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Images of Women in Ukrainian Poetic Cinema: Metamorphoses of Femininity

Abstract:

The relevance of the research topic is to address the archetypal foundations of female images in poetic cinema films, to consider the factors that bring the characters of the analysed films out of the depths of the national consciousness. Ukrainian screen culture is currently in search of the main types of screen characters, in the creation of new behavioural traits of heroes and heroines, as well as in the actualisation of symbolic and metaphorical features of the images of Ukrainian poetic cinema. The study object is the female characters in the films of Ukrainian poetic cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. The study aims to identify signs of transformation of archetypal foundations of female characters in the films of Ukrainian poetic cinema. The study analyses the feminine traits of the characters in the films of Ukrainian poetic cinema, identifies similar figurative and metaphorical features of the analysed female characters, and considers the socio-cultural context of the era under which the films were created. The main methods are aimed at understanding the historical process during which the cultural and ideological foundations of Ukrainian poetic cinema were laid. In this regard, the article uses such research approaches as: historical and genetic, cultural, art historical, comparative, and others. Among the researchers of poetic cinema of Ukraine whose works are used in the article are the following: O. Bryukhovetska, I. Zubavina, H. Pohrebniak, O. Musienko, and others. The results of the study focus on the phenomenon of poetic cinema, which included female characters, because through feminine characteristics, directors increasingly boldly promoted the idea of the political and cultural fate of Ukraine, its peculiarities. In these images, the directors encoded their reflections on the colonial past and the colonial present.

Keywords: Ukrainian poetic cinema, female images, femininity, archetypes.

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Жіночі образи в українському поетичному кінематографі: метаморфози фемінності

Анотація:

Актуальність теми дослідження полягає в зверненні до архетипічних основ жіночих образів фільмів поетичного кінематографу, до розгляду факторів, які виводять персонажів аналізованих

фільмів з глибин національної свідомості. Українська екранна культура нині перебуває в пошуку основних типів екранних персонажів, у створенні нових поведінкових рис героїв та героїнь, а також в актуалізації символічних та метафоричних ознак образів українського поетичного кіно. Об'єктом дослідження є жіночі образи фільмів українського поетичного кінематографу 1960–70-х рр. Метою дослідження є виявлення ознак трансформації архетипічних основ жіночих образів у фільмах поетичного кіно України. Завданнями дослідження є аналіз фемінних рис персонажів фільмів поетичного кіно України; виявлення подібних образно-метафоричних ознак аналізованих жіночих персонажів; розгляд соціокультурного контексту доби, під впливом якого були створені фільми. Основні методи спрямовані на осмислення історичного процесу, під час якого закладались культурні та ідеологічні підвалини поетичного кінематографу України. У зв'язку з цим в статті використано такі дослідницькі підходи, як: історико-генетичний, культурологічний, мистецтвознавчий, компаративний та інші. Серед дослідників поетичного кінематографу України, роботи яких використано в статті можна назвати таких як: О. Брюховецька, І. Зубавіна, Г. Погребняк, О. Мусієнко та ін. Результати дослідження акцентують увагу на феномені поетичного кінематографу, яким стали зокрема й жіночі образи, адже через фемінні ознаки режисери все сміливіше просуvalи ідею політичної та культурної долі України, її особливості. У цих образах режисери закодовували власні рефлексії щодо колоніального минулого та колоніального сьогодення.

Ключові слова: український поетичний кінематограф, жіночі образи, фемінність, архетипи.

Introduction

Ukrainian poetic cinema of the 1960s–1970s posed a challenge not only to the political system of the then-Soviet Union and its cultural paradigm but also defined new forms of artistic expression. This cinematic movement emerged during the Khrushchev Thaw, a period when public notions of individuality, freedom of choice, and the value of human life were undergoing profound change. Unprecedented attention was paid to the inner world of the individual and to the sphere of emotions. The concept of love began to be associated not only with love for the Motherland or its leaders but also with intimate, deeply personal experiences.

