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Images and Themes of World Literature in the Ukrainian Literary Space of the 19th and 20th Centuries: Specifics of Reception

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the specifics of the reception of artistic images of world literature in the Ukrainian literary space, to reveal their influence on the national consciousness and cultural values of Ukraine. The study employed the historical, literary, and comparative-typological approaches, which helped to consider the influence of world literary traditions on the works of Ukrainian writers. The findings of the study revealed that such figures as Prometheus, Orpheus, and Faust in the works of Ukrainian authors acquired new connotations corresponding to national and socio-cultural realities, reflecting the struggle, self-sacrifice, and desire for freedom. It was found that the reception of world themes enabled Ukrainian authors to comprehend historical challenges and social problems, as well as to create a unique literary tradition that combines universal and national values. The literary images of Prometheus symbolize the struggle for freedom, Orpheus is interpreted as an artist-prophet, and Faust represents the desire for self-knowledge and innovation. This demonstrates the multilayered nature of the Ukrainian literary space, which can convey profound aspects of social experience. It was also found that Ukrainian literature, transforming these world images, uses them as a tool for creating an original literary space that reflects both universal values and national uniqueness. The analysis confirmed that the reception of world motifs contributes to the development of a literary tradition that effectively reflects the historical and cultural realities of Ukraine, forming profound intertextual links between world and Ukrainian literature.

Keywords: *absurdity, antiquity, archetypes, identity, interpretation, symbolism*

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Introduction

The relevance of the study of images and themes of world literature, particularly ancient literature, in the Ukrainian literary context is conditioned by the major influence of world literary traditions on the development of national identity and cultural expression. Ukrainian literature has often transformed world ideas into its unique sociocultural reality, which contributed to the development of unique literary images and plots. In literature, especially poetry and drama, one can trace the intertwining of ancient and world motifs, which creates a multidimensional and profound cultural perspective. The study of this process allows not only to trace literary transformation, but also to discover new aspects of intercultural interaction and perception. Considering these aspects, the study contributed to the understanding of both the Ukrainian literary tradition and the way it is involved in the world literary discourse.

The issues of this topic are complex and cover global issues of cultural reception, specifically within literary processes. Not only was the influence of world images on Ukrainian literature observed, but also the transformation of these images in the national culture. At the same time, the analysis of this process opens national traditions to external influences and raises the question of the nature of the integration of such influences into the cultural space. Thematic identifiers of world literature, such as the motifs of antiquity, romanticism, and symbolism, through their reception in the works of Ukrainian authors, become a tool for a deeper understanding of the relationship between cultures. Consideration of this topic provides an opportunity to enrich literary discourse within the framework of an intercultural approach.

Previous studies emphasized the diversity of approaches to the study of this topic. Nalyvaiko (1988) analyzed Ukrainian literature in a comparative context with European literature, focusing on its identity and common features. The researcher pointed out how Ukrainian literature transforms world motifs, giving them national connotations. The study emphasized the significance of the mutual influence of Ukrainian and European literature in shaping the national style. Russova (2016) explored the influence of baroque motifs on Ukrainian literature, tracing their evolution from the 19th to the 21st century. The researcher focused on the symbolic and religious aspects that the Baroque brought to the literary process. This helped to illustrate how the Baroque heritage enriches contemporary Ukrainian literature. Slipushko and Katuzhynska (2021) studied the Baroque features directly on the example of Lesya Ukrainka's work. In addition, Slipushko and Zlotnyk-Shahina (2021) examined the concept of Prometheism in the works of Taras Shevchenko and Lesya Ukrainka. The researchers showed how the image of Prometheus is transformed,

acquiring the features of struggle. The study focused on the significance of this symbol for the shaping of national identity and literary tradition.

Filonenko (2011) examined the development of mass literature in Ukraine, its genre features and gender aspects. The researcher also analyzed the effects of social changes on the genre transformations of mass literature. Filonenko's findings showed how mass literature has become an essential element of Ukrainian culture. Zhukovska (2021) analyzed the myth of Cassandra in the works of Lesya Ukrainka, focusing on the significance of myth as a means of cultural continuity and literary innovation. A. Galavan (2019) studied mythological symbols in Lesya Ukrainka's drama *The Forest Song*, examining how the author used mythology to create universal and at the same time national images. The researcher focused on how symbols of nature and mythical images reflect the cultural outlook of the Ukrainian people. Umanets (2020) analyzed the Faustian theme in Ukrainian literature, considering it a symbol of the search for truth and intellectual freedom. The researcher emphasized how Faustian motifs are transformed into national conditions and become an expression of the Ukrainian spirit. The study emphasized the value of global themes as a source for creative interpretation by Ukrainian authors. Vasyliiev (2019) analyzed the phenomenon of genre conversion in contemporary European drama, considering how traditional genres are transformed under the influence of new cultural and social conditions. The researcher explored the processes of transition between genres and the ways in which classical forms are transformed in the context of contemporary trends.

The gaps in previous studies necessitate further analysis of the interaction between the images of world literature and the Ukrainian tradition, specifically in the context of national rethinking and integration of these images into a specific cultural space. The purpose of the present study was to identify new aspects of the influence of images and themes of world literature on the Ukrainian literary heritage and their reception in the national tradition. The objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To analyze the artistic images of world literature and their place in Ukrainian literature.
2. To investigate the transformation of images and themes of world literature in the works of Ukrainian authors.

Methodology

The study was a historical and literary one, as well as a comparative and typological one, as it analyses the transformation of world literary images within Ukrainian culture, focusing on the reception and reinterpretation of universal archetypes in literary works. The timeframe covered the period from the 19th to the

late 20th century, which helped to trace how Ukrainian authors transformed classical images and themes in the context of cultural and historical changes.

