

# Neo-Poetic Film and its Representation of Ukraine's Intangible Cultural Heritage

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## Article abstract

I look at Ukrainian neo-poetic film and its relationship with ICH, exploring the efforts to renew approaches to achieve filmic expressions of independence, “Ukrainian-ness,” and grounded-ness in the national aspect. To articulate the renewal of aesthetic and stylistic solutions for neo-poetic works in the 21st century, I first review the principles characteristic for the classics of Ukrainian poetic cinema of the 1960s. Based on an interest in folklore, ancient traditions, authentic details of daily life, the poetic cinema of the “Sixtiers” (шістдесятники) was saturated with deeply ambiguous content and engaged in poeticization and mythologization. This approach resonated with the later conceptualization of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. From the beginning of the 2000s, we see a change in approach in cinematic techniques for the re-creation of myths, rituals, aesthetic expressions of everyday life, and colourful ethnographic elements of Ukrainian culture. The film itself (beyond the physical medium) becomes (in)tangible cultural heritage.

# NEO-POETIC FILM AND ITS REPRESENTATION OF UKRAINE'S INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

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The beginning of the 21st century was marked by tectonic shifts in diverse spheres for the people on earth. This period of change became turbulent as the foundations of human worldviews, value systems and deeply held assumptions were shaken. As the parameters of existence became relativized to the extremes, the need for stable anchors in our sense of reality was correspondingly increased. Intensifying processes of globalization are no less important markers of this period. Great leaps in the development of technology and tendencies for worldwide integration led to the intensification of cultural contacts among countries, peoples, communities and individuals. Doubtless, such transnational and transcultural communication enriches civilizing relationships, creates conditions for diffusion of ideas and values and opens a worldwide audience to the uniqueness of authentic cultures, worldviews of various nations and nationalities, and local communities. At the same time, these integrative processes are associated with a kind of “dissipation of culture,” with the danger of gradual unification and dissolving the unique spiritual heritage of once distinct ethnic groups.

It has been noted that markers of identity acquire particularly great importance in existentially difficult situations. In this context, it is obvious why feelings of belonging to the national body have taken on a greater gravity and meaning in Ukraine after the treaty-breaking full-scale Russian invasion of the sovereign territories of Ukraine. Ukraine is a country with an ancient history, language and traditions. The significance of one's culture has intensified by degrees of magnitude in Ukrainian society with the beginning of the war. Along with globalizing pressures, over a background of

cultural polyphony, the issues of preserving the spiritual heritage, updating the corpus of signs of distinctiveness, emphasizing signs of difference/uniqueness in the conceptualization of reality and cultural inheritance all became exceedingly relevant. In the context of military engagement, the question of safeguarding the spiritual heritage has been elevated to a high priority. The matter of protection of monuments of culture and art, which combine material and spiritual expression, has arisen with all urgency.

Given the extreme polarization of political and economic forces in the world, naturally the significance of the cultural base grows. In Ukraine's case, the cultural base is comprised of profound spiritual treasures accrued by many generations of Ukrainians. Awareness of cultural and ancestral belonging is a major component of identification. After all, culture is an important factor influencing behavior, perception of reality and perspective. It is a resource for reformatting cultural meanings and narratives, for framing the common historical memory of society.

In recent decades, processes of political transformation have been prominent in Ukraine. They involve great challenges, sometimes revolutionary changes in social consciousness, as well as adjusting the spiritual and practical aspects of the people's worldview, including its normative and regulatory functions. These difficult processes are engaged through culture and all this is taking place against the background of resisting the terrifying threats of wartime. The experiences imprinted in our collective cultural and historical memory form a kind of "cultural archive," and are manifested in works of art – in audiovisual screen arts particularly.

For more than 100 years, primarily in films of poetic cinema, Ukrainian cinematography has been preserving and artistically interpreting elements of Ukrainian spiritual ancestry, customs, traditions and archaic rituals inherited from the people's great-grandfathers. Filmic reconstructions of these cultural elements are based on ethnographic and folkloric sources. Delving into the ancient layers of Ukrainian views of the world and packaging them non-trivially in poetic screen expression contribute to the preservation of the precious codes of national culture. A great many components of intangible culture have been subjected to artistic interpretation in Ukrainian poetic cinema, including scenarios of sacred rituals, characteristic clothing, folk traditions, elements of mytho-fairytale folk art, peculiarities of aesthetic vision, principles of worldview, as well as customs that reflect traditional understandings of the world's coexistence with nature. Indeed, Ukrainian poetic cinema can be recognized as a meaningful component of the national spiritual heritage, a tool for its preservation and popularization.

