

The 'Magic Mirror' Metaphor as a Philosophical Concept of Holistic Reality: Lesia Ukrainka's *Forest Song* and Patrick Süskind's *The Story of Mr Sommer*

Bütünsel Gerçekliğin Felsefî Bir Kavramı Olarak 'Sibirli Ayna' Metaforu: Lesia Ukrainka'nın Orman Şarkısı ve Patrick Süskind'in Bay Sommer'ın Öyküsü

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Abstract: Based on the comparative method, the article reveals the philosophical meaning of one of the most outstanding works⁷⁻ of Lesia Ukrainka, the classic author of Ukrainian literature, whose 150th anniversary is celebrated by the world literary community in 2021. This is an in-depth study of the philosophical concept of interdependence of the integrity of the world and man, embodied in the *Forest Song* by Lesia Ukrainka and *The Story of Mr Sommer* by Süskind, in consequence of the “magic mirror” metaphor, attributable to oxymoronic poetics of magic realism. The archetypal potential of the mirror image and the laws of mirror symmetry made it possible to express the actual ideas of personalism and existentialism in artistic form and to reveal the existential experience of a person in opposition to the destructive tendencies of the anthropological crisis. A comparative historical analysis of both works revealed that the writers showed the main problem of the 20th century in different socio-cultural material, namely, the loss of authenticity by the person, which turns a man's life into a psychological hell, and him himself into a beast or a mechanical doll.

Keywords: Magic realism, archetype, person, authenticity, personalism, existential truth, mercy.

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Introduction

The *Forest Song* appeared in the first decade of the 20th century, and *The Story of Mr Sommer* in the last one. They are two world wars and the establishment and collapse of two dictatorial regimes on the territory of their authors' motherlands apart. These works are united by genetic kinship with magic realism and, above all, by a deep philosophical understanding of the causes of the anthropological crisis and the growth of totalitarian intentions in all socio-cultural spheres, which led to hecatombs of catastrophic proportions. If the *Forest Song* appears with a premonition of these threatening realities and Lesia Ukrainka is trying to find a way to protect the world from them, then *The Story of Mr Sommer* arises from Patrick Süskind's attempt to find a way to overcome their consequences. In the context of these efforts, the concept of a "magic mirror" is formed as a defensive reaction against the terrible reality of the 20th century.

The growth of totalitarian intentions, as the history of the last century shows, gives rise to dictatorships and global wars. Today, when the problems, caused by the pandemic, are multiplying exponentially and, the processes of totalitarianization, globalizing, are proportionally intensified, we are offered a "philosophy of self-isolation" and "social distancing" in the form of a new worldview, which should protect humanity from the epidemic and help cope with the growing panic horror. An attempt to consider two stories against the background of this cognitive dissonance, the one by Mr Lukash and Mr Sommer's one, becomes relevant as the problem of self-isolation and social distancing, as well as ways to solve it by the "philosophy of mercy", formulated in the context of the philosophical potential of the "magic mirror" metaphor by the representatives of Ukrainian and German literatures.

The concept of the integrity of multidimensional reality, embedded in this metaphor, is the philosophical reaction of fiction to depersonalization, dehumanization, and total alienation of the human personality, generated by the civilization crisis. Its philosophical dimension is determined by the ideas of personalism and existentialism, and its artistic dimension is determined by mythopoetics. The "magic mirror" metaphor as a philosophical or literary phenomenon, has not been studied, although it is embodied, in addition to the indicated works, in a number of masterpieces of



world literature, associated with magic realism: *Steppenwolf* (1927) by Hermann Hesse, *The Town across the Stream* (1947) Hermann Kasack, *Klontz* (1947) by Hans Nossack, *The Way to Look* (1979) by Julio Cortazar.

The attention of scientists to magic realism is not fading away, thanks to the latest research, its geocultural and chronological boundaries are expanding. Thus, Mahin Shamsayi (2017) connects its genesis with *Shahnameh*, the national epic of the Iranian peoples, one of the largest poems in the world literature, while Maryam Ebadi Asayesh and Mehmet Fikret Arargüç accentuate oxymoronic poetics and indicate the connection with the philosophical theory of “magical idealism” by Novalis, the German romanticist, who “brings together the dualities of mind and body, subject and object, inner and outer worlds, real and ideal” (2017: 28), revealing an infinite reality. Scientists consider the issue of correlation between realities in fiction as philosophical. Ozdzhazhan Yilmaz Sutcu in particular interprets fiction in his *Literature, Fiction and Reality* article as the activity, which expands the perception of reality, thus opening doors to different planes of reality, and blurring the boundaries between fundamentally isolated areas, such as matter vs memory, conscious vs unconscious, reality vs unreal, objectivity and subjectivity (2020: 871).

The ratio of magical-fantastic and realistic elements, which forms the picture of reality inherent to it, is the focus of the studies of works of magical realism. The novelty of our approach is associated with the discovery of a new perspective of this issue: the relationship between the irrational and rational is viewed through the prism of the “magic mirror” metaphor as a balanced integrity of the transcendental and empirical dimensions of the existence of a human personality in a mirror-proportioned world.

The powerful mythopoetic potential of the *Forest Song* has generated a significant array of studies of works by Lesia Ukrainka. At present, *The Story of Mr Sommer* is in the shadow of Süskind's bestsellers and is studied mainly in comparison with *The Pigeon* story within the framework of the issue of social outsiders or, for example, in the context of the poetics of absence. Despite the fact that studies of Lesia Ukrainka's work have a hundred-year history, for the last thirty years, the *Forest Song*, like Süskind's story, has been viewed in the context of the issues of the postmodern dis-



course, conditioned by the interpretation of the world as chaos, the rejection of ontological values (love, beauty, freedom, truth, harmony) and negation of mimetic modeling of the world. Therefore, the second aspect of the novelty of our research is an attempt to get out of the destructive circle of postmodern interpretations of both works and, relying on various methodological principles of analysis (philosophical, philological, mythological, and psychoanalytic), consider each of the works as a semantic whole. This methodological approach made it possible to elucidate the conceptual and typological potential of the “magic mirror” metaphor and reveal the deep philosophical meaning of the studied stories, determined by the concept of the balanced integrity of the real and unreal worlds that form an empirically transcendental continuum, the axiology of which determines mercy. The first part researches into the genesis of the “magic mirror” metaphor and its conceptualization as a new type of mimesis. The second part studies the semantic field of Süskind’s story, created by the “magic mirror” metaphor, which generates not only its internal plot, but also the replacement of postmodern irony with mercy, the highest ontological value. The third part shows peculiarities of the creative laboratory of Lesia Ukrainka and the circumstances of how a new vision, inspired by the beauty of the Turkish coast near the “fantastically beautiful Constantinople” (Ukrainka, 2021g: 127), appeared in the works that preceded the *Forest Song*.

The “Magic Mirror” Metaphor as a Space for the Transformation of Humanistically and Personalistically Deformed Objective Reality

The “magic mirror” metaphor as an aesthetic concept was developed by the writers of the 19th century, Edgar Poe (*The Oval Portrait*, 1842) and Oscar Wilde (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1890), in particular. They both created an artistic image of the “magic mirror” as a metaphor for mimesis, based on the mythical belief “that a part of the man’s life passes to his image, there is a causal relationship between the first and the second” (Potebnia, 1989: 238). In both works, the flow of life into a work of art is depicted as a mirror interchange, in the mechanism of which some kind of a magical terrible secret is hidden. Both Poe and Wilde’s “magic mirror” acts as a metaphor for mimesis, which, outlining the circle of purely aesthetic issues, reveals the author’s concept of art and conveys the opinion that



there is an inextricable connection of demonic-vampirish character between art and reality. Despite the fact that *The Oval Portrait* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* have a powerful mystical and fantastic element, behind the layer of visible reality, neither writer opens qualitatively different, deeper, unknown layers of it or surreal dimensions, since, having turned to the archetype of a counter mirror, they reveal only its infernal connotation. Both use myth to create, though colourful, but flat mystical decorations, and do not select the dynamic structure, which Yakiv Golosovker defined as “the logic of the myth.”