Soviet cinema of the totalitarian era (1930s–1950s) primarily focused on gender distinctions when portraying professional roles (e.g., milkmaid, combine operator, female teacher, steelworker). In war-themed films and those centred on the fight against enemies, masculinity was depicted through traits of militancy and victory, whereas femininity was considered solely as a personalised function for reproduction. Sexual relationships between characters were excluded from the narrative. Even married couples (as positive characters) were rarely shown in an interior with a bed (never in bed), and displays of affection such as hugging and kissing were treated with caution in the Soviet cinematic representation of romantic relationships.

Despite ideological taboos on expressions of sexuality, women on the Soviet screen during this period sometimes still appeared attractive. Actresses of the time attempted to emulate the beauty standards of Hollywood and European stars. However, their characters were subject to behaviour constraints imposed by ideological censorship, limiting their ability to express attractiveness freely.

In Ukrainian cinema, prohibitions on the expression of female attractiveness often took on the character of taboo. A persistent, predominantly asexual image of the modern Ukrainian woman—both in contemporary and historical settings—prevailed on screen. In poetic cinema,

schematic, one-dimensional representations of Ukrainian women frequently replaced more complex portrayals.

The relevance of this research lies in the appeal to the archetypal foundations of female images in poetic cinema and in examining the factors that bring these characters forth from the depths of national consciousness. Today, Ukrainian screen culture is in the process of redefining key character types, shaping new behavioural traits for heroes and heroines, and revitalising the symbolic and metaphorical dimensions of the images found in poetic film.

The subject of the study is the female characters in Ukrainian poetic films of the 1960s–1970s.

The study aims to identify the signs of transformation in the archetypal foundations of female imagery in Ukrainian poetic cinema.

The objectives of the study include analysis of feminine traits in the female characters of poetic films, identification of recurring symbolic and metaphorical features in these characters, and exploration of the socio-cultural context of the era in which the films were created.

The primary methods applied in the study are aimed at understanding the historical processes that shaped the cultural and ideological foundations of Ukrainian poetic cinema. Accordingly, the article employs a range of research approaches, including historical-genetic, cultural, art-historical, comparative, and others.

Among the key scholars of Ukrainian poetic cinema are L. Briukhovetska, Ya. Hazda, I. Zubavina, I. Kanivets, S. Trymbach, H. Pohrebniak, O. Musiienko, and others. H. Pohrebniak, in her exploration of authorship in Ukrainian poetic cinema, emphasises the important role of cinema in shaping the spiritual space and value orientations of national identity (2023). The semantic content of female images in poetic cinema is examined through the archetype of the mother in I. Zubavina's article (2023). This same author also stresses the relevance of the warrior-maiden archetype in contemporary cinema (2022), arguing that the image of the Warrior breaks with traditional (i.e., phallogocentric/patriarchal) stereotypes portraying femininity as weak and passive (Zubavina, 2022, p. 19). The symbolic representation of female characters is analysed in the work of O. Musiienko (2021). L. Briukhovetska was the first to draw attention to female sexuality in poetic cinema and to the unique visual representation of the female body (Briukhovetska, 2015; Briukhovetska, 2019).

The findings of this study are intended to support further scholarly research in Ukrainian cinema and culture at large. The main positions presented in this text may also be of use to third-level art students (Doctor of Arts) in the development of creative projects where the foundational traits of Ukrainian art will be central to the creation of narratives, artistic images, and core messages.

Results

“Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors” by S. Parajanov (1965)

In the article *Two Women: Sexuality in Serhiy Parajanov's Film Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (2015), O. Briukhovetska emphasises that the Thaw in cinema brought about the emancipation of the discourse of sexuality and the female body—it began to be spoken of, albeit cautiously (Briukhovetska, 2015, p. 50). According to the author, the original text by M. Kotsiubynsky, upon

which Parajanov based his film, offers fertile ground for a psychological analysis of the characters, particularly the issue of the inability to reconcile two distinct currents—sensuality and tenderness—and to direct them towards a single sexual object: “*In that same year of 1911, as Kotsiubynsky’s novella was published, Lesia Ukrainka’s play The Forest Song also appeared, exploring the theme of the woman’s dual nature...*” (Briukhovetska, 2015, p. 49) In *Shadows...*, unlike in Ukrainka’s drama, there is no division of female images into categories of spiritual versus earthly love, heavenly versus enigmatic and subconscious versus pragmatic, material affection. In Marichka’s image, Ivan finds a synthesis of all feminine hypostases, with an allusion to motherhood (pregnancy) (Briukhovetska, 2015, p. 49).