Cinematographic works incorporating an iconography of events have been and continue to be in high demand during the most dramatic turning points in history. This was the case in the 1960s, against the backdrop of powerful state prohibitions aimed at dissolving the Ukrainian language and national distinctiveness in favor of the abstract concept of “Soviet people.”<sup>1</sup>

The current transformations of intangible cultural heritage are taking place against the background of military actions, which emphatically demonstrate the fragility of the material world: Human lives, villages, cities, natural landscapes and architectural monuments are destroyed by the aggressive enemy shelling. Monuments to historical personalities (Taras Shevchenko, Bohdan Khmelnyts'kyi, Princess Olha, Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi and others) have been obscured behind sandbags, a commonplace now in the urban landscape. They are almost invisible under the accumulation of protective scaffolding, and so the contours of these figures are graphically outlined on the vertical faces of the temporary structures designed to help protect these physical memory objects from air strikes.

This is an example of how certain filters can reveal the intensity of values. Currently, these include ensuring human life, psychosocial support, compensation for trauma, uplifting narratives and appeals to feelings from past experiences. The principal strategy of the “artistic front” is to engage with the urgent demand for anything that can constructively raise the adaptive potential of the individual. It is no accident that in modern contexts of confrontation, painted murals, films, theatrical performances and other products of spiritual culture expressed in material form have become more pronounced in public life. As creators or guides of authentic meanings, artists produce images of events, generating artistic projections of their own experiences on canvas, on the walls of city buildings or in film, thus archiving content-laden images of the traumatic experience of the time of war. In this way, day by day, artists refute the cliché “when the cannons roar, the muses are silent.”<sup>2</sup> At the same time, there is an increased societal desire to watch and listen to Ukrainian content. The overwhelming success

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1. The years after Stalin's death in 1953, particularly the early 1960s, are known as “the thaw” (відлига) in Ukrainian culture. It was characterized by an important, if limited, flowering of artistic and (to a lesser degree) political expression. Artists and activists of that time are often called “sixtiers.” They were mostly repressed shortly thereafter.
  2. This phrase, which circulated in Soviet times, is a paraphrase of a Latin aphorism attributed to Cicero “*Silent enim leges inter arma.*” Western and Ukrainian references to the phrase often contradict it.

of Ukrainian films at prestigious international film festivals confirms this convincingly. Cultural ambassadors also testify to the demand for classical Ukrainian artistic works which allow a better understanding of Ukrainian mentality, character and history.

The films of Ukrainian cinematic poets of the sixties, harnessing the power of folk creativity, myths and fairy tales, fed on folklore and mystical roots and resisted the dominant discourse of “homo sovieticus.” They rejected the dominance of the verbal in filmmaking. Such “dyslexia” was perceived as a manifestation of dissent – dissidence – a rejection of reliance on words as the main form of communication. Engaging with Ukrainian tradition was interpreted as a form of resistance to Soviet homogenization. This had also been the case in the 1930s. Since the beginning of the 21st century new impulses of aggravation and contradiction (military, political and economic) inspire resistance to the leveling of identity, counterbalancing the centripetal tendencies of globalization.

In a certain sense, Ukrainian poetic cinema captures the quintessence of spiritual heritage in a symbolic form. It is an effective means of actualizing its material and immaterial aspects, because it deals with universal values: it solves the problems of good and evil, life and death, explores the resource of love and the importance of harmonious coexistence with the world, which increases significantly with the real threat of loss of life. Even just for these reasons, Ukrainian poetic cinema and its renewed modalities merit more detailed study.

Ukrainian poetic cinema was an artistic trend that arose at the height of the cultural thaw of the 1960s. It was rooted in the cinematography of Oleksandr Dovzhenko and Ivan Kavalieridze in the 1920s, and has now inspired creative emulations in the 21st century.