The above-mentioned writers of the 20th century, unlike their predecessors, are not only limited to the aesthetic sphere, wrapped in the flamboyant mystical mist. They reveal a philosophical dimension in the “magic mirror” metaphor: they connect the archetypal potential of the mirror image with the dialectic of existential truth, as the secret of existence of the human person. From a philosophical perspective, the unreal world, both in form and in content, acquires volume, that is, it is no longer a decoration that imitates an objective, rationally conditioned reality, but a full-fledged reality with qualities and parameters, inherent only in it. This is not just about a new way of handling archetypes and mythological material by means of literature, but also about the search for a “new focused view on the world and man,” which Gugin drew attention to when investigating the foundations of magical realism (Gugin, 1998: 35).

Mykola Berdyaev in his *Slavery and Freedom* (1939) work formulated the existential vision of truth as a personalistic category:

Truth is a particular person, his path and life, ultimate truth is highly dynamic, it is not given in a finished and frozen form ... Truth is not beingness, and beingness is not truth. Truth is life, existence of the subsisting (1995: 48).

Carl Jung also points out the personalistic nature of truth in his *Problems of Soul of Our Time* (1930), emphasizing that one should not either “know” the truth or master it intellectually, but find a way to the inner, possibly silent, irrational wisdom, because real truth is worthless, if it has not become a vital inner experience of a person (1996: 9).

It is important that the basis of the “magic mirror” metaphor as a fig-



ure of replacement is the mechanism of transferring the designated practical sphere of reality into the mythological one. The creators of this metaphor took into account the mentioned mechanism, as well as the fact that the myth, by its inherent means, reflects the complex organization of intricately interconnected ideas about the higher reality. They attached great importance to mirror symmetry in both life and art, because the binary logic of mythical thinking corresponds to mirror symmetry. In fact, the “magic mirror” acts as a space, where worldly reality turns into a myth and acquires a sacred character. For example, according to Lesia Ukrainka, it is the space of the primordial forest of Volyn, following Nossack, they are the ruins of post-war Hamburg, or Süskind’s space of children’s memory. Thanks to the “magic mirror”, there appears space in a dehumanized, depersonalized world, enslaved by totalitarianism, destroyed by revolutions and wars, in which, according to Berdyaev, “a person ceases to be not only the highest value, but has ceased to be a value altogether” (2003c: 168), and in which both a person himself and his life acquire sacred values.

On the one hand, the writers used realistic logic, mimetic, the general reproductive function of literature; on the other hand, the logic of myth, its dynamic structure, which is the structure of the metamorphosis of its images and their movement along the curve of implication. According to Golosovker’s concept, the logic of the supernatural image as the exhaustion of the content of the circular image is revealed in the myth by a successive series of single detailed images, as if moving along the curve towards its closure in a circle, which exhausts the semantics of this image. The logical movement of single particular images is usually carried out according to the principle of antithesis (Golosovker, 1987: 49). This logic corresponds to the laws of reflection (enantiomorphism), since a mirror is a different from the real one world of imaginary shapes and volumes, inverted from right to left. The “magic mirror” focuses single peculiar images in one character, whose story like a matrix of the archetype absorbs and structures all mythological stories (motifs) that generate the content of the composite image.

A new type of mimesis is implemented in the image of a “magic mirror”, realities are simulated simultaneously, mundane and sacred, as “two ways of existence in the world, two existential situations, which a person



develops throughout history" (Eliade, 2001: 10). Imitation of both realities occurs according to the principle of metonymy, which, in fact, equalizes them in rights. Both equal realities, mundane and sacred, collide in the artistic space; a connection arises between them by similarity, that is, a metaphorical connection, based on which, according to the theory of Potebnia's myth, mythical thinking arose. It is not about artistic imitation of the myth thinking, as in the precursors of magical realism, but about restoring its right to a full-fledged existence. Mythologism as a way of poetic realization of a myth in a literary work no longer depends on the author and reader's subjective processes of creation and reception, the very space of a literary text generates a myth. Artistic reality becomes a space of mythic consciousness; here there is not only an overlap of two basic principles of artistic imitation of reality by similarity and contiguity, but also the interference of realities, which gives an image of a complex multidimensional ambiguous reality and, accordingly, a complex multi-layered ambiguous human consciousness in the long run.

Albert Karelskyi and Oleksadr Gugin, the researchers of German literature of the second half of the 20th century, argue that elements of realism within the framework of magical realism acquire the role of an artistic device, though significant, but subordinate to a more important task, built into a totally different and, from the traditional point of view, fantastic context. With seemingly authentic unravelling of the plot and obvious visibility of details, the story is saturated with elements that constantly undermine the apparent obviousness from insights and reveal ever deeper yet unknown layers of reality, until, according to the original and familiar reality, the contours of a more terrible, voluminous, strange, shimmering reality loom; the landmarks and stereotypes of behaviour, developed at the level of primary objective reality completely lose their significance there (Andreev, 2000: 428).

In principle, one cannot agree with the opinion that a more terrible reality is revealed behind a layer of obvious reality. Kasack and Nossack, for example, on the contrary, depict objective reality so horrendous that "it is still unknown if God himself has survived" (Nossack, 1983: 534) in it. A person, in order to keep his consciousness integral, is forced to seek salvation from objective reality, the nightmares of which whittle away any



fantasy. Therefore, a “magic mirror” appears to prove that under the layer of reality, which has lost common sense and human meaning, there lies another one, salvational for a man, his spirituality and freedom. In the real world, depicted by magical realists, a person loses the integrity of his personality; specific connections between individuals lose human meaning, acquiring the character of manipulation, where a person is used as a means, and not as a goal. Both the person and the benefits of human activities are devalued. In this world, it is easier to survive for a common man than for a person, since the former is limited to his role function, even when he does not face the fact of physical survival, while a person always turns out to be more of a mask that society imposes on it, and tries no matter conditions of existence to preserve his identity, either human, cultural or national, since integrity and identity are the guarantors of the spiritual freedom of the individual.

Erich Fromm draws attention to this problem in the *Escape from Freedom* (1941), considering two concepts of health and neuroses. He believes that a person who is normal in terms of successful adaptation to the social environment is often less healthy in terms of human values than a neurotic, since successful adaptation is often achieved through abandoning his personality due to a loss of authenticity. Moreover, vice versa, a neurotic is a person who did not give up in the struggle for his own personality. Of course, his attempt to save individuality was disappointing; instead of its creative manifestation, he found salvation in neurotic symptoms, or escape to the world of fantasies; however, from the point of view of human values, such a person is less crippled than a “normal” person, who has completely lost his individuality (Fromm, 2006: 149).

Hence, the main function of the “magic mirror” is a protective one: to protect human conscience from the deadly toxic reality of the 20th century, having defined by art media the space, where “a single person and his fate are of greater value for the world order, harmony of the whole and abstracted existence” (Berdyayev, 1995: 48).

Berdyayev, analysing the signs of a civilizational crisis as an anthropological crisis in 1934, points to the total dehumanization and depersonalization of all socio-cultural spheres, first of all, to the “disappearance of the



integral image of a person" in spiritual culture: science, philosophy, theology, literature and art (2003c: 175). As a follower of the Ukrainian existential-cordocentric personalism, the philosopher warns of the consequences of the destruction of the image and likeness of God in a man (which caused his being as a person) and the splitting of the human personality into subconscious and intellectual, communicated in a psychological novel (Proust, Gide, Celine, Jouhandeau, Malraux). Berdyaev is convinced that the destruction and devaluation of the personality "can only be opposed to a whole person, who is rooted in the spiritual structure of existence" (2003c: 185).