The portrayal of the relationship that begins to form between Ivan and Marichka is rather controversial. Kotsiubynsky’s novella states that Marichka began her sexual life at the age of thirteen, while Ivan was slightly older. In a dynamic scene in the film, in which the children run to a mountain lake and gradually undress, the literary meaning is transcribed into the cinematic language: Ivan, playfully, tears a necklace from the naked girl, then picks red berries in the grass and offers them to Marichka. Through play, the children cross the threshold into adult life.

Marichka (played by Larysa Kadochnikova) fulfils all of Ivan’s (Ivan Mykolaichuk’s) needs, creating a complete cosmos of his existence. Her death robs Ivan’s life of all meaning—visually represented by the disappearance of colour, as his further existence is shown in black and white. This continues until Palagna (Tatyana Bestayeva) appears in his life. This woman “breaks the taboo on representing female desire—Palagna takes the initiative, actively seduces Ivan, presenting a completely different type of female sexuality.” (Briukhovetska, 2019, p. 38) Palagna lacks Marichka’s lyrical qualities and childlike innocence. Yet her image is imbued with an unprecedented sensuality on screen. She embodies all earthly pleasures that Ivan once rejected. Here—perhaps, for the first time since the nude scene in Oleksandr Dovzhenko’s *Earth* (1930)—a Ukrainian film openly presents a naked woman in order to depict her physical allure.

We never see Marichka working. Palagna, on the contrary, displays her femininity primarily through labour. Her image combines archaic notions of female attractiveness with “the Soviet propaganda-constructed concept of labour libido <...> where strenuous, exhausting work stood as a substitute for the sexual act.” (Briukhovetska, 2019, p. 38) However, the apex of unrestrained sexual desire is portrayed in the scene where a naked Palagna walks to the river at night to perform a magical ritual. Ivan is unaware of her journey and never sees his wife in such a state. Yet we understand that her desire to attract Ivan is hyperactive in nature—something that repels the man. Ivan begins to think of Marichka more often, mentally retreating into a phantasmagorical world full of unique beauty—a world he has lost, a world where there was Love.

Thus, in Parajanov’s film, femininity is presented in both lyrical and hypersexual dimensions. Two women—Marichka and Palagna—at different times construct the existential dimension of the protagonist Ivan’s being, a man doomed to death after the loss of Marichka. The other woman, who was supposed to become a biological replacement for his beloved and a natural way out of loneliness, only deepens Ivan’s sorrow, reinforcing his sense of doom.

“Evening on Ivan Kupala” by Y. Illienko (1969)

Sexual desire as a sign of sinfulness is portrayed in Yurii Illienko’s film *The Eve of Ivan Kupala*. One particularly bold scene, in terms of its visual expression, takes place in a forest during Kupala Night. This scene—through its dynamic camerawork and mise-en-scène—strongly echoes a similar forest scene from *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* by Serhii Parajanov (it is worth recalling that Illienko was the cinematographer for *Shadows*). In Parajanov’s film, naked adolescents playing in the forest thicket appear as though in the Garden of Eden, unaware of shame—at least for a time. In contrast, the Gogolian characters—Petro (Borys Khmelnytskyi) and Pydorka (Larysa Kadochnikova)—seduced by an unclean force, find themselves in a state of erotic frenzy, fully aware they are committing a pre-marital transgression. Pydorka is clearly the seductress; she is alluring and tempting. Such an image was unacceptably sensual for its time, especially given its engagement with Ukrainian folk traditions and the adaptation of literary classics.