The authors of the new poetic cinematic works are clearly inspired by the experience of their predecessors, showing not only a national-spiritual kinship, but also a tendency to explore certain mytho-symbolic structures, to use poetic rhythms and the language of symbolic images. These films are not abstract; on the contrary, they are the extreme concretization of the collective knowledge of the people, their ethnic and historical memory. The poetic cinema of the 1960s followed the modernist vectors of the period of relatively free creativity of the late 1920s. Preferring poetic expression over explicit meaning and verbal content, it became a latent avant-garde film. This poetic movement shook the imperative of narrative and the dominance of the word over content. It opposed the priorities of

the communal over the nationally authentic individual. Ukrainian poetic cinema of the 60s was an expression of resistance to Soviet assimilation, a peculiar form of dissidence. This resistance was symbolic, fueled by the codes of national culture. It was a portal leading beyond suffocating reality into the grand dimensions of a mystical, mysterious, frightening-but-attractive parallel world, where strong feelings raged and love defeated death. The subjects of the films engaged with the phenomena of memory (primarily genetic memory) as communicated through symbols. Among the most striking examples are *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1964, *Тіні забутих предків*) by Sergei Parajanov, *Stone Cross* (1968, *Камінний хрест*) by Leonid Osyka, and Borys Ivchenko's film *The Lost Deed* (1972, *Пропала грамота*), which remained under pressure from Soviet censorship until the early 1980s.

The film directors of the sixties, with their creative interpretations of worldviews and traditions rooted in the Ukrainian way of life and folk art, served as models in the following historical periods. Ivan Mykolaichuk's film *Babylon XX* (1979, *Вавилон XX*) is a strong example of this, where, in the conservative/stagnant socio-political climate of the 1970s, he attempted to ironically subvert the depiction of the peasantry as «the bearer of the spirit of the nation.» A polyphonic image of a village called Babylon, during the Soviet collectivization of the 1930s, is conveyed through a gallery of iconic characters, representatives of various ideas, ideologies and lifestyles. This was combined with references to the canonical tradition of the Ukrainian *vertep* (nativity performances, see Sendetskyi in this volume). The events of the film take place as if on two levels - a distant one, where the dimensions of everyday life are reflected and an upper, more metaphysical zone, focusing on high, elitist-poetic, philosophical creation. The symbolism in the film is quite eclectic, containing allusions to authentic folklore, biblical myths and layers of cultural mythology.

Relying on the ambiguity of symbols and their diverse connotations, Ukrainian film poets of the 1960s and 1970s productively evaded the dogmas of normative Socialist Realist aesthetics. In tension with the standard realist screen works, Ukrainian poetic cinema brought visual expressiveness, signs and symbols unique to the nation, as well as ethnographic and surrealistic motifs to the fore.

To be sure, the multiplicity of ambiguous expressive depictions in screen images sometimes generated pushback. For example, there is the oft-repeated story of the wedding scene of protagonists Ivan and Palahna in Parajanov's *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* from 1964. In this

scene, a wooden yoke for oxen is ceremonially placed around the necks of the bride and groom. This is a heavily saturated metaphor or poetic association to symbolize the couple moving forward together, documented in many variants in traditional wedding rituals, when their hands are tied together with a ceremonial towel or a woven belt as the bride is led to her husband's home where they will live. Tetiana Haievska emphasizes that wedding traditions, retaining remnants of magical thinking, reflect concepts associated with the shift to married life (Haievska 2016: 108). Researchers have repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that no Ukrainian village actually had a tradition of being harnessed together with an oxen yoke. This is a pure invention of the director. However, this symbolic act turned out to be completely consistent with the ethical norms of national morality, so it later took root, updating and diversifying the modern wedding ceremony. As Robert Lakatos remarks, "Parajanov uses existing symbols in this culture, but also, penetrating into the depths of its spirit, creates new ones" (Lakatos 2001: 42).

Times changed. Against the background of paradigmatic transformations in the social space of the 1980s, a reorientation of ideological, political, epistemological and cultural vectors took place, naturally leading to the renewal of poetic screen thinking. Ukrainian poetic films of the late 1980s bear the imprint of cultural shock from the rapid change of social and political coordinates, sensational incriminations and the fall of the Iron Curtain. The unfamiliar situation of more openness to the world provoked such defensive reactions as falling back on the roots of tradition, inspiring a kind of "fundamentalist" period in Ukrainian cinema. Iuri Ilienکو's film *Straw Bells* (1987, *Солом'яні дзвони*) serves as an exemplary experiment in the (re)actualization of the modernist matrices of Ukrainian poetic cinema in the artistic and aesthetic context of the late 1980s. However, this and other attempts to directly revive the cinematic poetics and models of the 1960s did not prove to be very successful. The search for new forms, symbols and meanings developed more effectively as Ukraine's independence approached.

