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Echoes of the Baroque: Reconstruction and Deconstruction of Tradition in Leonid Horlach's Fiction

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У статті здійснено комплексний аналіз віршованих романів Леоніда Горлача у контексті барокової традиції української культури та сучасних літературних тенденцій. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена потребою нового прочитання художніх текстів козацької тематики крізь призму універсально-культурних смислів, а також необхідністю осмислення взаємодії барокових світоглядних домінант із поетикою новітньої української літератури. У центрі уваги перебуває проблема інтерпретації культурних універсалій і специфіки їхнього художнього втілення у творчості Л. Горлача з позицій кінця XX – початку XXI ст.

Метою статті є визначення барокових світоглядних домінант і культурних універсалій у віршованих романах письменника та з'ясування особливостей їх авторського відтворення в реаліях межі XX–XXI ст. Реалізація поставленої мети передбачає застосування комплексу *методів*, зокрема універсально-культурного аналізу, що дозволяє виокремити ключові смислові структури та визначити їх функціонування у художньому тексті; типологічного та порівняльно-історичного методів для встановлення зв'язків між бароковою поетикою, традиціями «химерної прози» та постмодернізму; інтертекстуального аналізу, спрямованого на виявлення взаємодії текстів і культурних кодів; а також літературної герменевтики, що забезпечує глибше тлумачення ідейно-смислового рівня творів.

Об'єктом дослідження є віршовані романи Л. Горлача *Чисте поле* (1990), *Руїна (або життя і трагедія Івана Мазени)* (2004) та *Мамай* (2010), присвячені бароковій добі української історії, що відтворюють козацьку тематику і водночас демонструють складний синкретизм різних художніх традицій. У статті наголошено, що своєрідність творчості письменника полягає у поєднанні традиційної силабо-тонічної системи віршування, зумовленої впливом класичної української поетичної традиції, із новітніми художніми стратегіями, характерними для літератури другої половини XX – початку XXI ст. Такий синтез дозволяє розглядати романістику Л. Горлача як явище, що перебуває на перетині історико-культурних епох і літературних парадигм.

У ході аналізу встановлено, що ключовими світоглядними домінантами романів є барокові уявлення про світ як складну, суперечливу й динамічну систему, у якій поєднуються протилежності – життя і смерть, земне і небесне, тілесне і духовне. Значну роль відіграють мотиви пошуку свого покликання, подорожі, пам'яті, історичної тяглості та національної ідентичності. Водночас ці домінанти, відтворюючись, піддаються авторській інтерпретації, що враховує сучасний культурний контекст і змінене світосприйняття читача.

Особливу увагу в статті приділено аналізу культурних універсалій, які проявляються у творах Л. Горлача через систему образів, мотивів і символів. До таких універсальних категорій,

що відображають фундаментальні уявлення про людське існування, належать міфологеми раю, пекла, саду, архетипні образи козака, воїна, кобзаря та мандрівника, універсалії храму, чистого поля, символи свічки, бджоли тощо. У романі *Мамай* особливо виразно репрезентовано образ козака як носія національної ідентичності та духовної свободи, що корелює з традицією народної картини *Козак Мамай* і водночас набуває нових смислових відтінків у сучасному контексті. У статті підкреслюється, що художня свідомість Л. Горлача, естетика та поетика його романів формуються під впливом як барокової традиції, так і пізніших літературних явищ, зокрема «хімерної прози» та постмодернізму. Це виявляється у використанні іронії, гротеску, поєднанні різних стильових реєстрів, а також у схильності до інтертекстуальності та гри з культурними кодами. Така багатозаровість поезики сприяє створенню складної художньої структури, у якій різні культурні пласти взаємодіють і взаємно збагачуються.

У дослідженні порушена також проблема рецепції романів Л. Горлача з позицій сучасного читача. Автор статті наголошує, що дистанційована рецепція початку ХХІ ст. дозволяє по-новому інтерпретувати барокові домінанти, виявляючи їхню актуальність у сучасному культурному контексті. Це зумовлює переосмислення традиційних образів і мотивів, які набувають нових значень у світлі сучасних соціокультурних викликів.

Ключові слова: концепція циклічного розвитку культури, бароко, низове бароко, шістдесятництво, хімерна проза, небарокові тенденції, постмодернізм.

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Introduction

Cultural texts intertwine with the lives of every individual on various levels, shaping their worldview and values, and prompting self-reflection and an awareness of one's cultural identity. The study of the patterns of cultural development, its formative factors, and the tracing of continuity and antinomy has attracted the attention of many thinkers. In European humanities in the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, dualistic-cyclical concepts of cultural-historical change gained prominence (F. Nietzsche, G. Hegel, O. Spengler, A. Toynbee). In the domestic context, these ideas found their most striking expression in D. Chyzhevskiy's concept of the "theory of cultural waves," according to which this process is a wave-like, continuous transition from one pole to another [Chyzhevskiy, 2003, p. 354]. Among the key fundamental oppositions that defined the classical and Baroque poles were the categories of rational/irrational, Apollonian/Dionysian, monological/dialogical, sacred/secular, and so on. As we can see, in this context, the Baroque transcends the boundaries of the specific historical period of the 17th and 18th centuries and is perceived as a philosophical category and a worldview model (E. d'Ors's idea of the "eternal Baroque"), a meta-historical constant (Henri Focillon), and so on.

One of the fundamental contributions of the 21st century literary studies to the understanding and interpretation of Baroque culture is T. Hunko's work "The Concept of the Baroque and the Poetics of the Novels of Eugenio d'Ors" [2014], which, firstly, brings to the fore in contemporary academic thought the view of the Baroque as a permanent unit of the historical and cultural process and the concept of cultural progress as a shift in binary oppositions, and enables us to understand why humanity constantly returns to constants that became widespread in previous eras and reinterprets them, and secondly, justifies the need to study the manifestation of Baroque traditions in the works of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. Thus, O. Kulikova and N. Lysenko analyse the connection between Taras Shevchenko's literary legacy and Ukrainian literature of the Baroque period [Kulikova, Lysenko, 2023], whilst O. Novyk focuses on the transformation of the Baroque conception of death in the works of Romantic poets in general [Novyk, 2014]. T. Holovan, in describing V. Barka's poetic style, highlights the author's use of genre forms such as witticisms and nonsense, as well as corresponding Baroque forms and plots, and also notes syntactic similarities, a tendency towards morphological condensation of words, and universalism [Holovan, 2003]. T. Zhovnovska notes V. Shevchuk's use of the Baroque tradition both in terms of imagery (existential self-awareness and perception of the world, a focus on understanding the world) and in terms of poetics and plot elements (sleep as a spiritual trial for the protagonist, etc.) [Zhovnovska, 2000].

A. Shishkova traces the influence of the Baroque worldview on the metaphysical discourse in Yu. Lypa's poetry, particularly in its spiritual and religious themes (the motifs of the transience of earthly existence, death, immortality and love) [Shishkova, 2008], whilst O. Korotkova examines the worldview of the lyrical hero and the imagery of M. Rylsky's poetry [Korotkova, 2015]. S. Polyakova draws compelling parallels between the Baroque tradition and the depiction of reality as hell in B. Kharchuk's novels (scenes of fires, the "presence" of dead characters amongst the living, the inclusion of characters with infernal traits, etc.) [Polyakova, 2008], whilst V. Hural draws parallels between the Baroque duality of worlds, religiosity and philosophising, and the ideological dimension of M. Kryvtsov's poetry [Hural, 2024]. O. Yurchuk's studies [2007; 2008] are characterised by their conceptual depth and comprehensive approach. Taking into account the fact that Baroque themes were shaped by a crisis situation (both in the socio-political sphere and in terms of worldview and values), the researcher convincingly notes a tendency to revisit and reinterpret the patterns formed during this era at later turning points, which are characterised by a re-evaluation of traditional heritage, the emergence of the issue of national identity, introspection, a sense of tragic doom, disillusionment with existing ways of engaging with reality, and the search for new ones [Yurchuk, 2007, p. 3]. The cross-cutting nature of dominant themes and worldviews enables the researcher to broaden the scope of the study, extending her focus to include literary works of the 20th century (the 1920s, the 1960s, representatives of the "chimerical" movement, postmodernists, etc.).