The dark, nocturnal forest functions as a topos of unconscious desire, of yielding to evil, and in the aforementioned scene, it reveals in the virtuous girl Pydorka the archetype of the fallen woman. Tainted by sin, she will bear no children in marriage to Petro. She is just as potentially sinful as Petro, the murderer of her younger brother. In the end, the now-mad widow Pydorka will cradle a hatchet wrapped in cloth as a substitute for a child. The archetype of the mother, the Madonna, within this segment of the film reflects a deeply ingrained Ukrainian cultural trait—reverence for motherhood. According to archaic beliefs, femininity was realised solely through motherhood.

In an article analysing the cinematic projections of the Mother figure, Ukrainian film scholar Iryna Zubavina notes that the founder of archetypal theory, Carl Jung, identified the Mother archetype as one of the fundamental ones; thus, it can be seen as a prototype of femininity in general ([Zubavina, 2022, p. 52](#)). She further observes that “the films of the poetic school served as a channel for transmitting the semantic and conceptual foundations of the people’s worldview. They represented relationships with kin, native land, its history and mythology.” ([Zubavina, 2022, p. 54](#)) In Illienko’s film, the female character carries a significant portion of the symbolic meaning, which the director conveys through a mytho-poetic form: “...Ukraine itself, in its dispossession, is embodied in the image of a woman. Pydorka in *The Eve of Ivan Kupala* becomes the allegorical figure of Ukraine as a ‘colonised woman’.” ([The ‘imperial’ image..., 2013](#)) Thus, the beautiful but childless widow Pydorka—without a home of her own, raped by nomadic invaders—embodies in Illienko’s film the pessimistic vision of the Ukrainian 1960s intelligentsia regarding the nation’s revival.

It is worth noting that, over time, female figures in poetic cinema, even despite film censorship and bans on public screenings, increasingly advanced the idea of Ukraine’s political and cultural fate. The colonial past and the colonial present became a subject that filmmakers encoded, to a large extent, within their female characters. Verbal articulation of the issue of Ukrainian independence was a priori impossible. Therefore, it was deftly masked behind familiar folkloric types with characteristic ethnic features, rooted in deep-seated archetypes that later took on specific ethnocultural and national significance.

“The White Bird with the Black Mark” by Yu. Illienko (1971)

There has already been mention of the Mother archetype as the foundation for creating recognisable female types in poetic cinema that resonate with the viewer's consciousness. When analysing the socio-philosophical essence of the archetypes in Ukrainian mentality, scholars single out the Mother archetype as “the embodiment of Woman, of Ukraine”, and the archetype of the Land, “which is fundamentally based on an age-old trust in the ‘kind mother earth’, and which significantly shapes the psychological optimism and harmonious worldview of the Ukrainian people due to the land's bountiful natural conditions” (*Hordiichuk, 2018, p. 17*).

An archetypal, almost idealised image of the Absolute Mother was created by N. Naum in Yurii Illienko's film *The White Bird with the Black Mark* (1971). Kateryna Dzvonar loves all her children equally—her sons have grown up, each embracing his own political beliefs, which have become the cause of their hatred towards one another. In one of the film's key scenes—the murder of Orest (Bohdan Stupka)—Kateryna, sensing impending doom, runs to her son with an icon, hoping to avert disaster. The Mother instinctively senses that her protection is needed even by her grown child. To her, there are neither Banderites nor Red Army soldiers—there is only great sorrow: the lack of love between brothers, their enduring hostility, and their inability to coexist on their native land. A shot rings out, the icon slips from the mother's hands into a mountain river, and the camera lingers on the face of the Virgin Mary, her eyes filled with horror and grief.

In Orest's final scene, foreseeing his death, he performs an act of reconciliation—he kisses his younger brother Bohdan's hand. He essentially forgives the one who will kill him, though we never see who fires the shot. The negative figure of Soviet cinema—the “bad Banderite”—is reinterpreted today with a radically different subtext: Orest sought only one thing—to free his homeland from foreign rule. Of course, in the 1970s, such a character had to be loaded with a range of negative traits so that the viewer would feel no sympathy. Only mothers were allowed by Soviet ideology to display “political blindness”—such was the strength of this archetype, so deeply rooted in Ukrainian mentality that it overpowered any ideological framework.

