identity. The author also reveals very interesting ways of finding Kotsiubynskyi's place in the literary canon. The book will prove useful for all who are interested in Ukrainian culture and in its contemporary rethinking.

Without any doubt, the literary legacy of Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi, a prominent Ukrainian writer, is among the fundamental texts of European culture. It is difficult to combine biography and creative work but this is sometimes necessary for scientific research into a literary phenomena. Kotsiubynskyi complained about the vagueness and grayness of his own biography, but his life can serve as an example of the harmony of individual creative abilities. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Kotsiubynskyi was able to preserve the integrity of his creative nature and avoid radical ideological diversions, despite the significant challenges and risks of his biography.

The author of this book suggests rethinking Kotsiubynskyi from the contemporary point of view. He draws attention not only to well-known views but also to new, unusual perspectives that become visible through attentive research. This view allows us to counteract the marginalization of classical literature, which we can see today under the pressure of the media. On the one hand, in modern Ukrainian society Kotsiubynskyi is perceived as too traditional. In terms of Ukrainian modernism, he is not very desirable (due to the research inertia of the 1990s), and in the current trend of multiculturalism this writer is underestimated. On the other hand, stereotypes of the Soviet past, which are not always recognizable, weigh too clearly in the minds of contemporaries. They steadily appeal to the matrix of the writer as a singer of the revolution and the working masses, a friend of Maxim Gorky, and so on. Such a matrix fits very well into the canon of the artist-citizen, a fighter against social injustice. However, in this case it does not reflect the fundamental property of literature - to cultivate and accumulate beauty, to reproduce it by its own means, and to popularize it in society.

For the Ukrainian reader, Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi is a well-known stranger. Millions of his books' editions, his presentations in school, his presence in public discourse - all this is evidence that the author requires no unnecessary advertising. There is no shortage of scientific research on his work, both popular and analytical. M. Moroz's bibliographic index, which was published in two volumes, records 3930 items on the life and work of Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi. However, much of what was

written and published in Soviet times is unreliable, because it betrays overtly opportunistic positions, undermining the value of many literary sources.

This monograph consists of three chapters, representing three different ways of treating M. Kotsiubynskyi. Its author uses the metaphor of a mirror, a reflection that is key to understanding the creative heritage of this outstanding Ukrainian writer of short stories. The first chapter examines reflections on biographical discourse, the extent to which it is projected on the work of the writer. The second one emphasizes the aesthetic qualities of Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi's works, depicting a map of his artistic language, and studying the construction of an artistic image. The intermedia and intertextual potential manifested in the works of later Ukrainian artists who drew on Kotsiubynskyi's works is also elucidated. The third section of the monograph examines the social (political, ideological and cultural) contexts of his work, in particular the embodiment of the European idea, as well as the deconstruction of Soviet-era propaganda manipulations, and critically interprets the modern feminist interpretation based on the writer's private correspondence.

The first period of Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi's creative activity, which lasted from 1884 to 1897, first of all shaped him as an intellectual person who understands the mission of the Ukrainian writer. Kotsiubynskyi perfectly mastered the realistic style of storytelling, gained valuable life and creative experience. It is also important that he testified to the flexibility and evolution of talent. His first successes and recognition did not blind this young author, did not calm his creative ambitions, and did not put to sleep his demanding self-discipline, which were an essential sign of his talent. That is why, at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi managed to go beyond the limits of traditional writing, critically rethinking his acquired experience and, moreover, deciding to look for a new style. It was a wise and far-sighted choice that later brought Kotsiubynskyi another kind of fame: he was known as a modernist writer who paved new paths in national literature. Kotsiubynskyi's life and work in his mature period (1897–1913) are connected with the provincial city of Chernihiv, as well as with trips abroad (Italy, Austria-Hungary), which inspired and expanded his worldview. He became a leading Ukrainian prose writer focused on modern European culture. The establishment of Ukrainian culture and its emergence from the colonial shadow progressed with the establishment of Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi as a leading Ukrainian novelist, whose works are often translated and published abroad. The writer found a new poetics, focusing on the variability of moods, emotions and affects, also producing a narrative which is based on the inner voice of the character, his self-characterization. The guidelines of the psychological study encouraged Kotsiubynskyi to reflect his characters close and directly. This causes its limited presence in time and space, meaning the action is focused on one episode from life, as well as a small local entourage. This is a notable feature of Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi's mature works. If earlier the writer liked to create large spatial scenes, and the movement of heroes indicated liberation from cramped and confined spaces ("For the Common Good", "Expensive Price", "On the Stone", and, finally, "Apple blossom"), later he modelled his action scenes quite differently: concentrating it in a small and closed room, such as in the house ("Laughter", "He Goes!", "On the Road"), in prison ("Unknown", "Persona grata"). This allows for a theatrical effect: just as in a drama, the author rejects optional details, so the novelist focuses on the main, snatching, like a searchlight from the darkness, the specific feelings of the character caused by a particular stimulus from the outside world. His works are perceived as something of a standard for modern Ukrainian literature: they are guided by them, they are recommended to foreigners as an example of refined style, and they act as a convincing argument in defending the great potential of Ukrainian literature.

There are special features of Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi's literary works, thanks to which his images are easily perceived. There are three typical signs that are most noticeable. Firstly, it is the beauty and harmony that the writer achieves. This stands out against the background of the pessimistic decadent fashion that dominated in the popular literature of that time. That is why reading Kotsiubynskyi becomes an "aesthetic holiday", as the translator Ipolit Bochkovsky from Prague wrote. Secondly, the Kotsiubynskyi's works are texts open to the addressee. They can be perceived at different levels of

understanding, depending what the reader's requests. Kotsiubynskiy manages to find such images and techniques that equally fascinate both the naive reader and the refined aesthete. Thirdly, everything written by Kotsiubynskiy fascinates with its immediacy. An unusual fusion of epic and lyrical elements creates the impression of a living story, which is always emotionally charged. Those who knew Kotsiubynskiy personally and could compare his manner of speaking with literary texts describe this in an especially perceptive manner.