The "magic mirror" metaphor made it possible to realize the philosophical concept of an integral personality in a literary and artistic form. In addition, embodied in the "magic mirror", the concept of an integral personality, rooted in the spiritual structure of existence, opened up new possibilities to solve one of the key problems in the history of European literature, declared itself at the turn of the 11-12th centuries. According to José Ortega y Gasset, from the indicated time to the 17th century, two literatures coexisted in Europe: chivalric romance, facing the sky, and literature of the common people that crawled on the ground. They represented two super-modern views of the world, the world of ethereal, illusive forms and the world of inert matter (Ortega y Gasset, 1994: 270-272). The romanticists with their "ins Blau" imperative deepened the literary split between heaven and earth. Later, the realists wanted to reflect not only the road, but also all the dirt on it, thus Charles Baudelaire's poet (*Journey to Kiefer*, 1857) found himself between heaven and earth, like a punished outlaw-troublemaker. From the point of view of Eugene Ionesco, realism narrows, discolours, deforms reality, depicts a person in the perspective, diminished and alienated from its depths (Tovarniki, 1992: 153).

The theoretical attempt to combine heaven and earth in literature was made by the German preromantism in *The Preparatory School of Aesthetics* (1804) treatise, which asserts a holistic perception of existence based on enantiomorphism. Considering different views on the inner and outer worlds, time and eternity, Jean-Paul, the author of the treatise says that it is a moral antithesis for the public and a steadfast antipode for the philosopher, where alternately one world is destroyed by another, but there are



geniuses, endowed with the “divine instinct”, teaching them to contemplate the earthly instead of the earthly teaching them to contemplate, as is the case with others. This instinct makes it possible to realize the ideal of reconciliation of the rational and irrational principles and the worlds, conditioned by them, endowing a person with a holistic vision of existence, in the perspective of which “harmony and beauty, simultaneously reflected by rays from both worlds, will turn them into a single whole, since there is only one before God, and there is no contradiction of parts.” Jean-Paul suggests a new world focus with the “Maps of the earth can only be created by maps of the sky” fundamental principle. A look from below will definitely distinguish the sky from the earth; if you look from top to bottom, “the only celestial sphere will open, and the globe itself, no matter how small it is, will float in the celestial sphere, whirling and sparkling.” Therefore, according to Jean-Paul, the talent that constantly humiliates the world of gods, defining for him the role of a satellite planet in his earthly world, will never reach ideal completion, will never replace it with a part of the whole and will not create Everything from a part. To visualize the aesthetic concept of combining two ways of perceiving and reproducing reality in a holistic vision of existence by an artist-genius, Jean-Paul creates a mirror metaphor: “thus, on the banks of a quiet river, two trees, real and reflected, seem to grow from the same roots and rise to two different firmaments” (1981: 95-96). The holistic perception of existence in Jean-Paul’s aesthetics is conditioned by the concept of the integral personality of the artist, the inner world of which, “I and his kingdom, the creator and the world of the creator”, is structured according to the laws of reflection. Self-awareness of an integral personality is always stronger than consciousness, since self-awareness assumes that a person is able to contemplate himself, to see himself as a whole, simultaneously “in two mirrors, turning to them, turning away from them (Jean-Paul, 1981: 87). Therefore, Jean-Paul encourages artists to invent new perceptibility that creates a versatile, holistic vision of the world.

For romanticists, Jean-Paul’s aesthetic teaching turned out to be a theory that could not be translated into literary practice. This was convincingly proved by Hoffmann in the *Little Tsakbes, Called Zinnober* (1819) fairy



tale, in particular. Although Hoffmann's attempt proved the "impracticability of the mission", nevertheless, it became a "preparatory school of aesthetics" for the creators of the "magic mirror" metaphor. Hoffman suggested fiction as a defence against the toxic world of objective reality, but this means proved ineffective, which allowed Lesia Ukrainka to name fiction in prose of the second half of the 19th century "the traditional 'devilry' of old romanticism" (Ukrainka, 2021h: 291) in her *Utopia in Fiction* (1906) article and refuse from its ineffective tools in her own artistic practice.

In Hoffmann's work, science fiction turned out to be a deception, which the author used like a shield to deliberately shut out reality, which "sweeps over". Therefore, fiction in the hands of the programmatic Hoffmann's hero Balthazar turns into unhealthy fantasies and lamentations, which he cherishes (skipping lectures) instead of doing something useful. The only "most fantastic" result of Balthazar's creativity was a "historical opus" about "the love of a nightingale for a purple rose" (Hoffmann, 1963: 97). The fantasies of a mediocre poet, a careless student, a prim handsome young man with open claims to the role of Hamlet, and also a modest, shy, judicious, ardent son of wealthy parents (this is how the author characterizes the hero) turn into self-deception, which leads to the death of Balthazar as a romantic hero, but gives everything that he subconsciously aspires to Balthazar, the philistine. God punishes us in two ways, either he takes away the mind, or fulfils our desires. As you can see, the author "punishes" Balthazar "in full." The hero hides his true intentions from himself and others behind ingenious fantasies, from the point of view of Balthazar. He is in love with Candida, though her image represents the antithesis of Balthazar's (romantic) ideal of a woman, marriage with Candida is extremely mercantile, a professor's daughter can be a catch for an unscrupulous student of average abilities. Balthazar calls "the unknown force", which attracts the hero to the house of Professor Mosh Turpin every morning and which he has no strength to resist, "dark fatality". No matter how much the hero is lying to himself, this is true, since "dark fatality" is the very force that attracts people to Tsakhes, being not mystical at all, but a very real force of gold and power. The hero supposedly takes pity on the unfortunate cripple, but becomes merciless towards Tsakhes, though he beats him up by proxy only when the little monster takes away the share of social



prestige, pertained to Balthazar. Science fiction does not save the hero. His fantasies, not confirmed by the real actions and personal responsibility for them, turned out to be not a path to romantic authenticity, the truth of which is verified existentially, but a mirror reflection of the philistine world. The higher reality, which he aspired to, without passing existential verification, turns into fiction. The author's crushing irony exposes the hero's self-deception, leaving him no chance. This task is carried out even at the level of composition of the work: out of ten sections, only the tenth has the title, which sounds like a sentence to the hero – *The Last One*.

Süskind – the Story of Mr Sommer in the World Space of Mirror Proportion

As for the creators of the “magic mirror” metaphor, the highest reality for them is not a fantasy, but reality, to which everyone belongs and which, in turn, belongs to each of those who live, once lived or will live their own authentic life.

Existential verification of authenticity, and, therefore, of various aspects of identity of personalistic existence, becomes relevant in a situation of conflict of the worlds, hence, the issue of authenticity, being the issue of existential choice and existential freedom of the individual, did not leave the focus of Ukrainian existentially-centred inspired thought. Today, it is being developed by Yevhen Bystrytskyi in connection with the hybrid war. The philosopher raises the issue of a person's responsibility for maintaining the authenticity of both his own life and his life world, linking the loss of authenticity with the loss of the meaning of life. In his opinion, the will to be authentic “forever” forces one to return to the sources of his own authenticity that is to cultural identity. “Forever”, since the determination to be “heroic” (the defender of the national, in particular), therefore, “to really be yourself against the background of cultural identity outweighs the existential horror of death as an empty denial of freedom in general” (Bystrytskyi, 2018: 68). In Ukrainian philosophy, the issue of authenticity of the human person acquired conceptual significance in the 18th century. It was formulated by Hryhorii Skovoroda in the concept of self-knowledge as the idea of “affinity” and considerably inspired the birth of the *Forest Song*, in which Lesia Ukrainka, based on the mirror symmetry, created an



aesthetically and mathematically impeccable formula for existential verification of a person's authenticity: "bring your life up to the level of your soul" (1950: 218).

The Ukrainian formula and the complex of philosophical issues, outlined by Bystrytskyi, define the content of *The Story of Mr Sommer* as a work about war and its depersonalistic and dehumanistic consequences, as well as the responsibility of a person for the loss of authenticity (the desire to be who he really is), and, therefore, for the destruction of cultural and living space, which forms a personal and community identity as ethnic, national, cultural and ultimately human.