Kateryna Dzvonar is a mother of many children. The family is poor, and one of her sons, a teenager named Heorhii, wants to destroy the stork's nest on their roof to prevent further additions to the family. The stork, as a symbol of motherhood, becomes an essential element of the film's imagery—as well as in others, where women yearn for children (Pidorka in *An Evening on Ivan Kupala*, for instance, builds nests for the storks herself, yet the birds avoid her home). Marriage, motherhood, and having many children have long been considered the principal virtues of women in Ukrainian cultural consciousness. To this list was added diligence—the ability to balance childbearing with fulfilling basic material needs. A woman could attain social legitimacy only by embodying this particular set of feminine qualities. Without them, she was relegated to the margins, facing scorn and condemnation.

In *The White Bird with the Black Mark*, such a marginalised female figure is the village loose woman, Vivdia (D. Firsova). Whereas a married woman with children was perceived as Good from the standpoint of common morality, Evil was embodied by the prostitute. In one scene, Vivdia appears as a temptress-Eve: young Heorhii Dzvonar sneaks into her apple orchard. In early Christian literature, Eve was often portrayed in a misogynistic light: “These texts place dramatic emphasis on the coexistence of seductive and evil traits within a single woman.”

(*Skrypnyk, 2022, p. 22*). The alluring beauty enjoys male attention but is regarded by other women as a source of sin. A telling scene shows Vivdia bathing in a pond where local women are rinsing freshly woven linen—her sinful body defiling the labour of decent housewives. As punishment, the community ties her hands above her head with the sleeves of a shirt. Heorhii, who has loved Vivdia since childhood, sees this as a moment to declare himself to her. The wedding ritual and Vivdia's exit from the house in a bridal headdress—a *karabula* decorated with feather grass—equalise her with the other village women, restoring her feminine dignity. Her archetype of the Fallen Woman transforms into a literary and cinematic trope familiar in both European and American traditions—the redeemed prostitute: “a woman who is virtuous at heart but has fallen; she is rescued from her sinful life, usually by a man who risks his own reputation to save her.” (*Skrypnyk, 2022, p. 28*) Thus, the male figure becomes the catalyst not only for redemption as a plot device, but also for the transformation of the female character from social pariah to positive heroine. Vivdia had been waiting for her saviour—and he came. She once told young Heorhii, who stole her apples to be like God, to know Good and Evil: “When you've been sold for a crust of bread a few times, then you'll understand.” Vivdia consorted with Romanians, Germans, and other men to survive. Only the Ukrainian Heorhii married her and, for a brief moment, allowed her to feel human dignity.

Another female character in *The White Bird...*, Dana (L. Kadochnikova), also longs for a decisive act from a man. The elder Dzvonar brothers are in love with her, but their poverty breeds a certain male inferiority complex—neither dares to marry the priest's daughter. Dana undergoes several stages of feminine transformation. At first, she seems like a typical dramatic archetype—a pure but wilful young lady waiting for her rebel. That rebel is, of course, Orest. However, another facet of Dana's character puzzles the brothers: she herself is unsure which of them she loves—Petro, Orest, or Bohdan. One night, she throws herself into Petro's arms in an attempt at seduction, but he refuses. To Dana, the brothers are one entity, yet none of them can overcome their sense of inferiority—especially national inferiority. Dana is ready to risk her reputation so that one of the Dzvonars will become her husband. Their indecisiveness leads her to agree to marry a Soviet soldier she barely knows (as Bukovyna falls under Soviet rule). This plot element becomes highly symbolic in the context of historical events. In her imagination, Dana performs her wedding dance—a sabbath—passionately with Orest, with whom she will spend her first wedding night.

Ukrainian ethnologist D. Lepkyi noted that the name Dana is associated with Ukrainian water-spirit festivals and appears in songs and folklore (*Lepkyi, 1883*). M. Kostomarov considered Dana to be a female deity of water among the Eastern Slavs (*Kostomarov, 1994*). The recurring refrain “Dana-dana” in folk songs may support these theories across generations. Film scholar O. Musiienko analyses female images through elemental symbolism and notes that “in mythological beliefs, water was seen as the embodiment of femininity, a symbol of purity, truthfulness, and honesty.” (*Musiienko, 2021, p. 26*) It is reasonable to assume that this feminine name and its mythologised foundation may invite an association between Dana and Ukraine itself.