In Iuri Ilienکو's film *Swan Lake: The Zone* (1989, *Лебедине озеро: Зона*), he tried to combine the aesthetic principles of poetic cinema with subject matter relevant for the 1990s. Rejecting the dominance of the verbal in cinema, he portrayed the history of the life, love and death of the Man who finds himself in opposition to society. The large monument of a hammer and sickle, in which the hero hides, is an emblem of the era, a metaphor for society as a prison, the essential homelessness of the individual, his loitering

around the peripheries of criminal structures. This “new mythology” testifies to wandering through the labyrinths of the author’s own soul, the comprehension of the traumatic experience of meeting the Other and the Other within himself. The active use of Christian and biblical symbols in opposition to the emblems of the Soviet government was meant to demonstrate the revival of spirituality, the rejection of passive existence in the realities of an imperfect and hostile world.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the renewed poetic cinema in Ukraine produced its own philosophical, epistemological and aesthetic guidelines, determined by the peculiarities of the national, social and cultural situation in this transitional period. The 1990s became a kind of bifurcation point marking two paths in the further development of Ukrainian poetic cinema.

On the one hand, given the background of the intense creative revival, the poetic cinema of the 1990s invoked ethnocentric complexes, unusual metaphors and semantically ambiguous insoluble discourse. Retreating into the archaic, there was a renewal of the metaphysics of feelings and emotions. In the poetic films of Natalya Motuzko, *Miracle in the Land of Oblivion* (1991, *Диво в краю забуття*) and *The Voice of the Grass* (1992, *Голос трави*), we can see such immersions into the unnerving and uncanny as a retransmission of the archaic national spiritual experience. The focus is on the form of expression: meditative and dreamy, charming, suggestive, which leads the viewer out of the rounds of everyday life. In this way, relying on the irrational, appealing to the sensory and emotional register, poetry in general and film poetry in particular, characteristically achieves unconscious resonances.

On the other hand, the spread of postmodern artistic reflections, which by this time had already developed into an established intellectual fashion in the countries of Western Europe and America, became fundamental for the screen practice of Ukrainian film poets in the 1990s. The new postmodern thinking inspired a number of bold arthouse experiments.

The new encounter with the poetic in Ukrainian cinema is associated with dynamic visual models focused on manifestations of creative freedom, irony, play, carnivalesque, intertextuality, collage and allusion, with appeals to the codes of diverse cultures. The complexities of this transitional period in society led to the adjustment of aesthetics in the national cinematographic discourse, based not so much on the classical mytho-poetic tradition as on the trends of the time.



An example of creating a new aesthetic format was Mykhailo Illienko's film *Waiting for Cargo on the Fuzhou Run Near the Pagoda* (1993, *Очікуючи вантаж на рейді Фуцжоу біля пагоди*), which combined poetic speech with elements of irony and play. Rejecting the dominance of the rational, the author appeals to fairy tales, ancient mythological ideas, weaving them into the "new mythology" of the early 1990s. This film presents a carnival of characteristic characters (Orest the village idiot, who is driven by the wind; the local woman Messalina-Otdushina and others), and humorous stories generating whole series of connotations. Fish rain from the sky. Ukrainian rural houses hide under the greenery of the trees. However, as we zoom in, we see that these trees are not commonplace cherries or pears, but actually palm trees. The absurdity of such combinations is a marker of the postmodern worldview.

The mute fool Orest's departure across the ocean to America represents an attempt to escape from the captivity of stereotypes, stability and inertia. The artist character, on the other hand, remains in his native village. Having lost his sight, he paints with the colors of his heart. With this imagery, the filmmaker clearly communicates his stance about the place and role of the artist.