The research materials included a wide range of Ukrainian literary works that trace the influence of global, specifically ancient, motifs and images. These included poems and dramatic works, namely Taras Shevchenko's *"The Caucasus"*, Lesya Ukrainka's *"Cassandra"*, *"Orpheus' Miracle"*, *"Orgy"*, and *"The Forest Song"*; novels and short stories, namely Olga Kobylanska's *"The Princess"*, Ivan Franko's *"Stolen Happiness"*, Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi's *"Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors"*, Ivan Nechui-Levytskyi's *"Mykola Dzheria"*, Vasyl Stefanyk's *"The Stone Cross"*, Oksana Zabuzhko's *"The Alien"*; and poetry collections, namely Pavlo Tychyna's *"Sunny Clarinets"*, *"Instead of Sonnets and Octaves"*, and prose works, Ihor Kostetskyi's *"You Own the Whole World"*, Mykola Khvylovyi's *"I (Romance)"*, and Valeriy Shevchuk's novel *"The House on the Mountain"*. The study also included research on literary criticism that examined the interaction of Ukrainian literature with world classics and covered the specifics of national comprehension and reinterpretation of universal images and themes. The data was collected through a thorough analysis of literary texts, with special attention paid to the study of key images of world literature, Prometheus, Orpheus, and Faust. Such choice of materials enabled the exploration of the interaction of national literature with universal archetypes, as well as to identify differences in the reception of world themes in the Ukrainian context, specifically in connection with the historical and social challenges faced by Ukrainian society.

Analyzing the texts, several methods were employed, each of which enabled a more in-depth exploration of various aspects of literary images. The comparative method provided an opportunity to compare the interpretation of images. This helped to determine how figures such as Prometheus or Orpheus acquired new features. The typological approach was employed to identify common and distinctive features of European and Ukrainian literary traditions. This approach helped to identify general trends and their specific manifestations in the Ukrainian context. The use of typological analysis helped to identify the specific features of national literary specificity and its connection with the wider world context.

Semantic analysis played a vital role in uncovering the profound symbolism in the texts, especially in the works of Lesya Ukrainka and Pavlo Tychyna. This method was employed to analyze the significance of images related to spiritual search and national self-discovery. The findings of this study were also interpreted in the cultural and historical context, which gave insights into how world literary images were received. This helped to determine their role and spiritual values, which are significant for understanding the Ukrainian literary tradition.

Results

Artistic imagery of world literature in the Ukrainian literary context

Ukrainian literature has always actively interacted with world literary traditions, specifically with ancient imagery that acquired unique connotations in the

Ukrainian national context (Kalantaievska, 2016). Artistic images of world literature, such as Prometheus, Orpheus, and Faust, were transformed in the Ukrainian cultural space, becoming symbols that not only expressed universal themes but also reflected national values, worldview, and identity. The image of Prometheus, which symbolizes struggle and self-sacrifice, in Ukrainian literature acquired features that resonate with the ideas of the struggle for independence and national freedom. In the works of Ukrainian writers, this figure acquired new cultural and social connotations, integrating universal values into the national context. It was especially developed in the literature of the early 20th century, specifically in the poetry and drama of Lesya Ukrainka. In her dramatic poem *Cassandra*, Prometheus appears as a heroic figure who embodies strength of spirit and indomitability in the face of adversity, expressing the individual and collective will to freedom, which became a central theme in Ukrainian literature of the period. The Ukrainian interpretation of this image emphasized not only personal heroism, but also a profound social responsibility to the community, which is often manifested through the motif of sacrifice and devotion. Slipushko and Zlotnyk-Shahina (2021), and Galchuk (2017) noted that the image of Prometheus has become a symbol of national identity, which is manifested in both the themes and stylistic features of the works of Ukrainian authors.

This symbolism is especially evident in the works of Taras Shevchenko, specifically in his poem *The Caucasus*, where Prometheus is the personification of inexhaustible strength, heroism, and indomitability that resists repressive forces. Taras Shevchenko presented Prometheus as an unconquerable force that, despite all the trials, does not give up and continues to fight, becoming a symbol of opposition to the colonial policy of the Russian Empire towards the Caucasus and Ukraine. In *The Caucasus*, Prometheus, chained and torn apart by an eagle, is a metaphor for endless suffering and struggle, representing both personal and national courage. As in classical mythology, Prometheus in Taras Shevchenko's work symbolizes light and knowledge, but in the Ukrainian context he also became a symbol of national will and readiness to sacrifice for the sake of greater ideals (Tarasenko et al., 2023).

The image of Orpheus in Lesya Ukrainka's oeuvre acquired a symbolic meaning, especially in the dramatic essay *"Orpheus' Miracle"*. This work, which belongs to the so-called *"Triptych"* created by the author in Egypt in 1913, is a unique interpretation of the myth of Orpheus, where the mythological hero becomes the personification of an artist capable of awakening public consciousness and inspiring creative work even in the most challenging conditions. In this literary piece, Orpheus, although exhausted and despondent, continues to play his flute to inspire others to build the city wall. According to Koloshuk (2008), this scene symbolizes the ability of

art to penetrate human hearts and, much like Orpheus' magical power, to inspire people to sacrifice and work together for greater ideals, such as the protection of their community. This piece also contains elements of criticism of a passive public that has lost faith in its heroes. Lesya Ukrainka's Orpheus is not only an artist, but also a prophet who calls people to action, but they leave him alone with his mission. This emphasizes the theme of social indifference and the inability to appreciate the artist's creative contribution until it becomes necessary for the survival of the community. Thus, Lesya Ukrainka reinterpreted the ancient image of Orpheus, adding Ukrainian national color to it, and gave it new symbolic connotations, such as pain for the neglected culture and a call to awaken national consciousness.