Dana undergoes a metamorphosis—from maiden to prostitute and from prostitute to mother. After living in the forest with her lover, the villagers see her as a fallen woman. This stigma is intensified by the fact that Orest is a “traitor, an enemy” (according to Soviet ideological

framing, the only acceptable interpretation of UPA fighters). After Orest's death, pregnant Dana returns to the village for good. When her father rebukes her for her sin, she replies: a woman must give birth so that people may live on the earth. With this final statement, Dana is no longer a girl but a woman—"the earth, most often associated with the feminine, with motherhood, with the mature woman" (*Musiienko, 2021, p. 26*).

Thus, Dana will continue the Dzvonar lineage—the lineage of rebellious, defiant Ukrainians who know exactly where their homeland lies, for she bears Orest's child in her womb.

From the above, it is evident that in his film, Yurii Illienko presents a unique triune concept of Ukraine, embodied in the archetypes of the Maiden, the Mother, and the Prostitute—respectively, Dana, Kateryna Dzvonar, and Vivdia. The first and the last exhibit the sexual characteristics of femininity linked to carnal love, while the Mother represents non-sexual qualities—an expression of unconditional spiritual love.

Babylon XX

Let us consider another female figure from poetic cinema, which, like the previous ones, combines the archetypes of the prostitute and the mother. In the film *Babylon XX* by I. Mykolaichuk, the character of Malva (played by L. Polishchuk) presents an allusion to the images of Vivdia or Dana from *The White Bird with the Black Mark*, and we observe the same allegorical dramatic devices: "Once again, we see on screen a woman who embodies the image of Ukrainian soil. And whoever earns her favour will be the one to build the future." (*Babylon..., 2020*)

The archetype of the prostitute, embodied by L. Polishchuk, most fully aligns with its profound foundations. The director spent a long time searching for an actress to play Malva. There are certain traits of an actress's appeal—her psycho-physical factors—that defy straightforward professional classification. Malva's sexuality had to be evident from the moment she appeared on screen. The viewer was meant to believe she was the most attractive, the most desirable woman in Babylon—and yet one who had never experienced the joy of true love. The men who used her body were never able to touch her soul.

M. Romanchenko, analysing the cinematic interpretation of Malva in the screen adaptation of V. Zemliak's novel *The Swan Flock*, compared Malva Kozhushna to the archetype of the "priestess-woman"—a woman to whom others bow, a temptress. He also points out that Malva does not feel ashamed of bodily desires (at least, at the beginning of the narrative) (*Romanchenko, 2016, p. 120*). The author goes on to state: "In I. Mykolaichuk's film, we are shown a slightly different Malva—more self-assured and spiritually stronger." (*Romanchenko, 2016, p. 121*)

Comparing Malva in V. Zemliak's novel and in I. Mykolaichuk's film, researcher N. Kryvoruchko suggests that "the emphasis on Malva's personal traits follows this order: in the novel, she is free, carefree, lustful—the one others fight for—while in the film, she embodies strength, and at times the lack thereof, complete independence from her environment, and becomes the one who fights Circumstance on her own." (*Kryvoruchko, 2014, p. 98*)

In Soviet cinema, such a type of woman could not be portrayed as a positive character. To alter the feminine characteristics of a heroine depicted as a femme fatale, certain events had to take place to suppress her sexual allure and lead her to become a socially active figure. The dramaturgical device of redemption through love in Mykolaichuk's film is introduced at the beginning in a somewhat ironic manner: the young widow Malva, in search of love, arrives at a

commune inhabited solely by men. The commune leader (I. Havryliuk) meets the stunning woman with hostility, wishing to expel her lest her appearance tempt the communards.

The scene evokes an analogy with the apostles of Christ and Mary Magdalene, the repentant harlot. The irony lies in the fact that the communard, delivering a fiery communist speech before portraits of Marx and Engels, is doing so in his underwear—having just risen from bed, awakened by Malva's visit. She attracts him, but he believes he must not waste his energy on love and instead offers her a "replacement"—a young, handsome man named Volodia (A. Khostikoyev).