Süskind has convincingly proved that life has left no room for fantasy. Sommer is a living mechanical doll, created by the most terrible war in the history of mankind. Hoffmann would have been shocked by the logic, with which life developed the image of a mechanical doll, generated by his fantasy. The hero of Süskind is excluded from the world of the living by the emptiness Lesia Ukrainka warned about in the form of a werewolf back in 1911 and appeared as an inevitable reality of the mental life of Europeans in the 1930s, as Jung argued in his *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1934) work, when Hitler had already come to power.

The Story of Mr Sommer is a work about war, though actually the war is mentioned only three times: the first time, when the narrator indicates that Sommer settled near Lake Street "immediately after the war"; the second time, he remembers the tree on which an old Nazi allegedly hanged himself after the war; the third time, when he claims that he knew by heart the beginning of the work of Gaius Julius Caesar, the ancient Roman emperor, "De bello gallico" and the ancient Greek first stanza of the "Odyssey".

At the figurative-lexical level, each of the references reveals the degree of Mr Sommer's connection with the war. The first one indicates that the hero's crazy journey is the result of the war. The second one testifies to the fact that war is always Judas' treason, guilt, gorgonian truth, and makes one think about the connection of Mr Sommer with Nazism and the nature of this connection.



The third one requires a more detailed consideration given the assertion of critics that Sommer is a character with, albeit existing, but “impenetrable past”, therefore, the reasons for his “social isolation” cannot be ascertained by the method of Lorenzer’s psychoanalysis, but they are unlikely to be related to the “existential horror” (Fleischer, 2005: 102, 110, 111). Since, in comparison with Noel, the hero of *The Pigeon*, these reasons, according to Fleischer, cannot be revealed either through the description of the past of Mr Sommer, or through the “linguistic symbolic realization of events” (2005: 110) by himself, they should be considered abstract. One cannot agree with this, since it is the third actualization of the war that makes it possible to reconstruct important facts from the hero’s past, of which *The Story of Mr Sommer* consists, being determined by its genre in its title already.

Firstly, the third mentioning of the war reveals the epic, literary and scientific foundations of the story of Mr Sommer as a “historical opus”, because *Notes on the Gallic War* is a classic of historiography and historical literature, and *Odyssey* is an epic one. As for the “historical opus”, in comparison with Hoffmann, the author’s irony has a completely different structure; it is ambidextrally two-vector. One vector is aimed at the narrator, a teenage boy, who measures the conflict between duty and desire in minutes, 45 seconds to be exact in each direction according to the law of mirror symmetry, and his adulthood (as a measure of the authenticity obtained), in kilograms and centimetres of his own body and at the same time in learning of all Grimm Brothers’ fairy tales “and half of Maupassant too” (Süskind, 2003: 109), *Notes* by Caesar, stanzas from *The Odyssey*, musical pieces by Haydn, Schumann, Beethoven, Chopin, along with blues and boogie-woogie. The second vector is aimed at the protagonist, who has lost his authenticity and his human appearance along with it, thus turning into a “clockwork”. The “magic mirror” turns this second vector of irony into mercy. If you look at the facts of Sommer’s biography not from the position of rational analysis, but “very closely,” as Lesia Ukrainka suggests (2021c: 204), from the point of view of mercy, you can see that, unlike Noel, in his pre-war past, there was no psychological trauma provoked by the “existential horror”. This is documented¹ by pre-war photographs. After

¹ Documented, as it is a passport photo that officially confirms the identity of the person,



the war, existential horror already exists, because it was it that turned on the clockwork, which turned the hero into “a man who all his life was on the run from death” (Süskind, 2003: 104) Sommer has a wife, who with the tenacity of a clockwork:

Day in day out, ... manufactured little dolls for children out of wool, cloth and wood shavings. Once a week she would wrap up the dolls she'd made in a big parcel and take it along to the post office. On the way home from the post office she would go to the grocer, the baker, the butcher and the greengrocer, one after the other, and arrive home with four bulging shopping bags and then stay at home for the rest of the week, making more dolls (2003: 15-16).

Reel dolls have complex semantics as a symbol. Reel doll-amulet remembers the warmth and care of mother's hands. It is the personification of the sacred connection between generations, between the world of the living and the world of the dead; thus, we can assume that these are the lost children of the Sommer spouses. The “Doll-Maker” does not sell them at the market, but sends them by mail (Süskind, 2003: 107).² However, she sells them. The witch reel doll is a magical personification of a particular person; everything that is done to her must happen to the person. If we continue to analyse the semantics of doll magic and connect it with the motifs of guilt, sale, Judas' betrayal, we will give an answer to the question of what caused Sommer's existential horror, but, there are secrets, guarded by mercy.

Let's return to the third mentioning of the war, because, secondly, *The Odyssey* is an exemplary work about the consequences of the war and responsibility for it before those, who sparked it, since the poem has not got only a mythological dimension, which is mercilessly exploited by literary scholars, but also realistic. Odysseus in it is an invader, a representative of the barbarian world of the Achaeans, who took a “heroic” part in the destruction of the world of Trojan culture. The first stanza is enough to understand this:

Tell me, O Muse, of the man of many turns, who was driven

in addition, it is published in the newspaper, again in order to identify this person as he is wanted.

² In other words, does this refer to a special connection?



far and wide after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy.

Many were the men whose cities he saw, and learnt their minds,

many the sufferings on the open sea he endured in his heart,

struggling for his own life and his companions' homecoming (Homer, 2016: 3).

Whereas both dimensions, mythological and real, are equal for Süskind in *The Odyssey*, Sommer's insane journey is his redemptive odyssey, the path of returning home (to himself as he is). Therefore, it is not necessary to know Sommer's past; a few facts are enough so that its consequences do not turn into "abstract causes".

The name of the Süskind's hero is similar in structure to the names of the times of Hoffmann. Maximilian Ernst Egidius Sommer (Süskind, 2003: 125) is the full name of one of the representatives of the neo-romantic *Prague School*, to which Franz Kafka belonged. The writers of this School are characterized by an acute sense of social isolation; the specificity of existence for them is unbearable and takes shape of an escape of a physical, aesthetic or spiritual nature. They suffer from the realization of disintegration of traditional foundations and hostility of the modern soulless, technicalized and bureaucratized world. "With his claustrophobia there wasn't enough room for him in Europe" (Süskind, 2003: 125), say Sommer's neighbours, who think he is crazy. Moreover, he runs, runs from death, from horror, from that emptiness, which ate out his soul, depriving him of his own "I," runs until he finds salvation in the mirror of a forest lake:

As I pulled the twigs down, the lake came into view. It was like a large, bright mirror. And there, on the edge of the mirror, stood Mr Sommer. At first I thought he must be barefoot. But then I saw that he was actually in the water up to the tops of his boots, standing a couple of yards away from the shore, with his back to me, looking westward, to the opposite shore, where there was still one remaining strip of yellow-white light behind the mountains. He stood there as still as a fencepost, a dark silhouette against the bright surface of the lake, his long, undulating stick in his right hand, and his straw hat on his head (Süskind, 2003: 119).

The whole entourage of this framed "picture of a mirror" convinces that it is a paraphrasis of Caspar David Friedrich's, the romanticist's, *Wan-*



derer above the Sea of Fog (1818) painting. A teenager, the future writer, contemplates this “picture” in the same way the viewer gazes at the canvas by Friedrich. According to art critics, the *Wanderer...* is a dialogue between a person and God, a desire to raise the human soul through a dialogue with nature. One critic called the figure of the Wanderer “a certain German Oedipus”, who allegedly held his breath, trying to measure his insignificance according to the greatness of the dumb, icy Universe. The composition of the painting reflects a tendency that can be traced in the works of Friedrich after 1816, when the artist tried to establish a connection between close and remote, finite and infinite, therefore, he was looking for a new perspective to create a spatial continuum. The human figure emphasizes and, at the same time, hides the centre of the picture: its dark silhouette intercepts the central part of the landscape. The person stands with his back to us; his face is turned to what we do not see. Thanks to this technique, the artist makes the viewer identify himself with the Wanderer (DeuPetit, 2003: 14).