Despite the interest and value of these studies, we must note a certain lacuna in the study of texts from the second half of the 20th century to the early 21st century from the perspective of a postmodern reinterpretation of Baroque themes: the focus is on chimerical prose, and, in our view, the multifaceted nature of the creative legacy of the generation that made its debut in the 1960s is of particular interest due to the uniqueness of their creative and historical experience (the Thaw, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the establishment of independence). The novelty of this study lies in the fact that, for the first time, an attempt has been made to identify the influence of the ideas of the Sixtiers, the poetics of chimerical and postmodern prose, on the representation of the Baroque worldview and the manifestation of universal cultural meanings in literary texts on Cossack themes, using the works of L. Horlach as a representative of this generation.

The subject of our study is L. Horlach's (Kovalenko's) verse novels about the Baroque era, which not only involve a conscious engagement with the dominant worldviews of the period depicted, but also an unconscious (the influence of the material studied, the writer's familiarity with the achievements of a specific era on his own worldview and self-expression, as evidenced by the poetics of the novels of Baroque scholars D'Ors and V. Shevchuk [Hunk, 2014]). The uniqueness of L. Horlach's creative legacy lies in the superimposition of the creative strategies of his contemporaries (the Sixtiers, representatives of "chimerical prose," and postmodernists) onto traditional syllabo-tonic verse (with a distinct influence of "testamentary-rustic" discourse and Shevchenko's traditions).

For an artist who made his literary debut in the 1960s, turning to the theme of the Cossacks was a natural development. "Having grasped the dichotomous openness of the modes of social time—into the past, which passes through the present into the future, and into the future, which transforms the present into the past—the poetic consciousness of the Sixtiers developed a sense that, by its very nature, a person cannot live in a fragmented time," —as L. Tarnashynska rightly notes [Tarnashynska, 2006–2007, p. 121]. The desire to restore the continuity of national history motivated L. Horlach to write six major lyrical-epic works. The particular interest in his historical texts in the modern world stems from his adherence to the creative principles of the Sixtiers, in which "the axiological orientation ... is the critical and constructive attitude of human consciousness towards the past, and its driving "spring" is the moral ideal of the future as a result of the historical subject's dissatisfaction with the essence of the present" [Tarnashynska, 2006–2007, p. 111], which broadens the interpretative scope of the work and determines the relevance of studying the worldview-defining themes embedded in the text from a contemporary perspective.

When analysing art from the late 20th to the 21st century, it is advisable to draw upon dialogic discourse and the theory of intertextuality, since "tracing the conscious or intuitive, direct or hidden communication between texts of the same type is a means of revealing and understanding each of the cultural epochs" [Peleshenko, 2021, p. 17]. This idea highlights the

need for a hermeneutic reading of texts relating to a specific cultural and historical era, taking into account their intertextual dimension. It is worth recalling one of the most famous tenets of R. Barthes's theory: "any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognizable forms: the texts of the previous and surrounding culture" [see: Barthes, 1973, p. 78], to confirm the necessity of analysing the dominant features of the depicted era, their subjective reproduction and interpretation by the artist, the superimposition of the contemporary information field onto the created text, and the multiplicity of readings, taking into account the worldview characteristics of the audience.

It is likewise relevant to our study to establish the relationship between low Baroque and the chimerical current, particularly O. Ilchenko's novel *Kozatskomu rodu nema perevodu, abo Mamai i Chuzha Molodytsia* [*There Is No End to the Cossack Line, or Mamai and the Strange Young Woman*], with which one of the texts by L. Horlach under analysis, *Mamai*, is correlated. Among the key similarities worth noting are "a tendency towards playful wordplay, crude humour, and a pervasive sense of folk culture," a deep-rooted connection to folk mythology, and a desire to "recreate the national spirit of the Ukrainian people" [Yurchuk, 2007, p. 8]. Among the reasons for the emergence of chimerical prose in general, it is worth mentioning the attempt to escape totalitarian control and evade censorship (a way of using the guise of "chimerical quality" to conceal reflections on contemporary issues through the prism of history), the expression of creative freedom, and, at the same time, the opportunity to employ a variety of artistic devices. Among the defining features of the chimerical novel are conventionality, the use of myths, fantastical elements, antithetical qualities, intertextuality, the distortion of chronotope, grotesqueness, the interweaving of different stylistic layers, and so on. N. Peleshchenko regards fantastical prose as a transitional phenomenon, as an attempt to restore a disrupted cultural process, a transition from the use of modernist achievements to postmodernist aesthetics [Peleshchenko, 2021, p. 202].

Ukrainian chimerical prose, whilst developing as a phenomenon distinct from global magical realism, is closely linked to this movement; so it is worth considering the position of T. Bykova and N. Osmak regarding the need for a hermeneutic reading of such works from the perspective of the contemporary cultural context: "A unique postmodern dialogue emerges between literary, visual, musical and other texts... This is now perceived as a fully-fledged structural component and artistic device, where what takes place is not merely reading, but a game with the reader. And the result of this game is the reader's attention to the work and its original source, which "shines through" the new text, creating a palimpsest" [Bykova, Osmak, 2024, p. 40].

It is also worth referring to the work of N. Horodniuk, who, in her study of V. Shevchuk's work (with her distinctive dialectic of chimerical prose and postmodernism), reaches compelling conclusions regarding the affinity between the Baroque worldview and the postmodernist one, identifying the following common elements: a crisis of faith, sensuality, epistemological uncertainty, the textualisation of reality, the perception of the world as chaos, as text, the fragmentary nature of consciousness, the fragmentary nature of narrative, and so on [Horodniuk, 2003, p. 168].

The position taken by O. Calabrese (and also by his follower A. Ndalianis), who advocates the use of the term "neo-Baroque" to describe contemporary culture, with the proviso that this does not imply a return to the past, but rather a concept of the "spirit of the age," which allows one to trace the connection between certain current scientific theories (catastrophe, fractals, dissipative structures, theories of chaos and complexity, and so on) and cultural phenomena. Among the key constants of this "neo-Baroque," the researcher identifies "a search for, and valorization of, forms that display a loss of entirety, totality, and system in favor of instability, polydimensionality, and change" [Calabrese, 2017, p. xxii]. Angela Ndalianis's work "Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment" [Ndalianis, 2004] provides compelling evidence of the reinterpretation of the Baroque heritage in products of so-called mass culture (cinema, theme parks, games, etc.), particularly through a focus on spectacle, intertextuality, the play with time and space, and a tendency towards seriality.

In Ukrainian academic discourse, this task has been addressed in the aforementioned work by O. Yurchuk: summarising the findings of studies on the works of 20th-century writers (in particular, P. Tychyna, M. Khvylovy, H. Kosynka, I. Drach, O. Ilchenko, V. Shevchuk, Y. Andrukhovych, I. Tsyordiuk, Y. Pashkovsky), the scholar identifies the leading "neo-Baroque tendencies"—the

tragic nature of the worldview, dynamism, binary thinking, a reinterpretation of Christian imagery and the traditions of classical literature, the complexity of form, its prevalence over content, Baroque excess conveyed through intensity, bravura, the carnivalisation and theatricalisation of reality, and buffoonery [Yurchuk, 2007, p. 4]).

H. Skliarenko's research [Skliarenko, 2020] is valuable for our study, given the evidence it provides for the thesis regarding the influence of Baroque traditions on various forms of Ukrainian art from the late 1980s to the 2000s, particularly the emphasis placed by artists on the aspect of the national character of culture.