In Lesya Ukrainka's drama "*Orgy*", the image of Orpheus once again takes on a symbolic meaning, reflecting the fate of an artist living and working in a hostile environment. The protagonist of the work, the poet Antaeus, who refuses to sing for the Roman conquerors, becomes the embodiment of indomitable strength of spirit and refusal to submit to the oppressors. The image of Orpheus here symbolizes both the creative power of the artist and his struggle to preserve national culture, even at the cost of his life. Antaeus faces a hard choice: either to abandon his artistic mission and adapt to the occupation conditions, or to stay true to his beliefs, risking his life. Lesya Ukrainka used this image to emphasize the tragic fate of an artist who becomes a stranger in his home country because he refuses to make concessions and compromise with the conquerors who destroy the culture of his people. The Orphean symbol in "*Orgy*" embodies the power of the artistic word, which can withstand pressure and encourages the awakening of national consciousness.

In later works, such as *The Forest Song*, the idea of Orpheus reappears through the character of Lukasz, whose music can enchant and heal, but whose personal weakness and inability to resist temptation led to tragedy. Here, as in other works by L. Ukrainka, the image of Orpheus is associated not only with creativity, but also with the profound moral choice of the artist, who must either sacrifice himself for a greater purpose or risk losing his power. Thus, through the multifaceted image of Orpheus, Lesya Ukrainka revealed the essence of the artist who faces a choice between spiritual destiny and his personal weaknesses, emphasizing his role in shaping national identity and the struggle for cultural revival.

The specific feature of the Ukrainian reception of Orpheus is the emphasis on the theme of national survival and cultural preservation. The Orpheus theme in Ukrainian poetry has become the basis for reflections on the preservation of national identity in the face of a cultural crisis. Orpheus, who descends to the underworld to return his beloved, becomes an image in Ukrainian literature that symbolizes the

preservation and transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to the next. This image is also used to express the idea of national rebirth, which has become a central theme for many Ukrainian writers who have sought to restore a destroyed cultural tradition in the face of external influence.

The Faustian theme, symbolizing the constant search for knowledge and truth, is of particular significance in Ukrainian literature. It becomes a metaphor for understanding existential searches and moral conflicts. For instance, in the work of Oksana Zabuzhko, specifically in her novel *"The Alien"*, this metaphor is revealed through the intertextual elements of the classic Faust story but acquires a modern and feminist meaning. In this work, the protagonist Rada D., a female Faust, seeks absolute knowledge, trying to comprehend the essence of life and human nature, which makes her image parallel to the classical Faust. According to Myslyva (2012), Zabuzhko used a *"Faustian personality type"* characterized by a thirst for knowledge, which emphasizes the heroine's internal struggle with moral dilemmas. Rada strives to understand and control other people, but her search for absolute knowledge and power has a destructive effect, alienating her from others and turning her into an 'alien', a stranger even to her own society.

Zabuzhko's novel contains a classic element of a *"deal with the devil"*, where the Messenger plays the role of Mephistopheles, offering Rada eternal life and the ability to create masterpieces in exchange for renouncing ordinary human existence. This element enabled the author to emphasize the heroine's struggle between personal ambition and spiritual freedom. As in the case of Goethe's Faust, Rada is on the verge of a life crisis and seeks salvation in knowledge, but this path turns into an existential trap, where achieving absolute freedom requires abandoning moral values and close relationships. Through this motif, Zabuzhko raised the question of the nature of creative freedom and its consequences, which reflected the postcolonial context of the idea of the loss of cultural identity and the struggle for it. Zabuzhko also modernized the Faustian theme by presenting the protagonist as an independent and ambitious woman who seeks to understand the world but at the same time experiences an internal conflict between creative inspiration and humanity. As stated in the text, Rada sees people as *"material"* for her creative pursuits, which gives the Faustian motif a touch of manipulation and egocentrism inherent in the modern artist who considers art to be above social responsibilities. This motif emphasized the *"duality"* of the artist's personality, where the artist struggles with the *"human"*, reflecting the complex process of creation, as well as the spiritual dialectic of the internal struggle between the human and the divine.

In Ukrainian literature, the Faustian theme raises the question of responsibility towards society and culture, which is raised through the opposition of intellectual development and moral principles. This theme became a key one for Ukrainian literature of the 20th century, especially in the works of those authors who sought a way for national renewal and cultural revival. Reflecting internal conflicts and moral search, the Faustian theme contributed to the deepening of the Ukrainian literary discourse based on the concepts of personal and social responsibility.

By drawing on ancient and European images, such as Prometheus, Orpheus, and Faust, Ukrainian literature created a unique tradition of interpreting and transforming these world archetypes. Table 1 summarizes how these classical images were reinterpreted by authors and implemented in their works, emphasizing the interconnection between the global and Ukrainian literary traditions.

Table 1. Transformation of classical images of world literature in the Ukrainian literary context

Figure	Original meaning	Ukrainian interpretation	Examples of Ukrainian works
Prometheus	A symbol of the struggle against the Gods, a bearer of light and knowledge who sacrifices himself for the sake of people; Expresses disobedience, the desire for freedom and knowledge	In Ukrainian literature, Prometheus symbolizes the struggle for freedom and independence. He embodies the strength of spirit, indomitability, and readiness for self-sacrifice in the name of the nation and ideals.	"Caucasus" by Taras Shevchenko, "Cassandra" by Lesya Ukrainka, "Moses" by Ivan Franko, "Prometheus" by Pavlo Tychyna
Orpheus	A mythological hero, musician, and poet, capable of enchanting even nature and the Gods with his music. A symbol of eternal love and art that conquers death	Orpheus becomes a symbol of creativity that can inspire and awaken social consciousness. He also embodies the pain of cultural decline and the call for national revival	"The Orpheus' Miracle", "The Forest Song", "Orgy" by Lesia Ukrainka, "Grieving Mother" by Pavlo Tychyna
Faust	A hero who craves knowledge and power and makes a deal with the devil. A symbol of the pursuit of absolute truth, but also a willingness to make moral compromises	Faust symbolizes intellectual pursuits, but his image also contains reflections on responsibility to society and the struggle for national revival. He is also being reinterpreted with a feminist and postcolonial focus	"The Alien" by Oksana Zabuzhko, "Prague", "The Faust's Night" by Yevhen Malaniuk, "Frankfurt am Main" by Yuriy Klen, "Long Night as a Long Memory" by L. Mosendz

Thanks to this, Ukrainian writers managed to integrate universal values into their cultural space, giving them new meaning and significance. Ancient images have become the basis for reflections on national identity, particularly in the face of external influences and cultural challenges. Through the reception of these archetypes, Ukrainian literature managed to reveal profound aspects of national self-knowledge and spiritual development. Overall, the transformation of world images, such as Prometheus, Orpheus, and Faust, in the Ukrainian literary context has created a multidimensional cultural tradition that combines both universal and national aspects.