It is difficult to say whether Süsskind encourages the reader to identify himself with Mr Sommer (who will like this?), but he invites to follow the way the new “German Oedipus” is looking. The main thing is that, standing on the edge of a living mirror, the central character of Süsskind’s work for the first time does not look pathetic! For the first time he looks there, “beyond the mountains”, where the Sun, God, Eternity are. He looks “to the yonder side”. “The other shore” is an ancient philosophical metaphor, which Skovoroda turned to in his time, actualizing in its context the issue of self-knowledge as an existential search by a human person for his authenticity and freedom in the focus of the “three worlds” and “two natures”:

Two countries the biblical sea has. One country is ours; the second is that of God. On our shore, the spikelets are empty, and the cows are thin, on the other side of the sea, the spikelets are good, and the heifers are perfect. Our coast is both poor and hungry; overseas there is the harbour of Good Hope, the bosom or the bay of Abraham, a rich place where all Israel grazes and rests, leaving the Sodomites on the hungry side. “Who will go to the other side of the sea?” (Skovoroda, 1994: 41).



The same motif is mirrored in the classical text of Mahayana Buddhism *A Thread Guiding to the Core of the Wisdom of that Shore* (Prajna paramita Hridaya-sutra), in which Wisdom of the “other shore” is proclaimed the highest “magic formula” of Great Wisdom, capable of relieving a person of any suffering. It sounds like this: “Oh, you who went, went, went to That Shore, and landed on the other shore, oh, the Awakened One!” (Campbell, 2002: 415-421). The emptiness of that Shore, in contrast to the emptiness in the soul of Sommer, is full of Wisdom, not horror. Both Christian and Buddhist religious traditions associate spiritual treasures with the “other shore” that makes a person free, therefore, he has such a magical influence on Mr Sommer, “a man who all his life was on the run from death” (Süskind, 2003: 104).

From the point of view of Jung’s theory of archetypes, the painting of Mr Sommer above the edge of a forest lake contains natural symbolism: the Wanderer goes back to the depths of his own “I,” where the miracle of the pool of Bethesda should take place: “For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had” (John 5:4).

There was a “sea of fog”, a delusion, which hides the truth, on the way of the hero of the romanticists, as Friedrich clearly convinces. Friedrich’s hero stands on a mountain, in front of him there is an abyss, wrapped in a “sea of fog”; you need wings to cross it. Romanticists suggest wings of the Spirit; however, generated only by human fantasy, they are too weak to bridge the gap that separates mortals from the truth. In a few decades, science will give humanity metal wings; they will also turn out to be only ersatz, and not the wings that will carry a person from the space of time to the saving space of eternity. Notabene, *The Story of Mr Sommer* begins with the motif of the eventual human ability to fly.³ Mr Sommer lost the ability to fly long ago, because, like any adult, he fell out of the space of his own childhood. As a real person, he is in the space of someone else’s childhood memory, and as a character of a literary work, he is in the space of someone

³ Following Süskind’s concept, the magical space of children’s memory not only preserves the belief that man is capable of flying, but also generates the belief that man is able to walk on water.



else's childhood. He is a sort of Alice who has lost her way in the worlds; Alice, behind the shoulders of whose there is the world of adults, which is not absurd in the eyes of a child and a fabulous "Wonderland" alien to her, but a real absurdity of the most terrible of wars. However, the path of Süskind's hero runs not through the deceptive water of romanticists, "the sea of fog", but through the living mirror surface of the lake;⁴ this means successful initiation in the context of the archetype journey of the mythological hero. Contemplating Eternity, Sommer freezes; it seems he has turned to stone. A moment and the "fencepost" is locked in a frame, a "dark silhouette against the bright surface of the lake" begins to move, and Friedrich's painting comes to life:

And then, abruptly, he started walking. Step by step, and every third step jabbing the stick down and pushing off, Mr Sommer walked into the lake. He walked as though he were walking on land, with that characteristic, purposeful haste of his, heading due west straight for the middle of the lake (Süskind, 2003: 119-120).

This new "German Oedipus", as always, helps himself with a stick, which the author compares with the third leg. In this regard, it is appropriate to mention another connotation in the semantics of the lake symbol: lakes in mythology were considered a reflection of heaven, their divine eyes (Zavadska, 2002; 161). Sophocles' image of Oedipus manifests the dialectic of the mythological motif of blindness vs visibility. The riddle of the she-Sphinx, solved by wise Oedipus, sort of a walking enigma, is widely known. According to Golosovker, it did not fall into the myth of Oedipus accidentally, as it directly concerns the motif of blindness vs visibility. The wisdom of this riddle is in its second part, in the solution. When sighted Oedipus solved the she-Sphinx's riddle, which goes as follows "who walks on four legs in the morning, on two in the afternoon, and on three legs in the evening?", answering: "a man," his wisdom was still blind, because the clue, the word "man" is the starting point of the she-Sphinx's wise riddle: What does a man know? What can a person know? The she-Sphinx's riddle is the

⁴ Süskind verbalizes Friedrich's quote according to the laws of mirror symmetry: "the sea of fog" is that which conceals the truth, it is replaced by the "mirror of the lake" – that which visualizes it.



riddle of knowledge. Only having weathered a long path of sufferings, relying on the staff of new inner experience, blind Oedipus understood the secret of knowledge, as if he had recovered his sight in his blindness. The meaning of the image of “visibility” passes from external vision to internal visibility, the internal eye. “The blindness of visibility,” like in a mirror, turns into “the visibility of blindness” (Golosovker, 1987: 53-54). The decisive passion, Oedipus’ pride, blinded the hero’s eyes: having guessed the riddle of she-Sphinx, he failed to solve it. Blinded by pride, Oedipus disturbed the natural course of things, he became a tyrant before becoming a hero,⁵ therefore, Thebes, freed by him from the she-Sphinx, turned into a “barren land” again, and he himself, not guessing the main thing that a “man” is he, Oedipus, took the path of usurpation, and thus, self-destruction. Thus, if the lake is the Divine eye, and Oedipus is the man, then God and man look into each other’s eyes according to the “magic mirror” of Süskind, like in the finale of Dante’s *Comedy* (Paradise, XXXIII, 112-132). Maybe Süskind asks the reader the she-Sphinx’s riddle about a man? And woe to those Oedipuses who do not recognize the person in themselves, in “a dark silhouette against the bright surface of the lake” (Süskind, 2003: 119). The truth, says Cortazar in the *The Way to Look* (1943), is “something as simple as a puzzle” (1999: 573). Süskind proves that the content of the Truth is simple, clear and apparent, but the path to it is extremely difficult, because, cultivated with human existence, it is the path that runs through the mirror mazes of integral reality.

The narrator will hide the mystery of Sommer’s disappearance, the secret he accidentally saw, from everyone, because there are secrets guarded by mercy. “I don’t know what it was that made me keep quiet so long and so obdurately... but I don’t believe it was fear or guilt or a bad conscience,” the storyteller admits to the readers, opening the veil over the life of a “young man with thick, dark hair, an alert expression, and a confident, almost cheeky smile on his lips”⁶ (Süskind, 2003: 125, 127), transformed into a mechanical doll by the war, but in spite of everything into a

⁵ Sophocles emphasizes this in the title of the tragedy “Oedipus the Tyrant”, in which he uses the word “τύραννος” and not “βασιλεύς”.

⁶ Young Mr Sommer in the pre-war photo somehow resembles Hoffmann’s Balthazar (Hoffman, 1963: 27-28).



man! After all, Sommer breaks out of the closed mechanical circle of wanderings, into which he was thrown by the horror of the experience, but he did not overcome the experience of war, from which the hero runs away all the time, aspiring not to light, but to rest in Bulgakov's sense of the collision of these two concepts; he breaks into the saving dimension of eternity. Sommer's story is a story of what war does to a human person, and a story of what war cannot do to a human person. *The Story of Mr Sommer* is a story about deep layers of horror, into which human consciousness is driven by the cruel and violent absurdity of the modern world of total lack of freedom, and a story of how to overcome them.