The breadth of the subject matter covered in the aforementioned studies, the diversity of the subjects under investigation, and, at the same time, the common tendency to seek out important existential constants within them, attest to the relevance of a contemporary interpretation of cultural texts that are key to national self-awareness, particularly those that are Baroque in theme, essence or poetics.

The aim of this article is to identify the Baroque worldview dominants and cultural universals in L. Horlach's verse novels and to trace the author's distinctive approach to their portrayal from the perspective of the early 21st century. Achieving this aim involves the use of the universal-cultural analysis *method* (to identify worldview dominants and universals and determine the specifics of their functioning within a literary work), typological and comparative-historical methods (to identify typological links between Baroque poetics, chimerical prose, postmodernism and their manifestations in L. Horlach's novels), intertextual analysis and literary hermeneutics. This study is the first attempt to read the various cultural strata of L. Horlach's Cossack-themed novels—*Chyste pole* (*Clean Field*), *Mazepa* (*Mazepa*), *Mamai* (*Mamai*)—with due regard to the complex syncretism of the dominant features characteristic of the Baroque era, Horlach's subjective interpretation of them, the contemporary artistic tendencies assimilated by the writer, and the distanced reception of the reader from the standpoint of the third decade of the twenty-first century.

Confessional mode as the tonal dominant of L. Horlach's lyric epic

Since the spiritual culture of a particular historical era is reflected in literary works indirectly through a character's life story, it is precisely the protagonist's evolution and inner dynamics that serve as the primary indicator of whether the writer's artistic worldview model corresponds to the spirit of the era being described. The depiction of historical events through the consciousness of the character became a kind of hallmark of the Sixtiers, who artistically reconstructed the defining eras of Ukrainian history and the national spirit, emphasising the unity of the personal and the social. A key feature of the literature of the "Thaw" period, which is significant in the context of our study, is its confessional nature—characterised by the author's particular candidness and expressiveness, a prioritisation of contemporary relevance over history, and the use of historical symbols and events to make sense of the reality of the time, in which the question of loyalty to national culture was raised with particular urgency. One of the most famous and striking examples of such a narrative, rich in character reflections, is undoubtedly L. Kostenko's *Berestechko*, and L. Horlach's lyric-epic works can certainly be regarded as its successors. In the artist's view, every national literature needs its own poetic epic, and following the repressions of the Stalinist regime, the issue of preserving national history became particularly acute, as people were afraid to speak of their own ancestry (including the writer's mother). "We were made to fear our own Ukrainian history; it, swollen with spiritual hunger, was also buried in a wasteland, and this could not fail to pain me," notes L. Horlach [Koskin, 2010]. Creating a gallery of historical paintings depicting prominent figures from Ukrainian history was a deeply personal and cathartic endeavour for the writer, as it served as proof of his freedom to create without the oversight of censorship: "I ceased to fear myself, and that is the greatest victory for an artist, one that helps to break the strongest of bonds" [Koskin, 2010].

The confessional nature of the works is ensured, above all, by a recurring compositional device employed by the author—artistic framing: the beginning and end of the work (the prologue and epilogue) depict the protagonist in their twilight years, effectively on the threshold between life and death, whilst the main body is presented retrospectively as the character's "memories" and reflections. The author encourages the reader, together with the characters, to rethink the past,

analyse key events and evaluate the decisions made. This approach to depicting historical figures is consistent with the tendency in Baroque painting, noted by A. Makarov, to impose an elegiac mood and a philosophical tone on the images, yet it is certainly not a conscious attempt by the artist to convey the distinctive features of the Baroque worldview: the poem *Night in Vyshhorod* about Yaroslav the Wise, and the novels *The Ring of Askold* about the Prince of Kyiv and *The Slavic Island* about Jan Žižka also feature such a composition. Despite this, for works on the Cossack theme, this artistic choice and the development of the motif of pre-death catharsis [for further details, see: Fedko, 2021] is exceptionally successful, as it resonates with the Baroque fascination “with mysterious psychological phenomena, in particular visions and revelations that arise beyond our control, as if involuntarily, in oblivion, drowsiness, daydreams, waking life or in dreams” [Makarov, 1994, p. 73]. Indicative in this regard is the section of the novel *Ruin* devoted to Ivan Mazepa’s deathbed visions (the appearances of Kochubey’s, Palii’s, and Motria’s spirits, together with his mother and the personified image of Ukraine). The writer makes the most of the potential of the chosen genre, infusing the text with the aforementioned philosophical undertones, moments of insight, and the characters’ lyrical digressions; in the narrative style, the lyrical element takes precedence over the plot. This type of narrative, saturated with the character’s reflections, reinforces the impression of self-analysis, the character’s immersion in his own memories on his deathbed, and creates the illusion that the protagonist is assessing the depicted events from the perspective of the future in order to achieve harmony with himself and his conscience. It is worth noting the author’s reinterpretation of the holy sacrament of confession: despite the mention in the novel *Ruin* of the corresponding Christian ritual (with the use of symbolic imagery such as candles, bells and the white colour), the priority of confession to oneself is emphasised and, through retrospective narration, to the reader over the priest’s forgiveness. I. Sirko, idealised by L. Horlach in the spirit of the European chivalric myth (see the next section for details), dies in a place sacred to Ukrainians—an apiary, surrounded by bees, symbolising spiritual purity and the path to paradise. Although introspection and the complex dialectics of the soul are entirely in keeping with the spirit of the Baroque era [see: Makarov, 1994, pp. 30, 42], L. Horlach’s choice of precisely this artistic form was also driven by an internal factor: a distinctive feature of his own worldview: “Sooner or later, every person wishes to delve into the depths of memory, or to feel that not everything in the fleetingness of life was in vain, that even in the gloom of everyday life there were moments which, in one way or another, illuminated your soul for years to come” [Horlach, 2018, p. 170].

Let us examine in greater detail the emotional and reflective layer of the novel *Mazepa*, which in its first (separate) edition was titled *Ruin (or the Life and Tragedy of Ivan Mazepa)* (2004). First and foremost, it is worth noting the multi-layered nature of the work’s title: firstly, this phrasing immediately indicates to the reader the author’s sympathies regarding the activities of this controversial hetman, a figure whose place in the historiography of the post-independence era required significant re-evaluation and rehabilitation, and emphasises the failure of the very purpose of his life; secondly, through a play on words, it combines a reference to the era depicted whilst simultaneously marking the geopolitical situation of the time; thirdly, it conveys the tragic worldview of an era of statelessness, subordination to the “elder brother,” and a premonition of the empire’s collapse (“*Була держава – і нема держави*” (There was a state—and now there is no state) [Horlach, 2015, p. 371]). The authenticity and power of the depicted emotions and emotional turmoil stem from the artist’s personal experience and that of his generation; as a result, whilst highlighting the problems of the Cossack era, the artist enriches the text with reflections that resonate with the present day.

The collective trauma of the post-totalitarian past has left its mark on several generations of Ukrainians, embedding in their consciousness a fear of their own thoughts, ancestry, history, initiative and difference, as well as a fear of authority figures and a tendency to submit silently even to the most absurd demands of those in power, and so on. It is only natural that the author devotes considerable attention to I. Mazepa’s shared experiences; on the one hand, this reflects the nature of the hetman’s political activities on his path to securing and retaining power, whilst on the other, it illustrates the helplessness of a man—a mere cog in the system—who is unable to alter the established order (“*мовчав <...> бо що він міг супроти сили влади?*” (he remained silent <...> for what could he do against the might of the authorities?) [Horlach, 2015, p. 417], “*на повідку*

короткому тримали” (they kept on a short lead) [Horlach, 2015, p. 415], “Мов і господар в Україні і мов покірний наглядач, облізлий пес на стлім сіні і сам до себе позивач” (Like a master in Ukraine and like a meek overseer, a mangy dog on trampled hay, and at once plaintiff against himself) [Horlach, 2015, p. 435]).