Interaction and transformation of European literary themes in the works of Ukrainian authors

Ukrainian literature, being constantly influenced by European literary traditions, actively borrowed and reinterpreted themes that were central to European culture, including tragedy, symbolism, the romantic hero, absurdity, and decadence. When transformed by Ukrainian writers, each of these themes acquired unique national features that reflected specific aspects of Ukrainian culture, history, and identity.

The theme of tragedy, which has profound roots in ancient and medieval European literature, has acquired a special national coloring in Ukrainian culture, becoming a significant tool for understanding the collective experience of suffering, struggle, and survival. In the European tradition, tragedy is mainly associated with the idea of the inevitability of fate, where heroes are forced to confront supernatural forces or their shortcomings, which ultimately leads them to death (Kieliszek & Gocłowska, 2019; 2021). In the Ukrainian context, this theme develops differently, as the emphasis shifts to collective tragedies that reflect historical challenges and trials, including colonial oppression, social upheaval, and the struggle for national independence. Ukrainian writers transform classical tragedy by drawing attention to the strength of spirit and moral fortitude of the characters who, despite all the trials, stay true to their beliefs and fight for the right to freedom and dignity (Nazarevych, 2008; Smetaniak, 2024).

This reinterpretation of tragedy is particularly evident in the works of Ivan Franko, specifically in his drama *“Stolen Happiness”*. Ivan Franko’s characters are forced to make challenging moral choices when faced with social circumstances that extend beyond their control. The tragedy of the characters lies not so much in personal mistakes as in social injustice, which becomes a fatal test for their lives. In *“Stolen Happiness”*, I. Franko depicts the tragedy of social conditions that lead to suffering, but at the same time emphasizes the characters’ ability to preserve moral values, even in the face of personal loss. This approach differs from classical European tragedy, where fate often appears as inevitable and faceless. In Ivan Franko’s case, the tragedy has a clear social nature, while the moral fortitude of the characters is a form of protest the circumstances.

Tragedy in the works of Vasyl Stefanyk also acquires unique features, as the writer focuses on the tragedies of the Ukrainian peasantry, showing their pain and

suffering in conditions of poverty, social isolation, and emigration. His short story *"The Stone Cross"* is an example of social tragedy, where the protagonist, forced to emigrate in search of a better life, experiences a profound inner conflict. His farewell to his native land and the placement of a stone cross as a symbol of memory reflect the loss of a part of his identity. For Stefanyk, tragedy becomes an expression not only of personal suffering, but also of collective experience, as it emphasizes the common fate of Ukrainian peasants who are forced to leave their homeland. Therefore, the Ukrainian version of tragedy does not simply convey the personal experiences of the characters, but becomes a metaphor for the national drama, where images and symbols acquire a broader social and historical significance.

Symbolism, as one of the crucial trends in European literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, played a key role in shaping new literary approaches among Ukrainian authors who sought to express national and spiritual issues. Ukrainian symbolism differed from European symbolism in its greater focus on themes of cultural identity and national revival, which was conditioned by the historical context of the struggle for autonomy and independence (Mushirovska, 2011; Kolisnyk & Podobed, 2020). For Mykola Voronyi, for instance, symbolism becomes a tool for conveying a sense of doom and hope that reflects the state of Ukrainian society. His works often use images of nature, such as the wind, river, and sky, which acquire a mystical meaning and convey the desire for harmony with the native land. At the same time, these images symbolize renewal and rebirth, where natural forces are associated with the internal spiritual processes experienced by the Ukrainian people.

In the work of Pavlo Tychyna, symbolism becomes a kind of synthesis of musical and light images that turn his poetry into a *"light and sound"* experiment that goes beyond the usual verbal art. In the collection *Solar Clarinets*, Tychyna uses the symbols of sound and light to create a harmonious image of the world, but this harmony is illusory, because it hides anxiety and fear of the changes taking place in society. For Tychyna, light symbolizes not only spiritual uplift but also national awakening, which, although it promises new opportunities, also conceals the threat of the destruction of the old world. Thus, Tychyna's symbolism acquires a special national coloring, where European symbolist motifs are transformed under the influence of Ukrainian realities, reflecting the complex transition from traditional society to the modern world.

Olga Kobylanska, being one of the first Ukrainian writers to turn to symbolism, uses this trend to explore the internal conflicts of her characters and the problem of self-discovery. In her novel *"Earth"*, the symbol of nature, specifically the earth, turns into a multifaceted image that reflects the characters' connection to their native culture and at the same time causes conflicts and tragedies. In the context of symbolism, O. Kobylanska's land acquires new meanings, becoming the embodiment of a force that is the source of life, but at the same time causes the characters' hard fate and internal conflict. O. Kobylanska's symbolism not only reflects the social reality but also raises issues of self-identification that were particularly relevant for Ukrainian society at the

time. Thus, Ukrainian symbolism becomes not only a stylistic technique, but also a means of comprehending the national and cultural specificity of the Ukrainian experience.