The film *Judenkreis: The Eternal Wheel* (1996, *Judenkreis, або Вічне колесо*), directed by Vasili Dombrovsky, also fits this pattern and contains strong examples of poetic speech. It pulls together fragments of mythological themes combined into a series of short stories, structurally united around the image of the rag-picker (the «eternal Jew» or the long-lived memorable Tiresias). The film draws content from the Lives of the Saints, from ironically reinterpreted cultural myths of Don Juan and from Taras Shevchenko's poem "Kateryna."

In the bitter irony of the 1990s we see nihilistic attitudes and attempts to rethink the body of cultural values and produce new meanings. Evidence of the engagement of Ukrainian poetic cinema with postmodern discourse can be seen in its use of parody, grotesque, bold manipulations of established texts (folklore, classical quotations, myths and national cultural traditions) – sometimes to the point of absurdity – and the neutralization of excessive pathos by strengthening irony. This path in Ukrainian poetic cinema practically converged with the neo-avant-garde.

The real flourishing of neo-poetic cinema took place in the first decade of the 2000s, when the spread of digital video and other technological innovations opened new horizons of spectacle, new prospects for creating

a photographically convincing, coloristically perfect pixel images. There was no longer need for any reference to the physical reality of the «solid» world. Therefore, surrealistic intentions, mystical images mixed with the contents of the national «collective unconscious,” motifs and images from the dictionary/museum/anthology of codes of national culture could be embodied in unprecedented ways.

Today, with its trends towards the visualization of culture, when, according to Marshall McLuhan's apt phrase: «man was given an eye for an ear” (the eye takes over the functions of the ear), the new poetic cinema has received additional potential for propounding picturesqueness, magnificence, luxury in molding the three-dimensional space.

Another feature of neo-poetic cinema is related to the acceleration of the rhythm of modern people's life and, accordingly, their experience of duration and tempo. Therefore, the general trend of filmmaking has been to make screen action more dynamic. Energetic intra-frame montage has become characteristic, often involving shorter scenes.

Being aware of the contingent value of broad generalizations, I dare to define the trinity of features that distinguish the neo-poetic films of the beginning of the 21st century: the *dominance of the visual*, with a luxurious pixelated modulation; the *dynamism* of assembly and scene editing; a marked *postmodern style of thinking*, replete with ironic re-evaluation and somewhat desacralizing of the traditional cultural and spiritual codes. This highly relativized matrix of values and meanings correlates with changes in attitudes to such basic poetic concerns as death and birth, gender, love, the material universe, as well as a harmonious coexistence with the natural world and with the universe. The postmodern worldview thus has a significant impact on the form of poetic cinematography as it was re-actualized at the beginning of the 21st century.

The new poetic cinema can be described in some respects as following the “school” of poetic filmmaking of the 1960s. Oles Sanin's film *Mamay* (2002, *Мамай*) can be attributed to this movement. Yuri Ilyenko's film *A Prayer for Hetman Mazepa* (2002, *Молитва за гетьмана Мазену*) also partly applies, as does the film *Toloka* (*Толока*) by Mykhailo Illienko, started almost at the same time but completed only in 2020.

Sanin's *Mamay* is based upon two epic traditions – Ukrainian and Tatar. The author's version of the legend about this character in Ukrainian folklore, a Cossack named Mamay, is based on the *duma* “The Escape of the Three Brothers from Azov.” It is interpolated with elements of a Crimean

Tatar epic song of the Dervishes about three valiant Mamluks. Citations, collages of various plots (practically mirror images of each other), the use of euphemistic names, signs and symbols, and melodic elements of songs and speech all form a kind of “anthology” or “collection.” In this “symbolic museum” the codes of the different cultures coexist, forming a kind of transcultural dialogue. The symbol of the Golden Singing Cradle – a sacred totem of the Tatar family – coexists organically in the film with the signs of a new era: the dried-up sea, for example, is a frightening symbol of the earth’s ecological exhaustion. Love, enmity between brothers, opposition of national “clans,” a child conceived from inter-ethnic love, each constitute a reinterpretation of the usual (customary) values.