It is interesting to note that the artist criticises not only the mindless execution of the Russian tsar’s orders, but also the implementation of dishonest decisions by his own superiors. As someone who had come of age within the Soviet system, the writer was well aware of situations where orders from incompetent superiors had to be carried out, and of the impossibility of objecting to them. Anticipating similar moral and ethical dilemmas in the modern democratic world, L. Horlach infuses the episode of Palii’s treacherous arrest [Horlach, 2015, p. 469], the “fratricidal” execution of Kochubey and Iskra [Horlach, 2015, p. 501], and so on. The lines “Я б рад прислужитися рідній землі, / вогнем возгорітися, інших зігріть, / але наді мною ж і гетьман стоїть” (I would gladly serve my native land, / blaze like fire, warming others, / but the hetman stands above me) [Horlach, 2015, p. 413] prompt reflection on the legitimacy of the actions of elected authorities and leaders, and subsequently serve as a warning against blind devotion to those in power, which corrupts a person and amplifies all their flaws.

By portraying a hero in his twilight years, on his deathbed, lost in his own memories, L. Horlach calls for an active approach to life and a fight for one’s ideals, declaring: “помрут не ті, що вже давно померли, / помре отой, хто від життя втікав” (It is not those who have long since died who will perish, / but those who have fled from life) [Horlach, 2015, p. 587]. The diplomatic approach favoured by Ivan Mazepa during his rule is, from a 21st-century perspective, perceived as deceptively safe and ultimately ineffective; hence, the author puts his own reflections into the character’s mouth: “Допоки тім’я чухаєш – уже / остригли з тебе навіть оселедця. / Розважливість нам силу збереже. / Та збереже, коли не вирвуть серця” (While you’re scratching your head—they’ve already / shorn from you even the oseledets. / Prudence will preserve our strength. / But it will preserve it only if they do not tear out our hearts) [Horlach, 2015, p. 383], where one can read the threat of humiliation, the loss of one’s own identity and even existence. A recurring theme throughout the text is the sense of a need for a “new Bohdan” [Horlach, 2015, p. 409] (that is, a resolute leader who would stand his ground with determination), in which a subconscious critique of the political figures of independent Ukraine can be discerned. “А муж державний не приходить, щоб мислю усіх з’єднать. Тому і горе верховодить, / і славу Хмеля не дознять” (But no statesman comes to unite all minds. That is why sorrow reigns supreme, / and Khmel’s glory remains unmatched) [Horlach, 2015, p. 403] —words that ring true both for the era of the Ruin and the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Living in constant fear of arrest, execution and suspicion of disloyalty is yet another emotional experience shared by the characters in the novel *Ruin* and its author. Although L. Horlach himself managed to avoid arrest and severe restrictions, he personally knew both the victims of Stalinist terror [Horlach, 2018, p. 144] and the disgraced Sixtiers [Horlach, 2015, p. 175]. The existential experiences of people in those days are reflected in the lines “короткий вік людський, як літня ніч. / А ще його вкорочують зичливіці, / що облягають душу зусібіч, / як звіра безневинного мисливіці” (Human life is short, like a summer night. / And yet it is shortened still by those who seek to harm, / who besiege the soul on all sides, / like hunters closing in on an innocent beast) [Horlach, 2015, p. 416]. Fear breeds mistrust, discord and fratricide, which finds artistic expression in the novel through the fall of Baturyn—the Hetman’s capital—at the hands of traitors (on the one hand, a historical fact, and on the other, a symbol of the destructive impact of turmoil on the deep foundations, plans and resources), and the emphasis on the participation of Palii’s Cossacks in the rout of the Cossack regiments at the Battle of Poltava. The unreliability of allies dooms the character to loneliness (“Не жди від когось медозбору / в суворій крижаній добі, / і не шукай в комусь опору, / твори опору у собі” (Do not expect anyone to gather honey / in this harsh, icy age, / and do not seek support in others, / build your own strength within yourself) [Horlach, 2015, p. 446]), and this existential state reaches its peak in the postmodern era, as it transcends mere alienation from others to the level of loneliness in a crowd, a sense of being lost amidst a deluge of information, and a crisis of communication.

Thus, the retrospective narrative and artistic framing (with an emphasis on the experience of a pre-death catharsis) lend L. Horlach’s lyrical epic a confessional character. This dominant

mood, characteristic of the work of the Sixtiers, naturally manifested itself in L. Horlach's texts as well, demonstrating a reflective nature, a questioning of proclaimed ideals, and a re-evaluation of the geopolitical processes of the time. The tendency of Baroque characters towards inner conflict and spiritual quest, which the author conveys in his works on Cossack themes, has allowed his own views on the problems of Ukrainian society in the 20th and 21st centuries to come to the fore (post-totalitarian trauma, the lack of a strong political leader, the destructive influence of authority, discord and betrayal, feelings of loneliness, etc.), which, on a worldview and emotional level, bring the present day closer to the turbulent Baroque era.

Ukrainian knighthood in the novel *Clean Field*: between history and myth

Since its inception, the Cossacks—as a nation-building pillar of Ukrainian culture—have been subject to idealisation and romanticisation in subsequent eras, as well as the cultivation of a distorted understanding of the social characteristics of this phenomenon (during the Soviet era). The publication in 1990 of L. Horlach's novel *Clean Field*, depicting the Zaporizhian Sich as an autonomous military mini-state rooted in folk traditions, was a natural development, for the foreboding of the Soviet Union's collapse and the debunking of socialist ideological tenets could not fail to spark an interest in the history of Ukrainian statehood.

The historiosophical concept of interpreting the Zaporozhian Cossacks as a later form of European chivalry, which the author has made the basis of the novel, fits into a typical trend of the late 20th – early 21st to revise established dogmas and an attempt to distinguish, within cultural interweavings, genuine realities from propaganda.

In light of this focus on the portrayal of the Baroque elite, we present a basic list of traits which, according to D. Bilous, were characteristic of medieval knights: “noble birth, class-based etiquette and standards of behaviour, ritualism, courage combined with unwavering faith, and devotion to ideals” [Bilous, 2003, p. 76] and examine the extent to which the depiction of the Cossack milieu in the novel *Clean Field* corresponds to these benchmarks. It is worth noting that, in his portrayal of the Sich Cossacks, L. Horlach—in keeping with the Soviet myth about former serfs—ignores the question of their origins and does not emphasise I. Sirko's noble lineage (unlike I. Mazepa in the novel *Ruin*). Instead, considerable attention is devoted to depicting behavioural norms and their certain ritualistic nature (a piece of silk fabric in memory of a fallen comrade, and the possibility of saving a man sentenced to execution by marriage at the girl's wish, and so on). The novel *Clean Field* is notable for its ethnographic and cultural accuracy in depicting the life of the Baroque elite; it serves as a unique artistic encyclopaedia of Sich traditions, thereby giving the reader an insight into the Cossacks' key values: democracy (for example, the scene of the election of the kish otaman), loyalty to comrades (Petro's self-sacrifice for the sake of his comrades), and a strict code of honour (a system of rules of conduct and punishments). Another common feature of Cossack society and European chivalry is the construction of their own masculine space with a distinctly aggressive code. The Sich is a Cossack outpost, a mythologised fortress that “*стояла, як несхитна твердь, / перехопивши України смерть*” (stood like an unshakeable stronghold, / warding off Ukraine's death) [Horlach, 2015, p. 168]), “*острівець в безкраїм морі, / куди не ступить ворога нога*” (an islet in a boundless sea, / where no enemy foot shall tread) [Horlach, 2015, p. 184], a place of counsel, rest, training, and brotherhood. In the work, the Sich and the Great Meadow appear as sanctuaries revered by the Cossacks; the cult of the Mother of God, the significance of feasts and humour (in particular, in the scene of writing a letter to the Sultan) are emphasised as manifestations of life-affirming energy.