The image of the romantic hero, which emerged in European literature as a symbol of an individualist seeking self-expression, in the Ukrainian context acquired additional meanings related to national consciousness and responsibility to the community (Kiselyova & Ivashchenko, 2024). Whereas for Western European romantics such as Byron and Goethe, the hero often stands in conflict with society, Ukrainian romantic heroes are viewed not only as self-sufficient individuals but also as fighters for national freedom and justice. In the works of Panteleimon Kulish, specifically in the novel *"The Black Council"*, the romantic hero appears in the traditions of Cossack romance, where individual freedom and personal qualities of the hero are organically combined with patriotic ideals. The protagonists embody the idea of national duty, particularly in the face of social upheaval and political conflict, which gives the image of the hero a special significance in the context of Ukrainian literature. P. Kulish portrayed his heroes not just as individuals seeking adventure or heroic achievements, but as defenders of the community who feel responsible to the people and their native land. The romantic hero in *"The Black Council"* embodies the struggle for moral and national values, where personal interests give way to common ones. Unlike European romanticism, where the hero often seeks to escape from social responsibilities, the Ukrainian romantic hero, on the contrary, becomes the embodiment of the unity of the individual and the collective, which allows readers to perceive him not only as a hero but also as a symbol of national resistance and self-sacrifice (Efremov, 2025).

This image also finds its continuation in the works of Ivan Nechui-Levytskyi, particularly in his novel *"Mykola Dzheria"*. The protagonist, Mykola, not only strives for freedom and justice, but also acts as the embodiment of the people's protest against social inequality and oppression. His struggle for personal and social justice reflects the archetype of the romantic hero, for whom personal dignity and national identity are integral components. In the Ukrainian context, the romantic hero turns into a symbol of the people's desire for freedom and becomes part of the national mythology, which shapes the idea of the hero as a defender of the native land and the spiritual values of the people.

The theme of existential search, which arose in European literature in response to questions about the meaning of life, free will, and alienation, was particularly reflected in Ukrainian literature, where these issues were used to reflect on national identity and the connection to native culture. In European literature, the existential search often focuses on the personal experience of the hero, on his isolation from society and the world (Kieliszek, 2023; 2025), but in Ukrainian literature, this search is closely intertwined with the ideas of cultural heritage, spiritual connection with ancestors, and the question of preserving national identity. Ukrainian writers, especially those of the early 20th century, use existential motifs to depict cultural

alienation, which is the result of a centuries-long struggle to preserve one's identity in the face of external pressure and assimilation (Stepniowski, 2024).

Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi's *"Intermezzo"* is a vivid example of the transformation of existential search into the Ukrainian context. The author presented a protagonist who is tired of a constant state of anxiety, profound psychological discomfort, and anxiety in search of answers about the meaning of his own existence. M. Kotsiubynskyi resolved this existential crisis by changing the protagonist's worldview, returning to his true nature (Lyskolenko et al., 2021). The author also transformed the theme of search in his novel *"Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors"*, where the protagonist, Ivan, is constantly searching for the meaning of existence, trying to find a connection between himself, nature, and the world of spirits that symbolize ancient Ukrainian traditions and mythology. Ivan's interaction with nature is not just a way of escaping from reality, but also a profound need to understand his place in the world, to define himself through his connection with his ancestors and cultural heritage. Combining the themes of love, life, and death, M. Kotsiubynskyi used existential images to reveal the protagonist's internal conflict between the present and the past, between personal feelings and cultural heritage, which distinguishes Ukrainian existential search from the Western one, which is mainly focused on individuality. Another example can be found in the works of Valerii Shevchuk, specifically in his novel *"The House on the Mountain"*, where the theme of existential search takes the form of historical reflection. The protagonists, being part of a long family line, experience internal conflicts that reflect the difficulty of preserving their identity in a world that is constantly changing. V. Shevchuk explored how historical memory and connection with ancestors influence a person's spiritual search, how the burden of the past becomes both a blessing and a burden that hinders personal development. In this context, the existential search becomes an expression of the collective desire for self-knowledge and harmony, which is deeply rooted in the national worldview.

The theme of absurdity, which became a prominent trend in European literature, especially after the First World War, underwent a particular transformation in Ukrainian works, as it embodied not only universal existential problems but also the specific political and social challenges faced by Ukrainian society (Kulakevych, 2020; Shahzad, 2024). The Ukrainian absurdity appears to be more deeply connected to political hopelessness, social injustice, and the constant threat of losing cultural identity. In this context, the theme of absurdity became a means of expressing spiritual and psychological oppression, particularly in a totalitarian regime, when a person is faced with the dictates of a system that does not respect the individual and considers them a cog in the machine.

One of the most striking examples of this trend is Mykola Khvylovyi's work *"I (Romance)"*, where the absurdity reaches a profound psychological level. The protagonist, who carries out cruel orders in the context of the revolution, gradually loses his humanity and turns into a part of a soulless mechanism. The hero's tragic alienation from himself and the society where he lives reflects a deep identity crisis

caused by social and ideological pressure. The absurdity of M. Khvylovyyi emphasized the impossibility of preserving personal integrity in the reality of a totalitarian regime that dictates strict requirements and erases individuality (Muslienکو, 2018). Another example of the theme of absurdity in Ukrainian literature is Ihor Kostetskyi's *"The Whole World Belongs to You"*. This novel, written in the context of emigration, reflects the absurdity of the life of a person who is constantly looking for himself in a foreign environment and feels detached from his cultural and national identity. I. Kostetskyi used the absurd to show the protagonist's confusion in the face of an uncertain future caused by political and social circumstances, including the traumatic experience of war and emigration. In *"The Whole World Belongs to You"*, the protagonist faces illogical situations and irrational circumstances that he cannot understand or control, which intensifies his sense of hopelessness and isolation. In this piece, Ihor Kostetskyi, like the European absurdist's, demonstrated how a person deprived of the usual cultural and social support finds himself in a situation of complete uncertainty, where the usual values lose their meaning. This novel emphasized the problem of alienation from one's national identity, which is a prominent aspect of Ukrainian absurdism, driven by historical challenges and the experience of political instability.