The work of Süskind is an archetypal story about human soul, which, like Mavka⁷ in the *Forest Song* by Ukrainka, thanks to her own efforts, despite everything, strives for Freedom and Eternal Life from the stone captivity of Maryshche⁸. Mr Sommer is not a multidimensional person, he is just a man, therefore, he cannot walk on the mirror surface of the water, like Jesus, but the hero goes into the saving space of the mirror lake as if he can. As every person can, which was proved by Skovoroda in the distant 1780s:

Our corpse sits and rests, but our heart goes on. It passes from the corpse to God, from the insane to the wise. It takes off like Noah's-pigeon, above the flood waters of all the elements, let it rest on the hills of eternity. The Lord's Easter is a judgment, when the heart flies from darkness to light, from stupidity to reason and judgment (Skovoroda, 1994: 56).

In myths, lake is a magical place, where the Sun goes to rest. The Sunset, despite the Christian connotation of the Last Judgment, symbolizes sleep and rest, that is, the peace that Mr Sommer is crying about and looking for.

The scene was one of absolute stillness. And then I saw a little moving point. A dot, on the very left edge of the woods, making its way steadily across to the right, along the perimeter of the wood, up School Hill and along the top of it, along the crest, heading south. Silhouetted against the blue of the sky, though no bigger than an ant, you could clearly see it was a man. I recognised

⁷ Mavka, a forest nymph (Ukrainka, 1950: 169).

⁸ Maryshche – "He Who Dwells in Rock", a phantom signifying Death and Oblivion (Ukrainka, 1950: 169).



Mr Sommer by his three legs. Regular as clockwork, in tiny tick-tack steps, his legs hurried on, and the faraway dot slid – at once quickly and slowly, like the long hand of the clock – right across the horizon (Süskind, 2003: 62-63).

At the beginning of the work, the Sommer dot is against the background of the blue sky, in the finale, the Sommer dot is against the background of the mirror lake: “I never moved my eyes – not for a second, not to blink – from the little dot of the head that was going down.” (Süskind, 2003: 123). What has changed in this dot? A Lot. The azure, “ins Blau”, of the romanticists turned into the mirror surface of the lake, and against this life-giving background (and not against the background of the unattainable cold sky of the romanticists) the ant becomes a man, the dead mechanism of the Sommer’s clock turns into a living human heart.

Let us go back to comparison between Mr Sommer and Oedipus, not as a mythological hero, but as a literary character. In Sophocles’ tragedy “Oedipus the Tyrant” the issue of the hero’s guilt is removed from the discussion by the title itself, therefore, the dynamics of the work is associated with the disclosure of his own authenticity by Oedipus himself. Having learnt who he really was, Oedipus did what the “old Nazi” did in Süskind’s work, he hanged himself. Sommer, a new “German Oedipus”, takes the place of the Wanderer, identifying himself with the romantic character of Friedrich, therefore, restoring his identity not in the Aryan culture of the Nazis, conditioned by the real madness and idealistic philosophy of individualism (pushed to the limit) of Nietzsche, but in the German culture of Hoffmann, Friedrich, Jean-Paul, the Brothers Grimm, Schumann, Beethoven, and decides to do that what the romanticists did not dare to, just walk to that world they dreamt of, in which the existential horror of death loses all meaning, and the opportunity to be oneself makes one free. The hero returns the lost authenticity, symbolically written in his name: he is a neo-romanticist (Maximilian Ernst Egidius Sommer), he is summer.

The presence of Süskind’s hero in the real world is due to the binary mythological logic, correlated with the mirror symmetry. Endowed with the “Sommer” surname, which means “summer” in German, the hero exists in the “winter/summer” natural time coordinates, which the author skillfully shows through the description of Mr Sommer’s wardrobe, as well as in the spatial coordinates of the two “Oberensee/Untersee” villages, which



means "Upper Lake" and "Lower Lake" in German. The lake is the centre-piece, around which the storyteller's childhood memory structures the world:

... there lived in our village... or rather not precisely in our own village of Unternsee, more in the next-door village of Obernsee, although it wasn't really as hard and fast as that, because Obernsee and Unternsee and all the other villages weren't really separate entities, there was a whole line of them, running along the shore of the lake, one after another, without any obvious beginnings and endings, a narrow chain of gardens and houses and farms and boathouses... (Süskind, 2003: 14-15).

The lake, being a "magic mirror," does not delimit, but unites the mundane and sacred worlds into a continuum. However, as expected, there is a crossroads between qualitatively different worlds, designated by Herma:

... at the parting of the ways to Obernsee and Unternsee ... There was a rock there ... In the middle the rock bore a hollow indentation in the form of a hoof. People said this indentation had been caused by the Devil stamping his foot on the ground with rage because the farmers had built a church near by, way back in the mists of time (Süskind, 2003: 58-59).

Herma's task is to warn the travellers about dangerous areas of space, in which a person falls under the influence of chaos, thus he can lose everything: "If you go to the left, you will lose a horse, if you go to the right, you will lose your life, if you go straight, you will remain alive, but you will lose your own self."

Bareis, the German researcher, tries to explain the paradoxical type of reality, created by Süskind, by the Gertsman syndrome, which the adult storyteller suffers from. Firstly, the narrator often gets lost in space, confusing left/right, and one of the signs of the syndrome is the right-left disorientation. Secondly, at the beginning of the story, he tells how he fell from a tree and with great physical accuracy describes the parameters of the fall, according to Galileo's law, and at the end, the story of how Mr Sommer went along the lake, as if by land, violating all the laws of physics. Taking into account the head injury, received by the narrator, and guided by "his own empirical experience," Bareis defines the story of



Mr Sommer as an unreliable fiction or hallucination (2009: 238-239).

It is symptomatic that the view of the world as a continuum is perceived through the magnifying glass of postmodern autopsy as a “brain injury” (Bareis, 2020: 18). For us, something else is obvious: Süskind convincingly proved that the fundamental laws of classical mechanics, according to which the body falls to the ground at one speed or another, and the spiritual laws of religious miracle operate in the world space of the mirror proportion of the rational and the irrational, the material and the spiritual, the mundane and the sacred.

Lesia Ukrainka – Change of Perspective

On the eve of the First World War, Lesia Ukrainka in the “magic mirror” showed the need to change the idea of the human inner world and his connection with the Universe. In the *Forest Song*, she philosophically deeply and aesthetically convincingly substantiated the opinion that internal ties in modern Ukrainian society, as they have developed over the centuries, atrociously violate one of the main laws of nature, the law of individual development, when every living creature is the personification of cosmic relationships.

The image of Lukash the ghoul became the first warning in the world literature about the consequences of dehumanization and depersonalization of culture as interdependent processes – the loss of personal authenticity causes person’s depersonalization and loss of human identity. Lesia Ukrainka proved that the existential experience of the “dread, unearthly, wild despair”⁹ (Ukrainka, 1950: 239) makes it impossible to return to the world of human culture and restore interpersonal relationships, since real human relationships require personal and communal authenticity,¹⁰ while the false ones become unbearable,¹¹ therefore, the “groaning in the forest” (Süskind, 2003: 127) of Volyn and “You, give me a moment’s peace!” (Ukrainka, 1950: 251) reflected in a triple “Why don’t you just leave me in

⁹ According to Berdyaev, hell is a state of consciousness and human soul, caused by the loss of integrity, extreme egocentrism, evil and dark loneliness, ie ultimate inability, helplessness to love and achieve superconscious integrity (Gorban, 2014: 202).

¹⁰ According to C. S. Bartnik, the modern Polish philosopher-personalist, God created man to cooperate with other men, endowing him with the need for unity in order to comprehend his own fullness of personal existence (Bartnik, 1998: 207).