The psychological portrait of the true Cossack and knight, as established in the culture, shares certain defining characteristics. In panegyrics, church sermons, folklore and the visual arts of the Baroque era, a set of virtues (bravery, contempt for death, piety, chastity, love for the Church and the Homeland, etc.) [Spivak, 2016, p. 134] and the cult of holy sacrifice (heroism) “for the sake of Faith and the Homeland” [Spivak, 2016, p. 130], the affirmation of one's social duty, and the awareness of the task of defending the land and Christianity as sacred. The mythologisation of the knight as a noble warrior was one of the means of encouraging heroic deeds and self-sacrifice: “For the loss of life and health for the homeland is rewarded by God in heaven with eternal life and undying glory” [Radyvylovskiy, 1987], not only by enhancing prestige, but also as a means of popularising such a way of life among contemporaries, that is, to replenish the ranks of the army.

In historiographical thought (both European and Ukrainian), there is a tendency to idealise the image of the heroic defender, a view contradicted by historiographical evidence. The contrast between the facts and accounts of Ivan Sirko's life and the established national myth is particularly striking. In his analysis of "A Brief Account of Sirkov's Deeds", A. Makarov highlights the "ruthlessness, ferocity and cruelty" of the character [Makarov, 1994, p. 129]. However, in contemporary fiction, we can observe a tendency towards the overt idealisation of the figure of the Cossack kish otaman [see: Biliatska, 2017, p. 118]. In L. Horlach's novel, the portrayal of I. Sirko as a true man of integrity and a champion of a sacred cause is underpinned by the universal motif of the "chyste pole" [clean field], which features in the title of the work and embodies an unbreakable code of honour ("поможи нам, доле, / не осквернити наше чисте поле" (help us, fate, / not to defile our clean field) [Horlach, 2015, p. 176]), emphasising the connection with the martial tradition and the similarity of Cossack laws to the precepts of chivalric orders.

Folk art bears witness to the archaic roots of the cultural-philosophical significance of the universal concept of the field ("To live one's life is not to cross a field," "When I am in the field, then I am free"). A relevant concept for our study is O. Kyryliuk's view on the functioning of this universal, since, according to the scholar, in the Ukrainian context the field "embodies cultural manifestations of activity as the capacity for creative generation" [Kyryliuk, 2000, p. 27], that is, the human capacity to cultivate, leave one's mark on and adapt wild space to one's own needs, thereby imparting a value-based aspect to the image. It seems no coincidence that L. Horlach frequently uses the lexeme "field" (as opposed to "steppe"), for the fertility and fruitfulness associated with this topos serve to highlight the purposefulness of the characters' actions and the significance of the goal of their struggle. There is also no doubt about the long-standing connection between this topos and the martial tradition, as reflected in L. Horlach's lyric epic: "де на однім стеблі і слава, й згин" (where on a single stem lie both glory and defeat) [Horlach, 2015, p. 310]. The very existence of the Cossacks was inextricably linked to this landscape, whether on a physical level (through prolonged stays on campaigns, which ultimately led to the perception of this place as "their own" or as "home" [Horlach, 2015, p. 245], or as a final resting place—a burial site [Horlach, 2015, p. 274])—and on a spiritual level—the space of struggle ("чисте поле, де миру нема" (a clean field where there is no peace) [Horlach, 2015, p. 205]).

The idealisation of the figure of the people's defender in the novel *Clean Field* can also be interpreted as an attempt to respond to the postmodern crisis of personal and national identity, and to remind Ukrainians during this turbulent period (on the eve of momentous changes) of the traditional values established as far back as the 17th century. According to V. Poturemets, "the poet draws from historical memory precisely what inspires a life of dignity – the spirit of chivalrous honour and national dignity" [Poturemets, 2015, p. 7]. The myth of the "golden age" takes on a similar tone, manifested in the novel through the idealisation of the period of B. Khmelnytsky's rule. By using the achievements and authority of the famous leader as a criterion for the success of a statesman, L. Horlach extends the evaluative scope of the text beyond the Cossack era described, prompting the reader to reflect on the present day ("Богдан би був – була б і оборона, / а то не Україна, а торги" (Had Bohdan been here, there would have been defence, / but this is not Ukraine, but a marketplace) [Horlach, 2015, p. 184]), conveying the need for a strong leader as Ukraine defends its independence.

Thus, in depicting the privileged social class of the Baroque era in the novel *Clean Field*, L. Horlach draws on the historiosophical tradition of viewing the Ukrainian Cossacks as a later form of European chivalry, taking into account both objective (complex social organisation, established laws and traditions, rituality) and idealised characteristics (the cult of courage, defence of land and faith, self-sacrifice). The focus on the Ukrainian equivalent of European chivalry and its deliberate idealisation were driven by society's spiritual need for highly moral role models and the necessity to return to national roots in a time of crisis. The use of the universal motif of the clean field in the work, as well as the mythologisation of the image of the Sich and the Golden Age during the reign of B. Khmelnytsky, serve this purpose.

Authorial interpretation of the folk myth of Cossack Mamai

The folk paintings that could be seen both in the homes of ordinary people, hanging in the "red corner," and in the residences of Cossack officers formed the basis for the development

of the folk myth surrounding Cossack Mamai. The exceptional role of this image in Ukrainian culture was highlighted by T. Marchenko [Marchenko, 1991] and O. Naiden [Naiden, 2002]; its connection to national mythology by D. Kurylenko [Kurylenko, 2015]; and its link to the culture of humour by S. Bushak [Bushak, 2008], and on the image's affinity with depictions of Eastern sages—B. Biletskyi [Biletskyi, 1960; Biletskyi, 1997].

Having emerged and established itself in painting, this motif has gradually spread to other fields, ranging from engravings to interior design elements and household objects [see: Modyn, 2017]. It attracts attention and inspires creators of different eras and art forms: visual arts (paintings by P. Biletskyi, V. Gutyria, V. Nakonechnyi, V. Saienko, O. Skop, M. Telizhenko, B. Tkachyk, S. Tripak, V. Tsapka, O. Chegorka), sculpture (O. Badio, V. Znoba), literature (O. Ilchenko, V. Nestayko and others), and cinema (O. Sanin). L. Horlach's appeal to this sacred image is evidence of a spiritual hunger, a desire to reclaim cultural heritage (*"Так тебе ж поховали матеріалісти, навіть діти не вірять, що був ти колись сторінка"*) (So the materialists have buried you; even children no longer believe that you were once a page) [Horlach, 2015, p. 608]). It is worth noting that in 20th-century art, interpretations of the figure of Mamai took on new forms and genres (for example, O. Ilchenko's chimerical novel and O. Sanin's innovative films). The era's tendency to experiment with sacred imagery also left its mark on L. Horlach's verse novel.

The text under examination clearly demonstrates the distortion of temporal and spatial parameters typical of chimerical (and later postmodern) novels: although the narrative framework—Mamai's conversations with the writer's alter ego—is presented within a stable chronotope, the main body of the text is linked by the motif of a journey into the past (the events of each chapter are tied to a new chronotope and simultaneously depict Mamai in a state of constant motion). It is worth noting that the theme of travel highlights Mamai's affinity with the work of the kobzars, for during his travels he encounters new (as well as familiar) characters—both real and mythical—listens to their stories, offers his opinions and advice, and in doing so gathers the collective experience of the people (as their spirit).

It is no coincidence that the focus has shifted from the Cossack warrior to the bandura player / kobzar (both in Baroque paintings and in L. Horlach's novel); we agree with D. Kurylenko's assertion that Mamai is, above all, "a thinker, poet, mediator, and creator of heroic *druzhynna* poetry" [Kurylenko, 2015, p. 151]. The traditional understanding of the artist's calling to serve humanity is brought to life in the novel through the juxtaposition of Mamai and his travelling companion through time (a contemporary writer), the establishment of a certain bond between them, and a sense of brotherhood (*"поети від Бога – також Мамай"*) (poets are sent by God – they too are Mamais) [Horlach, 2015, p. 621]) and continuity. In other words, L. Horlach, in his novel, not only conveys the dominant image of Mamai as an artist and folk singer (a repository and disseminator of folk memory) but also elevates him to a timeless level (unbound by the Baroque era or the phenomenon of kobzarism), extending this mission and responsibility to all creators.