Apart from the theme of existential search, Valerii Shevchuk's novel *"The House on the Mountain"* also contains elements of absurdity that reinforce the sense of hopelessness and irrationality of the world around us. These themes are intertwined with the characters' search for a connection with their own cultural heritage and the meaning of life. Like Kafka's characters, Shevchuk's characters constantly feel hostage to circumstances where their lives seem to be a series of inevitable and illogical events. The author used absurdity as an auxiliary means to depict the influence of history and heredity on a person, emphasizing their incomprehensible power and difficulty of understanding. Thus, in the Ukrainian literary context, absurdity is often not only a personal crisis of the protagonist, but also a reflection of the collective hopelessness caused by historical and social factors. Ukrainian authors use the theme of absurdity as a kind of challenge to society, emphasizing the need to find new ways for national and spiritual liberation (Chumak, 2022; Stepanenko, 2022).

Decadence, which emerged in Europe at the end of the 19th century as a literary and artistic movement focused on the themes of crisis, decline, and alienation, found a special response in Ukrainian literature. In the European context, decadence was considered as a kind of protest the rationalistic view of the world and expressed the disappointment of the intellectual elite in social values (Serikova et al., 2024). In Ukraine, decadent aesthetics was reinforced by the socio-political conditions that provoked feelings of insecurity, spiritual crisis, and the search for new ideals amid national problems and the struggle for self-affirmation. Ukrainian writers such as Olga Kobylanska and Pavlo Tychyna managed to transform the ideas of decadence, drawing attention not only to the personal crisis of their characters but also to the general sense of hopelessness in society.

In Olga Kobyljanska’s novel *“The Princess”*, the protagonist Nataalka goes through a deep internal crisis caused by alienation from social values and traditional ideals. Nataalka appears as a typical decadent character who does not find understanding in society and seeks to escape into her own inner world, thus embodying the theme of isolation and spiritual decline. Her disillusionment with society and her desire to find the meaning of life through introspection and detachment from the world around her reflect typical features of decadence. In this novel, O. Kobyljanska uses decadent aesthetics to convey the complexity of the heroine’s inner experiences, who feels useless and alienated in the social context, which enhances the overall impression of remoteness from the surrounding reality.

In his poetry collections, specifically in *“Instead of Sonnets and Octaves”*, Pavlo Tychyna used the themes of symbolism and decadence through the images of death, decay, and loss of meaning. His poetry, imbued with melancholy and a sense of hopelessness, reflects the general crisis of identity of Ukrainian society in a period of revolutionary change and political instability. In Tychyna’s works, death and collapse become symbols not only of an individual crisis, but also of a deep disappointment in the possibility of finding stability and harmony in a constantly changing world. These images emphasize the experiences of the author and his contemporaries, who perceived this period as a time of decline and destruction of the old-world order. In his decadent lyrics, Tychyna questioned traditional values and reflected the deep spiritual decline experienced by the Ukrainian people in the face of social cataclysms. Decadence is also evident in the works of Mykola Voronyi, whose poetry often addresses motifs of loneliness, doom, and fatigue. His poems convey a sense of alienation and disillusionment with a society that is unable to support the spiritual aspirations of the individual. M. Voronyi used decadent motifs to emphasize the contrast between high ideals and the dullness of everyday life, which is characteristic of decadent aesthetics. Thus, his poetry becomes an expression of disappointment not only in his personal life, but also in society that cannot satisfy the artist’s spiritual needs.

The theme of decadence in Ukrainian literature received a special national coloring, as it was closely connected with the feeling of loss of cultural identity, alienation, and the search for new ways to assert oneself in the context of historical instability (Svitlyk, 2024). Ukrainian authors used decadent motifs to convey both individual and collective experiences, reflecting the social and spiritual trials of their people.

Table 2 summarizes the themes of European literature discussed, focusing on their transformations in the Ukrainian context.

Table 2. Reception of global themes in Ukrainian literature

Topic	European literary tradition	Ukrainian reception	Examples of Ukrainian works
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Tragedy	Deeply rooted in ancient and medieval literature; heroes face fate or supernatural forces that lead them to their death.	The tragedy in Ukrainian literature often emphasizes collective tragedies, such as the struggle for independence, social trials, and resilience in the face of injustice.	“Stolen Happiness” by Ivan Franko, “Stone Cross” by Vasyl Stefanyk
Symbolism	Symbolism in European literature in the late 19th and early 20th centuries emphasizes profound images that convey the inner experiences of the characters, as well as social and spiritual issues.	Ukrainian authors use symbolism to express national identity, spiritual revival, and to symbolize historical challenges.	“Solar Clarinets” by Pavlo Tychyna, “Earth” by Olha Kobylyanska, “Moses” by Ivan Franko
Romantic hero	European romantic heroes, such as those of Byron or Goethe, are portrayed as individualists who conflict with society in search of self-expression.	In Ukrainian literature, the romantic hero reflects patriotism, responsibility to the community and the struggle for the nation’s freedom, turning into a defender of the native land.	“The Black Council” by Panteleimon Kulish, “Mykola Dzheria” by Ivan Nechui-Levytskyi, “The Haydamaky” by Taras Shevchenko
Absurd	In European literature, absurdity becomes an expression of human alienation and futility in the modern world, especially after the First World War.	Ukrainian authors use the absurd to reflect political and social trials, as well as to comprehend the problems of losing national identity in the conditions of dictatorship and emigration.	“I (Romance)” by Mykola Khvylovyi, “The Whole World Belongs to You” by Ihor Kostetskyi, “The House on the Mountain” by Valeriy Shevchuk
Decadence	European decadence, aimed at disillusionment with social values, individual crisis and romanticization of decline.	In Ukrainian literature, decadence focuses on the crisis of cultural identity, the search for new values, and personal and national alienation.	“The Princess” by Olha Kobylyanska, “Instead of Sonnets and Octaves” by Pavlo Tychyna, and Mykola Voronoi’s poetry

Thus, European themes in Ukrainian literature have undergone a pronounced transformation. Thanks to the creative works of Ukrainian authors, tragedy, symbolism, the romantic hero, absurdity, and decadence acquired a new national coloring, becoming a means of reflecting social, political, and cultural conflicts. This integration and reinterpretation of European themes allowed Ukrainian literature not only to expand its artistic range, but also to highlight issues of national identity and spiritual values, giving new meanings to borrowed European archetypes.