¹¹ As Jean-Paul Sartre proved in the drama *Behind Closed Doors* (1944).



peace!” (Süskind, 2003: 37, 46, 127) echo in the forest of Upper Bavaria. This would be a cruel and final sentence to a person, but for the “magic mirror”: there is no place for hell in its space. Lesia does not admit either hell or death to the scene of the magical vastitude of the Volyn forest. In the finale of Act II, Lukash goes to the house, and Mavka falls into Maryshche’s hands, while in Act III, Mavka is already at Lukash’s house, and Lukash just comes out of the forest, and even a long-drawn mournful howling of a wolf “that grows louder and louder” (Ukrainka, 1950: 238) around the forest is not the voice of Lukash, because Mavka has already turned him into a person. The final *mise-en-scène* is a metaphor for apocatastasis, there is no place for death. Serhii Krymskyi, a modern philosopher personalist, calls apokatastasis ontological optimism, which is archetypal for the Ukrainian mentality, for the belief in the return of mankind to primary purity during earthly life, accompanied the development of national culture and found its embodiment in artistic and spiritual forms, for example, in the temple painting of St. Sophia of Kyiv (2004: 198). A convincing artistic and religious picture of the apocatastasis is given by Taras Shevchenko in the *Isaiah. Chapter 35* (1859) poem. Ontological optimism is also the fundamental idea of Berdyaev’s active and creative eschatology, which the Kyiv philosopher has been developing for more than three decades, starting from the *Philosophy of Freedom*, written in the same 1911 as the *Forest Song*, in which the restoration of the integrity of the personality and the integrity of the world lasts only for a few moments, while melody №10 sounds on the theatre stage, which consists of a little over thirty notes, but this vividly returns the understanding, lost by the European culture that life and man are its highest values. On the eve of the first global war, both Lesia Ukrainka and Berdyaev assert, in fact, the same idea that the human person is responsible for the split of the world as a result of the Fall, therefore, he is also responsible for its restoration.

In the image of Lukash Lesia Ukrainka visualizes the thought that the loss of authenticity is equal to the loss of the meaning of life, the authenticity of a person is formed and belongs not to one of the worlds, but to both, material and spiritual, since it is determined not only by natural abilities and conscious or unconscious intentions of the person, but his real



actions, consistent with these abilities and intentions, and personal responsibility for them. The philosophical concept of the interdependence of integrity of the world and that of an individual is realized in the *Forest Song* through the “magic mirror” metaphor. After all, the integrity of a person is his authenticity, the ability to bring his life up to the level of his soul.

Krymskyi points out that on the threshold of the 3rd millennium, mankind, having built all the projects to restore its existence, faced the fact that progress depends on human qualities, and their constitution or even preservation requires the entire array of humanity, spirituality and moral experience, which has been forming millennia long and is concentrated in such archetypes as “eternal formulas”, “signposts of existence” (Krymskyi, 2004: 189-190).

Archetypes are the “building blocks” of the “magic mirror” metaphor in the drama. Like the accumulated experience of human existence, conveyed by the author by mythopoetic means, they allow Lesia Ukrainka to create a mirror interdependence of the real and unreal worlds, their equality, equivalence, equipollency, as a continuum in the space of the Volyn forest.

It should be taken into consideration that the *Forest Song* appeared based on the exceptional circumstances of the writer’s personal life: nostalgia became a significant impetus to write it, a specific state of the psyche that causes penetration into the deep layers of the collective unconscious, giving rise to the corresponding archetypal motives and images. Physically exhausting trip by sea to Egypt and yearning for the beauty of the Volyn forests, judging *From the Travel Book* series and *Who Told you that I was Weak ...* (January 1911) poetry, written after it, may have become the impetus for awakening mythogenic consciousness.

Taking into account the factors and the unrealistically short period, during which the *Forest Song* was created, it can be argued that the work appeared catastrophically, as a result of insights. However, insights, as a sudden comprehension of the essence of the problem and an instantaneous solution to it, presupposes a powerful tension of psychic energy, a colossal work of thought and intuition, and most importantly, persistent searches and painstaking study of the issue, which can last for years.



Archetypes turned out to be a multifaceted prism that allowed Lesia Ukrainka to illuminate reality in a new way. Prose has become a workshop for processing these optical instruments. The writer came closest to discovering a new view during her trip to Egypt. An impressionistic pencil sketch appears in the notebook between the *Epilogue* of this cycle and *Who Told you that I was Weak ...* poetry, dated January 21¹², inspired by the views of the “warm Anatolian coast” (Ukrainka, 2021f: 173) near Istanbul:

A clear, even stretch of the sea, finely woven with thin elongated rollings of flowing silver... The water became yet more still, the rollings changed into tiny scales, further they smoothed out, and slightly agitated, deserted, majestic, dark green mountains, covered with the exuberant fleece of the forests, alternated with red clay circles here and there, reflected in that glass-like surface (Ukrainka, 2021a: 409).

Obviously, this is a metaphor for a mirror, but the question arises if it is created by nature or human imagination.

However, the search for a new view and a new perspective of vision continued over the years. The first attempt to change the perspective of the vision was made in the *Above the Sea* (1898) story:

When a child, I was unpleasantly struck by the large oil paintings at the exhibitions, full of ruthless realism, such as Repin's paintings; in order to break the heavy illusion, I would come very close to the picture and then I stopped seeing it. There were just blurs of paint in front of me, and coarse canvas threads shone through them; strange as it may seem, they were scary to me from afar. Now, when the spots of paint have merged again into the distant picture, I want to put this picture on paper and again take a closer look at it; because it has taken too much of my attention and begins to oppress me (Ukrainka, 2021c: 204).

Since we are not talking about the artist's painting as an object of reality, but about an artistic picture of reality, the main thing in this picture for Lesia Ukrainka is to analyse the human psyche as a mental organization

¹² On January 21, Lesia Ukrainka stayed at a hotel in Istanbul, from where she wrote a letter to her mother (Ukrainka, 2021e: 226). While travelling, the writer visited Turkey again and again. She was delighted with Smyrna and Istanbul and shared her impressions with Kobylanska, her close friend: “... and Smyrna is a city of colorful fabrics, woven like the very outskirts, and fantastic Constantinople ... and meanwhile the sea, the sea and the eternal song of the waves” (Ukrainka, 2021g: 127).



of a person, motivated by conscious and unconscious intentions. Consciousness as a process of reflection of reality, which encompasses all forms of human mental activities and predetermines his purposeful social behaviour, is obviously the picture of “ruthless realism”, in which, if you come closer, you can see the elementary particles it consists of, mythy structures of consciousness, in particular. It should be noted that modern researchers consider myths as a category of not only psychology, but also sociology (Shatska, 2011: 71-101), which is part of the structure of both consciousness and subconsciousness, and do not exclude that they are encoded in human genes (Bierlein, 1997: 15).

Then there was *A Letter to a Distant Shore (Ein Brief ins Weite, 1899)*, written in German:

We met during one sea voyage (for me it was a journey to a foreign land, for you – returning home); the road still was the same ... Your figure is now moving in front of my closed eyes in the distant perspective ... as if through the theatrical binoculars, only when you turn them the other way round. I myself cannot explain to my very self why I always see you that way, but I cannot imagine you otherwise (Ukrainka, 2021b: 196).

Having tried to change the perspective in a natural way, by changing the position of the viewer, Lesia Ukrainka tries to repeat an attempt with the help of binoculars, an optical device. In this case, we are talking about two mirror-symmetric methods: a human eye vs technical device, approach vs removal. In addition, the motif of the mirror is directly introduced in the second attempt, combining a foreign land and a homeland, two culturally and emotionally different worlds, directly related to a person's identity, his authenticity. The combination of the two worlds takes place in the space of the “sea voyage,” in the chronotope of which, thanks to the quotation of the famous gnome by Heraclitus “The way up and the way down are one and the same,” a philosophical dimension appears.

The next attempt is *The Blind Man* essay-pendant (1902). While the previous work is an epistolary prose by genre, this one is epistolary in its existential essence. It was written as an effective manifestation of friendship between two creative personalities and had to fulfil the function of a personal psychotherapist and a personal priest, the most professional “doctor of the soul,” who does not offer, like “good ‘comrades,’” “a heavy,



barbed stick” (Ukrainka, 2021d: 246), but gives himself, all the potential of his mind and heart as an existential-cordocentric experience of wisdom and love. This work was written not for a potential reader, but for a specific person, a close friend who needed urgent help. The work required great spiritual tension from the author, because friendship is a spiritual phenomenon in, which the creative potential of a person is realized, aimed at the world transformation, both internal and external. Literary scholars regard this work as “a direct dialogue of texts” (Visych, 2007: 386). To clarify: it was a dialogue through texts.