When addressing the question of the transcendent, L. Horlach endows the image of Mamai with the traits of the Wise Old Man. The narrative and compositional structure of the text is particularly revealing in this regard: it contains no descriptions of heroic battles, but there are episodes of mentorship and guidance of others, in particular his landmark meeting with the poet, which helped the artist overcome his doubts [Horlach, 2015, p. 797] and restored his passion for creation [Horlach, 2015, p. 804]. The key to this interpretation of the work's archetypal level lies in its epigraph (*"народ наш тому лише вічний / що Мамай оживля його знову і знов"*) (Our people are eternal only because Mamai revives them time and again) [Horlach, 2015, p. 605]), which emphasises the role of spiritual guide, prophet, defender of identity and guarantor of national revival. Therefore, despite the combination of the Hero and the Wise Old Man archetypes in visual art, L. Horlach focuses on the latter.

At the same time, this deconstruction of the Hero archetype is linked to the neutralisation of the aggressive imagery embodied in depictions of military armour. It is precisely the weapons depicted in folk paintings that are intended to showcase the Cossack's martial prowess and heroic nature. The artist's use of the device of devaluing a military symbol: *"На шаблю хто позаздриться? Давно вже у нас шаблями косять лободу"* (Who would envy a sabre? We have long been mowing down ragweed with sabres here) [Horlach, 2015, p. 640], reflects a distinctive feature of the axiological system following the tragedies of the 20th and 21st centuries (two world

wars, genocide, repression), in which the ideas of humanism, tolerance and diplomacy begin to play a central role. Mamai's own behaviour can be interpreted as evidence of the nivellation of masculinity: he avoids open confrontation, does not engage in battle, but flees—often on horseback. In the image of the horse, one can detect the influence of both the foundational Baroque concepts (which will be discussed in the final chapter) and the particular focus on physiology, the animal world, the anthropomorphisation of animals, and the attribution of human-like behaviour to them—a focus characteristic of 20th-century traditions (chimerical, postmodern). In accordance with chivalric tradition, Mamai regards his horse as an equal and faithful companion (“*кінь же друг, а не якась тягло*” (a horse is a friend, not just some beast of burden) [Horlach, 2015, p. 656], “*бачу я не коня в тобі – вірного друга*” (I see not a horse in you, but a faithful friend) [Horlach, 2015, p. 612]). On the one hand, the writer conveys the symbolism of the horse as the embodiment of masculinity, courage and strength, as found in the original source—folk art; on the other hand, when reinterpreting this static image within the novelistic genre, which is characterised by its focus on plot, the paradoxical nature of the division of roles among the characters becomes more pronounced: it is precisely in the image of the horse that the aggressive code is realised; it appears as an active fighter and saviour, whilst the Cossack is assigned a more passive role as an observer, thinker and so on. This feature is in fact consistent with the dualistic mood of the folk paintings on which the national myth was formed.

It is worth noting the breadth of the work's intertextual interpretations: ranging from comparisons with the original source (folk paintings), politicised descriptions of hell and paradise in the spirit of Dante, and I. Kotlyarevsky's burlesque and travesty style, to the continuation of O. Ilchenko's traditions. However, the obvious influence of the poetics of Taras Shevchenko's poem *The Dream* on this work deserves special attention; indeed, the Kobzar himself is mentioned repeatedly in the work, first as a pupil, and later as a spirit (a witness to the present day) and a comrade-in-arms of Mamai [Horlach, 2015, pp. 749–750]. The motif of a dream (vision) employed by the writer, along with the inclusion of scenes depicting St Petersburg and the Russian tsarina [Horlach, 2015, p. 661], is a clear variation on the Kobzar's satire. Nevertheless, whilst launching a scathing critique of the imperial regime, L. Horlach highlights the historical continuity of Ukraine's geopolitical problems, using a “light-hearted” narrative style to mask his sharp criticism of the present day (the achievements of twenty years of independence). A striking example of this is the chapter “Mamai in the Verkhovna Rada,” which gives the impression that the spirit of the people sees right through the souls of politicians and their weaknesses [Horlach, 2015, pp. 770–774], the conflict with the criminal authority Babai [Horlach, 2015, p. 733], and the creation of a composite image of a weak and selfish leader—Narcissus, for whom the only redemption for his failed rule is to serve as a jura under Mamai (that is, the people) [Horlach, 2015, p. 795]. The novel conveys Ukrainians' ambivalent attitude towards the political elite of the early 21st century.

L. Horlach engages in narrative experiments characteristic of the 20th and 21st centuries: unlike the novels *Clean Field* and *Ruin (Mazepa)*, which employ the omniscient author's narrative perspective, the novel *Mamai* leans towards the English-language model of novels in verse, where individual sections are narrated from the perspective of different characters. In the novel *Mamai*, we see the narrative perspective of an omniscient author (“The Enchantment of the Young Woman,” “In Paradise,” “Mamai in Kaniv,” “Mamai in the Verkhovna Rada,” “Mamai at Narcissus”), a first-person narrator (the writer's alter ego in the chapter “Night Vision,” “In the Garden,” Makar's “At Makar's,” Mamai's “In Trakhtemyriv,” “In Hell”), as well as the blurring of boundaries between narrators (an internal monologue with no punctuation marks and using second-person address [Horlach, 2015, p. 723], which transitions into the omniscient author's narrative perspective in the section “At the Apiary”). The influence of O. Ilchenko's poetics can be seen in the way the work is enriched by an element of play with the reader's reception, and the inability to clearly identify the narrator correlates with a disregard for verisimilitude, a deliberate undermining of the reader's trust in the narrative, achieved through the dominance of the motif of dream / vision / delusion, typical of 20th-21st-century art. Firstly, the writer's alter ego meets Mamai in a sacred setting symbolising fertility and prosperity—a garden; from there, in the prologue, the characters set off on a “journey through time” (they undertake an act of discovery; Mamai acts as a guide for his companion, opening his eyes to the realities of this world and the afterlife) and ultimately, in the epilogue, the disillusioned protagonist experiences catharsis and a renewal of vitality (the

rediscovery of Eden—“his” place on earth). In this way, the garden—as the character’s physical setting and spatial constant—transcends into a metaphysical realm: the space of the character’s inner dynamics. The writer employs the technique of parallelism, emphasising the hero’s inner search and conflict in the prologue through a pre-storm landscape, and the catharsis and harmony found in the epilogue through an idyllic one (“*Виноград наді мною аж гнучся від плоду, у душі моїй квітнув осінній розмай*” (The vines above me were bending under the weight of the fruit, and in my soul the splendour of autumn was blooming) [Horlach, 2015, p. 804]), which correlates with the Eden mythologem. Secondly, the physical embodiment of Mamai himself is also called into question; he is not portrayed in the novel as an ordinary “flesh-and-blood” being from the real world, but as a metaphysical concept, an “eternal idea” (“*Срібним рокотом струн з-поза меж небозводу, / як із вічних віків, озивався Мамай*” (With the silvery rumble of strings from beyond the firmament, / as if from time immemorial, Mamai spoke) [Horlach, 2015, p. 804]). This interpretation of the figure of Mamai appears to be a logical extension of the idea that artists have a duty to preserve national identity (an idea which L. Horlach expresses both indirectly in this text and explicitly in his interviews [Koskin, 2010]). The writer combines the symbolic significance of the original depiction of the Cossack bandura player with the subsequent “worship” of these images, which gained increasing momentum following the abolition of the Cossacks, highlighting the image’s growing resemblance to the divine. In L. Horlach’s novel, Mamai appears as a mediator between God and humankind, almost as the Ukrainians’ own national “god,” who stands at the very origins of the nation’s riches [Horlach, 2015, p. 620], cares for the fate of the people and, like the pagan gods, can exist only on condition of faith in him: “*допоки я живу в народі, / я доти вічний, я – Мамай*” (as long as I live among the people, / I am eternal, I am Mamai) [Horlach, 2015, p. 723]. Thirdly, the journey through time and space itself takes place thanks to magical horses (Mamai riding Sultan, whilst the writer mounts Pegasus) and includes scenes that transcend the boundaries of the real world (for example, hell, paradise, and visions conjured up by a feast with devils).