Discussions

The findings of this study demonstrated the profound interconnection between the world and Ukrainian literary traditions, revealing the mechanisms of

transformation of universal images in the national context. It is crucial to identify the specifics of the integration of European themes and images into the Ukrainian cultural space, which suggests an active dialogue between diverse literary traditions. The process of rethinking world artistic images by Ukrainian writers turned out to be multilevel and complex, as evidenced by numerous examples of creative transformation of archetypes and symbols. The analysis revealed that the reception of European concepts is not mechanical, but through the lens of the national worldview and cultural values. It is significant that Ukrainian literature not only borrows but creatively reinterprets world images, giving them new meaning and context. The study confirmed that the integration of world literary achievements contributes to the enrichment of national culture and the development of a unique artistic space. A prominent aspect is to identify the mechanisms of reception of universal symbols in the context of national identity (Volkov et al., 2023). The findings of the study also suggest that Ukrainian literature is actively involved in the world literary process, while maintaining its original identity (Antofiichuk, 2002; Fomina and Niamtsu, 2009).

Galchuk (2019) focused on how ancient images are integrated into contemporary Ukrainian poetry, preserving their universality, but at the same time transforming to the specifics of the national context. The findings of the present study confirmed the conclusions of Galchuk, demonstrating that the reception of ancient motifs is not a passive process of borrowing, but rather an active creative rethinking aimed at their actualization in new sociocultural conditions. Galchuk's analysis complemented the findings of the current study, also showing that ancient images become part of a complex cultural dialogue, providing Ukrainian literature with the opportunity to enrich the world literary discourse. Specifically, the reception of ancient symbols in contemporary Ukrainian poetry is evidence that literature can not only preserve traditions but also actively transform them, creating new meanings that stay understandable in a global context (Tepla, 2024; Zlenko et al., 2021).

Bashmanivskyi (2004) examined how ancient images were receptive to new conditions, acquiring meanings that met the ideological and aesthetic demands of the era. The analysis revealed that for neoclassical artists, including M. Zerov, the appeal to ancient heritage was a conscious strategy aimed at creating links between Ukrainian and European cultural traditions. Comparison with the findings obtained showed that the function of ancient images in literature was not only aesthetic but also ideological. As in Bashmanivskyi's study, the present study emphasized the significance of integrating universal themes into the local context to enrich national culture. Bashmanivskyi also emphasized that ancient motifs served as a model for the development of a new aesthetic that sought to combine the Ukrainian literary tradition with European models.

Slyvynskyi (2012) studied the literary dialogue between Bohdan-Ihor Antonych and Polish modernist poets, focusing on the processes of intercultural interaction. The researcher emphasized that B.-I. Antonych's work was the result of a complex synthesis of various cultural influences that were shaped by Polish poetry. In the

analysis, O. Slyvynsky demonstrated that such aspects as symbolism, romanticism, and modernism, which were characteristic of Polish literary traditions, acquired new meaning in Antonych's work. Slyvynsky also addressed the fact that intercultural interaction was not a one-way process. B.-I. Antonych actively transformed them, creating new approaches to poetic expression. For instance, some of the themes of Polish modernism, specifically the tragic comprehension of the fate of the individual, in the works of B.-I. Antonych acquired additional layers related to the Ukrainian historical context. A comparison with the present study indicates that B.-I. Antonych's works are an example of a multifaceted intercultural dialogue that ensured mutual enrichment of the two literary traditions. Slyvynsky also confirmed the conclusions that Polish literature contributed to the development of Ukrainian poetry, while Ukrainian motifs and images influenced the identity of the transformed literary techniques.

Borysiuk (2024) investigated the mythological figures of Orpheus, Aeneas, and Persephone in the poetry of Kateryna Kalytko, focusing on modern approaches to the interpretation of these ancient images. The researcher noted that these characters, who were prominent elements of classical mythology, underwent substantial changes in the context of contemporary Ukrainian poetry, where they perform new functions. Borysiuk's conclusions showed that classical mythological images serve as an effective means of understanding contemporary experience and creating new cultural narratives. In this context, the study emphasized how mythological characters are transformed into modern thinking, while retaining the basic structure but being enriched with modern elements. A comparison of the study's findings confirmed that the reception of ancient images in the contemporary Ukrainian literary context is not mechanical. It included both the preservation of the main semantic components of these images and their reception according to modern sociocultural conditions. Furthermore, this approach helped to determine the depth of interaction between the literary heritage and current trends.

Koloshuk (2024) examined the detailed features of the reception of European literary models in the local context, which took place through their integration into the artistic structure of O. Kobylanska's works. The researcher investigated how European ideas and concepts were transformed in Ukrainian literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries to reflect local cultural values and social challenges. Koloshuk also revealed how O. Kobylanska used European literary traditions, transforming them to highlight the topic of gender and social inequality, which was relevant for Ukrainian society at that time. The present study showed that the combination of European ideas with national issues contributed to the creation of new literary forms and meanings that corresponded to the cultural and social realities of Ukraine. Koloshuk's findings demonstrated the value of understanding global literary processes for the development of Ukrainian literature. Particular emphasis was placed on the problem of the "other" as a symbolic representation of social and cultural receptions in the works of O. Kobylanska.

Malynovskyi (2023) analyzed the works of H. Kvitka-Osnovianenko in his study, focusing on the integration of European philosophical ideas into Ukrainian literary discourse. The researcher found that H. Kvitka-Osnovianenko's works were marked by a profound interconnection between national cultural values and Western European intellectual traditions. This helped to identify the mechanisms by which Ukrainian authors used European ideas to reflect local sociocultural realities. Malynovskyi studied how the philosophical concepts of European thinkers were perceived and modified in the context of Ukrainian literature. He focused on creative approaches that allowed Ukrainian authors to integrate Western philosophical themes while preserving the uniqueness of the national tradition. Malynovskyi also revealed the significant role of H. Kvitka-Osnovianenko in the development of literary traditions that reflect the influence of European philosophical thought.