In the early 1910s, Mykhailo Kotsiubynskiy experienced a gradual decline in his talent because of his health. The dramatic and tragic tonalities in the author's self-consciousness and in his literary texts became the dominant emotional feature of his works from this period. Despite his great fondness for small prose forms, Kotsiubynskiy sought to master the larger form: he produced epic paintings and wrote the novels "Fata morgana" and "Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors." It was this "superhuman fatigue", as Serhiy Yefremov claimed, exacerbated by illness and anxious forebodings of imminent death, that caused a decline in life-affirming sentiments. This was reflected in the tone of his personal correspondence, and in the mood of the works from the last years of life. Kotsiubynskiy was an extremely vulnerable man. He was acutely aware of the burden of responsibility that lay before him, and was aware of his mission as a Ukrainian writer.

The cult of nature, the symbol of which is his masterpiece "Intermezzo", belongs to the completely organic features of Mykhailo Kotsiubynskiy's work. This cult combined both his worldview-religious and aesthetic instructions. Kotsiubynskiy adored nature, and each of his trips was accompanied by an in-depth study of the natural terrain and its features, which deepened his impressions of a particular place. This cult interpretation of nature explains much in the views of the writer and is an important factor in the poetics of his works. Nature is a "bowl from which millions of people drank beauty and cannot drink to the end", it gives as much joy and creative inspiration, as it cannot give communication with people. Much has been written about Mykhailo Kotsiubynskiy's faith, this is an outstanding feature of his creativity. It is necessary to perceive faith in two dimensions - religious and artistic-aesthetic. In his works there is a powerful symbolism of light, based on the cultural tradition (from Ukrainian folklore to world literature), and beauty is organically associated with goodness, mercy and friendship. In the artistic palette of this master of the Ukrainian short story, the image of the sun is at the forefront, and this is quite natural. It also plays an important role in binary oppositions, shading the dark and gloomy sides of life, affirming an optimistic beginning in human life. It is no accident that Kotsiubynskiy associates the transforming power of art with sunlight. After all, art should not only express the quintessence of human life; it always inspires, gives the impression of comfort and harmony. At least, the author defended such a formula and did not recognize art that glorifies disease, death, dirt or meanness. That is why in the symbolism of the sun as the embodiment of art and harmony there is definitely a moral first: the sun is a light force and good.

The image of Mykhailo Kotsiubynskiy in the memory of his contemporaries is an organic combination of two incarnations - the man and the artist. Of course, at first, he was fascinated by human nature, and his works only reinforced and expressed the impression of an unusual person. This impression is recorded in the memoirs of Mykhailo Zhuk, Bohdan Lepkyi, Mykhailo Mohylyanskyi, Maxim Gorky, Mykola Chernyavskiy, and others. The sphere of acquaintances and friendships expanded over the years in concentric circles, and especially intensely in the final period, when the writer had to travel a lot and be away from home. This helped to strengthen his international prestige, with his skill being highly valued.

Seeking to express the essence of man, the writer preferred a neo-romantic worldview, which interpreted the reality under threat as a challenge that provokes the highest manifestations of humanism. This largely "programmed" the original reception of Kotsiubynskiy's work. His work attracted not only with its accuracy and color of descriptions, and the accuracy of its psychological characteristics, but also added spirit, instilled optimism and strengthened the vitality of readers. He became the embodiment of artistic harmony, which was achieved through overcoming internal contradictions,

through strong spiritual self-organization. With these notable features, the writer differs from many of his contemporary artists, who could not achieve such harmony, and could not embody this in art.

Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi's principal position as a writer who lived and worked in the Russian Empire but showed opposition to its policies is indicative. This is evidenced at least by his refusal to write in Russian and move to the all-Russian cultural space, especially after 1905, when such opportunities seemed both financially profitable and promising. Thus, he asserted the right to a separate identity that does not dissolve in the general imperial and does not support it. His work illustrates the tendency to bring the Ukrainian idea closer to the European one, which clearly manifested itself within the framework of this epoch. Kotsiubynskyi embodied the type of "Ukrainian European man", which means that he was a figure who certainly had a Western orientation, but who, at the same time, was clearly aware of the national specificity of his literary work. In difficult socio-cultural conditions, Kotsiubynskyi managed to raise the national idea and national culture to a new level of understanding. He filled these concepts with a harmonious meaning, combining the national mentality, which was manifested in his short stories and novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the European idea, which encouraged a broader and universal interpretation of national identity and gave new meaning to the national-cultural movement. The European nature of his creative attitude had a significant impact on the self-identification of subsequent generations of creators of Ukrainian culture, from Mykola Khvylovyi and Valerian Pidmohylnyi to the writers of the 1960s generation, as well as the period of independent Ukraine.

The life and work of Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi are already literary classics. They are like a rich palimpsest, from which we get the meanings that best meet the expectations of modern man. For someone from the early twentieth century, Kotsiubynskyi was a mysteriously modern author and a refined master of the Ukrainian literary word, and for Soviet readers he was a staunch realist depicting the class struggle and revolution. For our contemporaries, he opens up primarily through the deep psychology of his images and the universal dimension of the issues raised in his short stories and novels. This chain of priorities will obviously be continued and in the future, the reader will find new meanings in the works of this author.