Thus, within the Ukrainian cultural sphere, the figure of the Cossack Mamai is characterised by his omnipresence across various art forms and, unsurprisingly, by a high degree of intertextuality and emblematic significance. In addressing this image, L. Horlach draws on the experience of chimerical prose (by O. Ilchenko in particular) and postmodernists, making the most of this myth’s potential: playing with the reader’s reception, the narrator’s unreliability, saturating the text with mystical elements (witchcraft, evil spirits, descriptions of hell, paradise, encounters with God, conversations with the spirits of the dead and animals), the use of the motif of travel through time and space to expose social ills, the masking of sharp criticism of political leaders with a “light-hearted” narrative tone, the emphasis on the levelling of the former heroic character (through the symbol of neglected weapons), which is perceived as a prophetic warning (repeatedly verbalised), and the enrichment of the text with mythological motifs and symbols (the garden, the horse, weapons, paradise, hell).

Religiosity as a worldview feature of the Baroque-era individual

Religiousness is worth noting as one of the defining features of the Ukrainian national worldview. Despite the decanisation characteristic of postmodern art, the issue of re-evaluating Christian dogmas in the post-Soviet space has taken on a significance distinct from that in Europe. The spread of atheism and the questioning of religious beliefs in Ukraine were primarily driven by external factors (the deliberate policy of the Soviet authorities) rather than internal ones (a crisis of faith or philosophy). It is also natural that there was an instinctive backlash: as the Church’s influence waned in Europe, Ukrainians in the 20th century continued to baptise their children in secret, evading the authorities. As one of the issues that arose in the post-Soviet space—religiosity, the restoration of the right to choose one’s own object of faith and worship—it could not fail to attract the attention of artists. In the depiction of the religious struggle of the Baroque era in L. Horlach’s novels, one can discern a similarity with the aspiration to defend, in word and deed, the time-honoured Ukrainian national values at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries.

The presence in L. Horlach’s text of elements from the myth of the creation of the world [Horlach, 2015, pp. 616–620] and the creation of man from clay [Horlach, 2015, p. 415], [Horlach, 2015, p. 617]), the afterlife in hell for sinners and paradise for the righteous (in the novel *Mamai*),

the conception of God as the source and measure of beauty (“*А літо таке ж було – Господи, Боже! / А землі ж такі – неземна благодать*” (And the summer was just like that—Lord, God! / And the earth is such—unearthly grace) [Horlach, 2015, p. 353], “*О Господи, як жаско квітнуть вишні...*” (O Lord, how splendidly the cherry trees are in bloom...) [Horlach, 2015, p. 470]) and so on can be interpreted, on the one hand, as a reflection of the dominant worldview of the era depicted, and on the other, as a subtle reminder to contemporaries of the fundamentals of Christian mythology.

The socio-political crisis of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the declared rejection of old ideals and the search for new ones, have led to an intensification of feelings of loss, confusion and doom. Such experiences trigger an instinctive defensive reaction in people—to find new points of reference, and for many, religion has become that [Horkusha, 2015]. The age-old role of religion as a mediator, a guide and a means of coming to terms with difficult life situations and sustaining the fortitude that permeated the culture of the Baroque era is returning with renewed vigour in the modern world.

The phenomenon of faith is largely rooted in the human need for a higher meaning, for some explanation and purpose that would help one endure and overcome a difficult situation. In line with this perspective, the writer creates images of folk leaders, emphasising their perception of their mission as a divine calling: “*Та склалось так, як сам Господь звелів, зачисливши його в свої обранці*” (And so it came to be, as the Lord Himself had decreed, counting him among His chosen ones) [Horlach, 2015, p. 497], “*Та мусиш ти, як пам’ять роду, жити, бо це тобі колись Господь нарік*” (And you must live on, as the memory of your people, for this is what the Lord once ordained for you) [Horlach, 2015, p. 649], “*сам Господь вказує нам дорогу*” (the Lord Himself shows us the way) [Horlach, 2015, p. 531]. In this way, the theme of predestination unfolds, whilst also reflecting the fatalism inherent in a religious worldview, the inevitability of what is destined to happen, and the submission of all things to God’s plan. The characters seem to shift the responsibility for the course of events from themselves to a higher power, and at times even the blame [Horlach, 2015, pp. 241, 371, 494, 528, 637]. By highlighting this attitude of the Cossacks towards life’s vicissitudes, the writer brings them as close as possible to modern readers; for in these turbulent times, Ukrainians are all too familiar with and understand the sense of losing control over one’s own destiny, the transience of existence, one’s own mortality, and the purpose of life.

Accordingly, another important timeless dimension of religiosity is the need to believe in an afterlife. For warriors (both of the Baroque era and of the present day), the conviction that their actions are justified and that the human soul is immortal is of paramount importance. A remarkable episode from the assault on Perekop, in which old Petro deliberately takes on a suicide mission for the sake of his comrades [Horlach, 2015, p. 199], correlates not only with the stories of heroic deeds during the World War II known to the author, but also with the feats of recent years (in particular, the self-sacrifice of Vitalii Skakun). On the one hand, accepting the inevitability of death serves as a psychological defence mechanism in a situation where one is constantly living on the edge; on the other, it is a defining feature of a religious worldview: the perception of death as the next stage of existence, one that is more significant than earthly life and serves as a test of virtue and spiritual strength [Fedko, 2021].

Another manifestation of Christian doctrine in L. Horlach’s lyric-epic is the depiction of heaven and hell as the afterlife. However, due to the influence of the poetics of the “low Baroque” (see the final chapter for further details), the portrayal of these topoi is not canonical, but rather continues the traditions of I. Kotlyarevsky’s *Aeneid*. In exposing human sins and weaknesses, the artist resorts to overt subjectivity, interpreting all inter-ethnic conflicts from a pro-Ukrainian perspective [Horlach, 2015, p. 704], which, in spirit, is entirely consistent with the official stance of the church at that time in justifying and glorifying the Cossacks’ “sacred” struggle for faith and land.

The author does not avoid national specifics even in his depiction of paradise. In the novel *Mamai*, the righteous dwell in a place filled with peace and light, and this idyllic picture of paradise [Horlach, 2015, p. 718] corresponds to the Baroque concept of the afterlife, in which one can enjoy earthly beauty and luxury even after death [see Makarov, 1994, p. 23]. The landscapes depicted echo real Ukrainian scenery, whilst the space, filled with flowers and bees, is subconsciously

associated with peacefulness, an appreciation of the fruits of labour, and inner harmony. At the same time, the artist introduces a distinctive “rebellious element” into the depiction of a peaceful afterlife, emphasising the strangeness of such an existence for the Cossacks, as evidenced by the nostalgia of Mamai’s friend Makar [Horlach, 2015, p. 722] for earthly life. In this episode, we can trace a reinterpretation of the myth of paradise on earth through the prism of the Cossack worldview, a transformation from a passive, carefree and righteous existence to the fulfilment of their dangerous yet noble calling.

The theme of travel and Mamai’s timeless existence allow L. Horlach to convey, through the character’s reflections, his own views and judgements as a person living at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, which is most evident in his assessment of human virtues and flaws. It is no coincidence that one of the most striking episodes in the novel’s depiction of hell is the exposure of the Ukrainians’ most terrible eternal sin—“self-destruction,” internal dissension as a kind of curse from “Satan” [Horlach, 2015, pp. 707–709], which has weakened the Ukrainian people throughout their history (from the fragmentation of the Kyivan Rus’ era to the current tensions between different regions, even in the context of war with an external enemy).