Volodia's meeting with Malva is comical precisely because it defies the commune leader's expectations: the young woman immediately captivates the poet Volodia, who quickly forgets his communist asceticism. However, Malva later sheds the label of a fallen woman. Her relationship with the communard legitimises her behaviour—especially once it becomes clear that she is pregnant with Volodia's child. This signifies that she has become one of the "righteous"; her sexuality, transformed into motherhood, loses its "bourgeois" cultural traits.

Thus, Malva—like the female characters of the previously mentioned films—undergoes a transformation from the archetype of the Prostitute to the archetype of the Mother. Just like Pydorka, Dana, Vivdya, and Kateryna Dzvonar, Malva metaphorically embodies the concept of Ukraine within the socio-cultural paradigm allowed to artists by the ideological doctrine of Soviet poetic cinema.

The research problem of this article lies in identifying the main figurative and metaphorical structures of Ukrainian poetic cinema of the 1960s–1970s associated with female characters. Until now, female characters have not been studied comprehensively in terms of their feminine traits and the processes of transformation (metamorphosis) of those traits.

It can be noted that "the human figure in Ukrainian poetic cinema becomes a representation not so much of their class, as of the people, or more broadly—the land, the homeland." (*Pashchenko, 2015*) Turning to nation-building processes in Ukrainian cinema prompts a reassessment of historical stages, as well as the socio-cultural and political factors that influenced on-screen characters—factors that often dictated the themes and ideas that Ukrainian filmmakers were permitted to explore.

Hence, the female characters of Ukrainian poetic cinema—from the works of O. Dovzhenko to the new poetic visions of contemporary directors such as M. Illienko and O. Sanin—metaphorically represented Ukraine itself, often clashing with the Soviet policy aimed at shaping the notion of a "unified Soviet people".

The current state of Ukrainian culture and political reality dictates new conditions for the representation of Ukrainians on screen, articulating new ideas and the necessity for the emergence of different male and female characters. For this reason, a critical reassessment of Ukrainian cinema in its historical evolution encourages artistic and scholarly reflection on the key concepts of contemporary Ukrainian film art.

Conclusion

A cultural and historical analysis of the 1960s–1970s in the history of Ukrainian cinema reveals a clear regulation in the portrayal of feminine traits on screen. Women more often

appeared in roles stripped of sexual appeal. Female characters in poetic cinema largely replaced schematic and one-dimensional screen types of Ukrainian women.

In Serhii Parajanov's *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, two women—Marichka and Palahna—create the existential dimension of the main character Ivan's life, who is doomed to die after losing Marichka. Their opposing feminine traits—tender and sensual—metaphorically reflect two distinct levels of human existence. For Ivan, the loss of a special, sacred level could not be compensated for by the sensual, erotic one.

The phenomenon of poetic cinema gave rise to female figures that, through their feminine features, increasingly embodied the idea of Ukraine's political and cultural fate and uniqueness. In these characters, directors encoded their reflections on both the colonial past and colonial present. The idea of an independent Ukraine was disguised behind familiar folkloric types, marked by distinctive ethnic features grounded in deep-rooted archetypes, which later acquired ethno-cultural and national connotations.

In their films, Parajanov, Illienko, and Mykolaichuk frequently employed the principle of metamorphosis in female images – the transformation of their feminine features or the transfer of such traits from one female character to another. For instance, in *The White Bird with the Black Mark*, Yuri Illienko presents his own triune concept of Ukraine through the archetypes of the Virgin, the Mother, and the Prostitute, embodied in Dany, Kateryna Dzvonar, and Vivdya, respectively. The first and the last display sexual aspects of femininity associated with carnal love, while the Mother reveals non-sexual traits aimed at the spiritual expression of unconditional love. Malva from Mykolaichuk's *Babylon XX*, like the aforementioned characters, also undergoes a transformation from the archetype of the Prostitute to that of the Mother, and in her metaphorical essence embodies the concept of Ukraine within the socio-cultural paradigm permitted to the artists of poetic cinema by the Soviet ideological doctrine.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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