In the symbolic coda of the film: the Cossack Mamay (translated from Turkic, his name means «nobody») sits on the borders between the lands in a pose canonized by paintings of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Holding a musical instrument, he seems to be using the power of an artistic message to support the status quo between hostile «brothers,» who insidiously condemned him to death. This visual image, which appeared as a frankly ironic symbolization, had providential potential, given the very real socio-political events that unfolded in the 2010s – from the aggressive confrontation of 2014 to the direct military invasion of a “fraternal neighbor” into Ukraine in February 2022. The neo-poetic cinema of Ukraine, in opposition to the realist discourse, demonstrates completely modern interpretations of kinship, love, betrayal, death and long dying, existence on the edge, life in the margins. Therefore, this neo-poetic work vividly and convincingly testifies to the change of philosophical approaches to being and non-being.

This observation about the basic categories of being also resonates clearly in Illienko’s film *A Prayer for Hetman Mazepa*, where the author introduces images of intense fantasy consistent with the school of poetic cinema. The director combines the incompatible: the baroque splendor of the setting and the titular reference to prayer combine perversions of hypertrophied physicality with an intense focus on death. In an expressive vortex of dynamic visual imagery (and sometimes imagelessness), occasionally moving into the register of the aesthetics of the disgusting, the director refutes and removes taboos, both at the level of perverse physicality and in terms of the ethical and aesthetic canons of cinematography, with its customary vocabulary on the screen.

In the early 2000s, this film, unusual for the average audience, was perceived primarily as advancing a postmodern worldview, characterized

by immersion in anti-aesthetics, fascination with corporeality, relativity of moral values and naturalist imagery. It presented a new narrative and a subjective take on history with its non-standard imagery. The film was seen as contributing to the formation of a novel form of art. In the context of today's war however, the conflict between Muscovite Tsar Peter I and Ukrainian Hetman Mazepa are perceived in a new way. The film exemplifies the prophetic potential of the director's vision.

Though directors Yuri Ilyenko and Oles Sanin argue that their films should not be labeled as neo-poetic cinema, the creative kinship is obvious. It is evident in their reliance on tradition and its versifications, associated with changes in cultural mythologies.

The most recent example of a transtemporal neo-poetic film narrative is Illienko's picture *Toloka* (2020) - a stylization (a pastiche in post-modernist terms) based on the poetry of Taras Shevchenko. The editing of the screen work attempts to communicate the intonation and rhythm of Shevchenko's poems. Well-known rhythmic verbal formulas are used, in particular: "That Kateryna's house is built on a platform" ("Ї тієї Катерини хата на помісті"). The film offers a quintessence of the history of Ukraine from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present in a concise summary of events, some of them factual, some fictional, all presented symbolically. The filmic story is narrated by an unusual character – a simple rural Ukrainian house. The house "speaks" in the voice of Raisa Nedashkivska, an actress who is perhaps the most representative female figure for Ukrainian poetic cinema.

Two central symbolic images coexist in the film *Toloka* constituting the core of the poetic narrative: the first is the woman Kateryna from Shevchenko's poem (a female image that metaphorically represents the fate of Ukraine), and the second is a Ukrainian village house. The home is like a phoenix rising from the ashes, able to survive an endless chain of military confrontations. In the film, the house is not just a building as an element of material culture, but a sacred symbol – a kind of antithesis of death, a complex semiotic construct, connoting the circle of life and the immortality of the incomparable Ukrainian people.

The radical move of the postmodernist is to combine the seemingly incongruous: the interweaving of lyrical-poetic, surrealist motifs into the historical narrative of a socio-political, distinctly rational thread. In *Toloka* (House building bee), the past becomes the subject of reconstruction with a powerful uplifting and mobilizing potential, helping audiences to find new meanings in the poeticized presentation of the events. Real life – History,

with its cataclysms – invades the world of the heroes of the poetic and lyrical drama. Paradoxically, the romantic-grotesque imagery of postmodernism turns out to be consonant with Shevchenko's multilayered thinking of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the whirlwind of turbulent events, Kateryna and her love are a constant: patience, loyalty to her chosen one and her children, expressing stability in the repeated revival of the ancestral nest, the house. "Life is short – from war – to war." This periodicity, a continuous series of repetitions, causes a special emotional state which contributes to the empathetic perception of the film. Rhythm and repetition can create the effect of a suggestive emotional swirling, drawing the viewers in.