The blind man of Kobylanska describes a state of despair and dark loneliness, which describes Mavka in captivity of Maryshche: “how terrible it was... I slept a stonelike sleep there in the rock, in depths profound, in blackness, damp and cold” (Ukrainka, 1950: 239), and Berdyaev calls this hell (2003a: 386-388):

Plunging into my soul, to catch the sun and light by ear, although I know that neither blind man caught light with his soul, so I will not catch it either! ... Then I sink into the depths of my soul. It is as deep as it is dark now (Kobylanska, 2013: 345).

Mavka frees Lukash from hellish captivity with “ardent regret” and becomes free herself. Lesia Ukrainka helps her friend, according to Oleksandra Visych, with “altruism” and “readiness for self-denial” (2007: 387) for her sake, and Andrii Pecharskyi calls this “expression of love”, “heat of love” and “mature wisdom” (2010: 61), and he is right, because an expressive combination of love with wisdom is mercy. It is noteworthy that Berdyaev considers wisdom to be the art of holistic knowledge of the world, a prophetic creative breakthrough of personal consciousness to the meaning of existence, and expressionism – the method of existential expression of “personal destiny”, which “should also express the destiny of the world” (2003a: 31; 2003b: 342).

Mercy, the main intention that determined the life and work of Lesia Ukrainka was revealed in the dialogue between the two *Blind Men*.¹³ The circumstances of writing the essay, its content and form convince that mercy for its author is the only possible principle to realize the fullness of

¹³ Read more about this: Richard Gorban (2019).



her personality and authenticity – bring your life up to the level of your soul. The family-genetic relationship of its author with mercy is verbalized at the figurative-lexical level of the work in the form of a “sister of mercy”.

Mercy can be seen as the most radical way of personal existence in existential coordinates, defined by Erich Fromm in the *To Have or to Be?* (1979) work, “when a person has nothing and does not want anything to possess, but enjoys being in unity with the world, efficiently using his own capabilities” (2010: 30). As interpreted by the German existentialist, the to have vs to be conflict defines the existence of a person either as a passive assimilation of various forms of incorporation, from which a society of consumption and total alienation arises, or as an active way of human self-improvement. The philosopher explains the principle of existence as follows:

Only to the extent we give up possession, that is, non-existence, stop associating our own security and identity with what we have, we stop clinging to our own “I” and to our property, only to this extent being, a new way of existence, arises. “To be” means to abandon one’s own egocentrism and self-love, or, as the mystics put it, to become “empty” and “miserable” (Fromm, 2010: 101).

Choosing the “to be” principle as a guide to life, relying on their own abilities and strengths, people are hindered by the illusion that they will fall if they do not rest on the things they possess, so they are afraid of “falling without crutches” and are “like a child, who is afraid, he will never learn to walk” (Fromm, 2010: 101). Such a comparison is associated with Lesia’s image of a blind child, “that has never seen the sun in his life” (Ukrainka, 2021d: 243). The blind in Lesia Ukrainka’s work are those, who decided to “be”, they help each other, and nature helps them: a flower (smell-a sense of smell) and a shell (sound-ability to hear). Like Lesia Ukrainka, Fromm asserts that those, who decide to “be” are protected from “injury” by nature and human help.

The “to be” principle is illustrated by the philosopher with the help of an optical metaphor, suggested by Max Hunsiker, a Swiss artist: we see a blue glass as blue, because when light passes through it, the glass absorbs all other colours except blue, that is, we consider the glass to be blue not based on what it holds, but on the basis of what it lets through itself. It was this optical law that convinced the blind man, who tried to look at the sun “through multi-coloured glasses,” that the existential conflict “between



spirit and reality” could not be shown through protective eye wear in an equal proportion, but only “colouring everything differently” (Ukrainka, 2021d: 242).

The essay-pendant became an important stage in Lesia Ukrainka's realization that mercy is the optics that resolves this conflict in the mirror proportion of the world. Lesia Ukrainka's mercy is a category of existential dialectics, thanks to which there is a breakthrough of the “existence as finite subsistence into infinite” (Shynkaruk, 2002: 159), a transition to a new level of being. Such a concept of personality and the world, realized in an artistic form, surpassed the European philosophical thought of existentialism and dialogical personalism and became Lesia's contribution to the Ukrainian existential-Sophian cordocentrism, because the heart is the focus of mercy, its imperative centre in its concept, as an integral vitalistic organ of a human being: “I'll live eternally! I have that in my heart which cannot die!” (Ukrainka, 1950: 237).

Conclusion

The concept of the integrity of multidimensional reality, embedded in the “magic mirror” metaphor, made it possible to express the actual ideas of dialogical personalism and existentialism in an artistic form, using the archetypal potential of the mirror image and the laws of mirror symmetry to express the deep existential experience of a person in opposition to depersonalization, dehumanization, alienation and culture of consumerism. Lesia Ukrainka and Patrick Süskind proved that in conditions of total domination of spiritual impoverishment, lack of freedom, conformism, and selfish instincts, any escape from the world turns into the loss of oneself as a likeness of God, which turns a person into a beast or a mechanical doll. The person gets a chance to restore the lost authenticity in the mirror proportion of the world, since mercy, an ecstatic fusion of love and wisdom, maintains the balance of this world. You can have everything: money, power, fame, but be a “forked radish” (Hoffman, 1963: 8), like Tsakhes, and you can lose everything, but in spite of everything, remain a man, like Lukash and Sommer.

The *Forest Song* on the eve of the destructive postmodern era and *The Story of Mr Sommer* in the ascendant actualize the opinion that one cannot



behave with the whole world, be it the Universe, the natural world, the world of a human person or the world of a work of art, as if it is completely material, and, calling it a text, to open it like dead matter, for the creative “sculptures” of Gunther von Hagens will be the extreme form of this anatomy, because everything that brings money and pleasure becomes legitimate in the world of total dissection. For the time being, the “mummy,” a “plastoid” of the artist-pathologist, “which does not depict a person, but literally is a human mummy, that acts as an ‘artistic artefact’” (Abysova, 2019: 224), is the ultimate form of denial of the main concept of personalism about the human personality as the highest value and Süsskind’s ideas about secrets, mercy is on guard of which.

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Öz: Karşılaştırmalı yöntemle dayanan makale, 150. yıldönümü 2021'de dünya edebiyat topluluğu tarafından kutlanan Ukrayna edebiyatının klasik yazarı Lesia Ukrainka'nın en seçkin eserlerinden birinin felsefi anlamını ortaya koyuyor. Bu, Lesia Ukrainka'nın *Orman Şarkısı*'nda ve Süskind'in *Bay Sommer'in Öyküsü*'nde so-



mutlaşan, dünyanın ve insanın bütünlüğünün birbirine bağımlılığının felsefi kavramının, sihirli gerçekçiliğin oksimoronik şiirine atfedilen “sihirli ayna” metaforunun bir sonucu olarak derinlemesine bir çalışmasıdır. Ayna görüntüsünün arketipsel potansiyeli ve ayna simetrisi yasaları, kişilikçilik ve varoluşçuluğun gerçek fikirlerini sanatsal biçimde ifade etmeyi ve antropolojik krizin yıkıcı eğilimlerine karşı bir kişinin varoluşsal deneyimini ortaya çıkarmayı mümkün kılmıştır. Her iki eserin karşılaştırmalı bir tarihsel analizi, yazarların 20. yüzyılın temel sorununu farklı sosyo-kültürel materyallerde, yani bir insanın hayatını psikolojik bir cehenneme çeviren kişinin özgünlük kaybını ve kendisinin bir canavara ya da mekanik bir bebeğe dönüştüğünü gösterdiğini ortaya koydu.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sihirli gerçekçilik, arketip, kişi, özgünlük, kişilik, varoluşsal gerçek, merhamet.