Boron (2022) explored the motif of 'noble robbery' in Taras Shevchenko's works in comparison with European models, demonstrating the mechanisms of transformation of European literary models. His comparative analysis revealed the complex interconnections between Ukrainian and European literary traditions. The researcher showed how Taras Shevchenko creatively reinterpreted European motifs and demonstrates the originality of Shevchenko's interpretation of European themes. The conclusions of the present study on the transformation of world images into the national context were confirmed. In her study of the reception of ancient images in Shevchenko's work, Turgan (2014) covered the specific features of the transformation of classical heritage. Her analysis demonstrated the originality of Shevchenko's approach to ancient themes and showed how ancient images are integrated into the national poetic system. The analysis of the mechanisms of national reception of ancient motifs emphasized the originality of Shevchenko's interpretation of the classical heritage. As in the present study, the original interpretation of world themes in the national context was studied. Yatsenko and Shevchenko (2012), in their study of fiction in the context of world culture, revealed the mechanisms of intercultural interaction in the educational context. Their analysis demonstrated the significance of understanding the global context for the perception of national literature. They showed how world culture influences the development of the national literary tradition. Particularly valuable was the analysis of pedagogical aspects of intercultural interaction. The researchers emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to the study of literature. Their findings complemented the understanding of the educational aspects of cultural interaction, which was also indicated in the present study.

Gazheva (2023) studied the semantics and functions of the symbol in realist and modernist prose. Her study provided examples of the ambiguity of symbols that reflect the transformation of social moods and personal searches. These conclusions correlated with the findings of the present study, especially regarding the function of symbols such as Prometheus and Orpheus, which in Ukrainian literature acquire meanings that correspond to national aspirations and sociocultural realities. The analysis of Gazheva helped to better understand how universal symbols can be

reinterpreted and received in different literary traditions, which complemented the presented observations on the integration of global themes into the national context.

Moroz (2021) addressed ethnic and ritual elements as a means of national identification of characters in Lesya Ukrainka's dramatic poem "Boyarynya". The study emphasized the significance of national culture and traditions in shaping the characters' personalities, which contributed to the transmission of the idea of the struggle for identity within the colonial context. Moroz's conclusions were analogous to the present study, specifically in terms of the transformation of world themes, such as tragedy and symbolism, in Lesya Ukrainka's works. The researcher's emphasis on the use of national culture as a literary medium added a perspective to the presented analysis, expanding the understanding of the mechanisms of reception of world literary traditions in the Ukrainian context. Shevchenko (2024) analyzed Ukrainian literature of the 1960s, focusing on the search for and struggle for self-expression in difficult socio-political conditions. The study revealed how literary images and themes were used to reflect ideological confrontation and support national identity. L.V. Shevchenko's findings resonate with those of the present study in the context of the role of literature in highlighting social challenges and historical transformations. The researcher's accent on the struggle for national identity reinforced the current findings on the creative reinterpretation of world themes that become a vehicle for addressing pressing social and cultural issues.

The analysis of other studies demonstrated the diversity and complexity of the processes of integrating world images into Ukrainian literature. The findings of the cited studies confirmed the findings on the creative nature of the transformation of universal symbols and images in the national context. Particularly significant was the confirmation of the thesis about the preservation of national identity in an active dialogue with world culture and showed that Ukrainian literature created unique mechanisms for the reception and reinterpretation of world images.

Conclusions

The study confirmed the significance of integrating artistic images of world literature into the Ukrainian literary context, which enabled the national culture to perceive universal symbols to express its sociocultural values. The images of world literature, specifically ancient and European archetypes, have undergone a transformation in Ukrainian works, acquiring a special significance that reflects national ideological orientations and cultural priorities. These images in Ukrainian literature have become symbols that simultaneously convey both universal values and national identity. The study found that Ukrainian writers, integrating world artistic images, enriched their cultural space, forming a special style and thematic content that corresponded to the social and cultural realities of the country.

The study found that Ukrainian literature actively reinterprets world themes, transforming them into the national context and giving them a specific national coloring. European literary traditions, such as tragedy, symbolism, the romantic hero,

absurdity, and decadence, underwent a certain reception, being enriched by Ukrainian realities and spiritual quest. This reception process helped Ukrainian authors not only to borrow creatively from the world's literary achievements, but also to use them as a means of highlighting national experiences, historical challenges, and social aspirations. Thus, Ukrainian literature forms a special artistic space where European themes are reinterpreted according to the social and cultural needs of the country, becoming a significant tool for exploring national identity.

It was emphasized that such themes as existential search, absurdity, and other concepts integrated from world literature acquired a new meaning in Ukrainian culture and contributed to the enrichment of the literary process. These themes reflect the search for the meaning of life and responses to current social and cultural challenges inherent in national literature. Ukrainian writers use such concepts to reflect the internal struggle at the individual and collective levels, to identify the social and cultural challenges faced by society, and to reflect spiritual development and the desire to preserve national identity. The study demonstrated that Ukrainian literature employs European concepts not only as a means of enrichment, but also as an instrument for understanding national values and sociocultural guidelines.

Overall, the transformation of world images and themes in the Ukrainian literary tradition contributed to the development of a multidimensional cultural tradition that combines universal and national elements. By adopting European concepts, Ukrainian authors create a unique literary space that reflects national and universal aspirations. The study revealed the significance of an intertextual approach that allows combining local and global processes in a literary context, emphasizing the role of Ukraine's cultural identity and spiritual values on the literary map of the world.

The limitations of the present study included the small number of literary examples and the focus on concrete periods, which did not allow for full coverage of all possible aspects. Further research could expand the scope of the analysis to include contemporary literary works and explore the latest ways in which European images are transformed in the Ukrainian literary space.

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