Instead of a ceiling – the sky. The sun sets behind the posts and beams that will become the frame of the future house. Onto this skeleton, relatives, friends and neighbors must build walls from a mixture of clay, mount a roof and breathe a living soul into the home. Mischievous children, with their fun and games, are our guides in these scenes. The little ones are brought up in an atmosphere of mutual help, adopting the moral foundations of their ancestors and, most importantly, the highly poetic cult of honoring their people. Customary rituals are combined with paradoxical metaphors. The mystical elements of their worldview are enhanced by the poeticized screen images, the melody of the language, the authenticity or stylization of the reified components of culture (the juxtaposition of material objects, elements and colors of their folk clothing, wealth of their jewelry and decor).

Today, the war has prompted millions of Ukrainians to leave their homes. When families are destroyed and local populations are scattered around the world, the prospect of returning to the harmony of peaceful life through *toloka* is a powerful trigger for self-awareness, the restoration of historical memory and a code of positive thinking: a return to the origins of national consciousness, the seeds of genetic memory of the people.

It is striking how poetic rhythms in combination with historical and customary traditions work with completely modern material. Elements of mythopoetic speech can be seen in Dmytro Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk's family crime drama *Pamfir* (2022, *Памфір*). The film evokes the story of difficult relations within the family of a smuggler who returns with his earnings to his native Western Ukrainian border village on the eve of the Malanka holiday (New Year's on the Julian calendar, January 13th; see Sendetskyi in this volume). The director makes a screen reconstruction of the carnivalesque ritual into the compositional center of the picture. The performance of this

ceremonial extravaganza preserves its regional ethnographic characteristics. Preparations for the celebration are depicted in the film narrative and serve a background for the unfolding of the fabula, including the creation of stylized authentic masks and costumes for each participant as well as the mystical expression of the celebration itself. The core of the film *Pamfir* seems to have been conceived by the director as a self-sufficient artistic form, enriched with the traditions of celebration characteristic of the region, as early as in his documentary film *Krasna Malanka* (2013, *Красна Маланка*). Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk showed how artistic symbols and ritual objects used in an intense chthonic ritual action can become metaphors for the unity of man and nature.

The revival of poetic cinema in Ukraine's domestic screen space at the turn of the 21st century is caused, in my opinion, by several factors that are significant in the socio-cultural context of this time:

- the active introduction of digital image and sound processing and other technical innovations significantly enriched the palette of modern screen spectacles and opened new areas for poetic expression. In particular, in these cinematic formats, the transition between the real and fantasy could become much more fluid.
- postmodernist discourse, with its corresponding transformations of worldview, contributed to the rethinking of established values, the re-evaluations of ontological, ethical and aesthetic principles.
- radical changes in the perception of screen time, which led to more dynamic in-frame editing, and acceleration of the rhythm of the scenes in the films.
- the gradual return of cinematographers into the field of national security, expressions demonstrating the independence of Ukrainian culture, became noticeable in the 2010s in the context of the informational war and Russian ideological aggressiveness. At this time, culture and art became potent weapons, given the power of the artistic image and its relevance to the formation of national identity.
- the urgent need for elements of identification of a national character, an appeal to basic epistemological foundations as a challenge in times of military confrontation.

The poetic form in Ukrainian cinema reappears cyclically, specifically during the critical moments of national history. Further, these cinematic works correlate deeply with social and political reality. We can observe that neo-poetic cinematography replenishes the «museum of the symbolic,» the conventional dictionary/thesaurus/glossary of cultural images. In this way, it indirectly participates in the production and updating of the national

code. Moreover, during crises of identification, its nation-building potential is indisputable.

At the same time, it should be recognized that the complexity of the cinematic language of poetic pictures involves leitmotifs, refrains, parallels and consonances which are proposed in a non-linear course of events, as well as the disruption of the rational, logical and everyday. Such films require a certain level of conversance on the part of the viewer. This significantly narrows the base of initiated supporters and apologists of this cinematic style. Nonetheless, projects of Ukrainian film poetry, and works of neo-poetic cinema in particular, have a noble mission: they contribute to the introduction of Ukrainian culture into world contexts in a most direct and convincing way, through screen interpretations of Ukrainian worldviews, unique features of mentality and behavior which reflect key meanings and values from this centuries-old treasury of cultural heritage.

Having studied the mythopoetic cinematography of Ukraine as a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon that manifests the spiritual heritage of Ukrainians, it seems natural to introduce works of poetic cinematography as unique artifacts into practices for the protection of intangible cultural heritage.

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