A historical perspective allows the artist to use religious objects as a means of psychological expression to reveal the tragedies of the era portrayed. The deliberate avoidance of lengthy descriptions and the use of verse serve to emphasise the symbolic significance of the images. The church as a cultural universal [Kuryliuk, 2000, pp. 28–29] signifies a sacred space, all that is divine, salvation, immortality, love, righteousness, spiritual elevation, and a point of reference. In his lyrical-epic works, L. Horlach reinterprets this universal theme from a 21st-century perspective and uses the image of a ruined church as a symbol of the desecration of Ukrainian soil: “*nonid dimami vuglie cerkva, nibi sирота*” (Amidst the smoke, the church stands charred, like an orphan) [Horlach, 2015, p. 654], “*Церкви стоять, всуціль обдерті, хрести побиті бовванять*” (The churches stand, stripped bare, their broken crosses looming) [Horlach, 2015, p. 394]. Since the universal symbolism of the church is associated with immortality and the exaltation of life, the use of the image of derelict churches helps to achieve the greatest possible impact on the reader, to reveal the tragedy of ruin by elevating it to a timeless level (“*Зайдеши в село – а там лише пуста, / повиздыхали навіть пси. І мертва кров давно загула*” (You enter the village—and there is nothing but desolation, / even the dogs have died out. And the dead blood has long since congealed) [Horlach, 2015, p. 394]), for such desolation and desecration of religious buildings are familiar to the reader through the events of the 20th century and the present day.

At the same time, the writer drew on the perception of the church as a spiritual ideal and moral compass: by using this space as the setting for events, the artist heightens the contrast between the high spirituality inherent in the universal and the depiction of human baseness and treachery (the arrest of Samoilovich [Horlach, 2015, p. 425], the landscape near the Kremlin [Horlach, 2015, p. 307]).

Thus, the representation in L. Horlach’s literary world of the struggle for the Orthodox faith and its cultic elements (biblical mythology, heaven and hell, the mythological motifs of the garden, the Last Judgement, and sacred objects), characteristic of the Baroque era, is enriched with national specificity and elevated by the writer to a timeless level (in particular, through the use of the motif of a journey through time and space), enriching the field of textual interpretation with the reader’s reflections on the similarities between the dominant themes and issues of this aspect of Ukrainian social life during the Baroque era and the present day (the destruction of the sacred in the image of demolished churches, the betrayal of certain members of the clergy, the soldiers’ belief in the sacredness of their duty, their willingness to sacrifice their lives for sacred values).

Vital potential of the elements of low Baroque

The development of the low Baroque phenomenon is directly linked to the natural need to counterbalance the tragic and elegiac nature of the worldview of the time, and to create an effective defence mechanism against the fear of death and the realisation of the transience of existence. In the experience of such a spiritual crisis and the ways of overcoming it, one can discern a natural (for the concept of the cyclical development of culture) similarity to the dominant features of the postmodern era: laughter, attention to physicality, the rejection of taboos, feasting and, ultimately, carnivalisation.

On the one hand, laughter serves a life-affirming function [for more details, see Fedko, 2017], acting as a defence mechanism against the constant threat of death; on the other hand, L. Horlach employs the artistic device of irony—typical of the late 20th and early 21st centuries—to devalue and dismantle the tragic aura surrounding traumatic events. For example, the Treaty of Pereyaslav, as a source of misfortune and trauma, has become a sacrosanct element in Ukrainian culture (as evidenced, for instance, by its artistic portrayal as an unforgivable sin in Taras Shevchenko's poem *The Great Cellar*), whereas L. Horlach, as a man of the 21st century, views it more dispassionately, from a historical perspective, deliberately “downplaying” it, so to speak, “taking it off its pedestal” (“Казав я в Переяславі Богдану... / Так не послухав, підписався сп'яну” (I told Bohdan in Pereyaslav... / But he wouldn't listen, he signed whilst drunk) [Horlach, 2015, p. 647]), is merely one of many turning points in Ukrainian history, and that modern Ukraine, whilst taking the lessons of the past into account, must move forward rather than passively blame previous generations for the current socio-political situation.

Existential pursuits in both the Baroque and modern eras have brought the universal theme of the banquet to the fore in Ukrainian cultural discourse, owing to its potential to serve as “a reflection of significant shifts in the very history of Ukraine, the contradictory nature of human consciousness, a keen sense of instability, the uncertainty of human relationships and social processes, the struggle between the strong and the weak, the loss of one's footing, and the search for the meaning of life” [Turgan, Hrebenuk, 2008, p. 22]. The first is the protective function: during times of crisis, celebration and hedonism serve as a means of countering the tragedy of existence and the fear of death (both physical and metaphysical). This aspect of Cossack life [see Yavornytsky, 1990, p. 180] is particularly vividly portrayed by L. Horlach in his novel *Clean Field*: “Гуляла Січ, щоб знову стати вранці / на оборону, як у всі часи” (The Sich was ranging about, only to rise again at dawn to the defence, as in all times) [Horlach, 2015, p. 179]. The description of the banquet in the tavern combines jokes, singing, music, dancing and, of course, a lavish feast. Continuing the traditions of I. Kotlyarevsky's *Aeneid*, L. Horlach employs the technique of amplification [Horlach, 2015, p. 178]. The luxury and excess of the festivities honouring the new kish otaman stand in stark contrast to the moderation of everyday life. “Гуляйте, хлопці, доки сила є, / бо сядем на коня – про все забудем” (Have your fun, lads, while you still have the strength, / for once we mount our horses, we'll forget it all) [Horlach, 2015, p. 177], —says I. Sirko. This duality of the Cossacks' existence—the contrast between restraint and hedonism depicted in L. Horlach's novel—reflects the realities of the Baroque era, yet at the same time resonates with humanity's innate ability to seize moments of pleasure to renew one's inner strength. It is worth noting that in the memoir *The Imperishable*, it is precisely these interactions with colleagues and prominent figures in informal settings—during meals and celebrations—that form a recurring theme. Apart from the obvious desire to recall the joyful moments of life, this focus is also driven by the second function inherent in a banquet—liberation from constraints (social, etiquette-related, etc.). The festive atmosphere (and, undoubtedly, the alcohol) breaks down all barriers, liberates a person's true nature, and helps them to open up and get to know others. It is interesting that in the novel *Mamai*, it is precisely during the “orgy” that the protagonist forms his final opinion of Tsiperovich's flaws [Horlach, 2015, p. 613], recognises the chumaks as devils [Horlach, 2015, p. 684], that is, he recognises their true nature.

The full realisation of the banquet's universal nature is possible only if attention is paid to corporeality (and indeed to all things animal), which brings simple pleasures. It is no coincidence that there are jokes about basic bodily needs and functions, which are usually a taboo subject in “high” literature (“Не хочеш чарки? То бодай помету / із-під курей таким гостям найду” (Don't you want a drink? Then at least I'll find some chicken droppings for such guests) [Horlach, 2015, p. 654]), and the general emphasis on the utmost closeness between human and animal. In this way, the horse Sultan is endowed with human traits: he speaks, laughs, dances, takes part in a feast, and even acts as a force more formidable than his master.

The novel *Mamai* also features a recurring theme of costume changing, a process undergone not only by devils and saints, but by God himself. It is worth noting the complex dialectic between secular and religious culture in the Baroque era, and the absence of direct conflict between them [see Noha, 2001, p. 22]. The episode depicting Mamai's encounter and conversation with God [Horlach, 2015, pp. 617–620] (which at first glance appears to be an attempt at desecralisation and

a sign of the author's contempt, influenced by the imposed atheism) is in fact an accurate reflection of the Baroque tradition [Myshanych, 1983, p. 12]. In other words, the humorous descriptions and satirical elements in Baroque works are not an attempt to mock, disparage or parody, but are intended, above all, to bring the "higher power" closer to ordinary people, to present it as more accessible and understandable—a feat that L. Horlach also manages to convey organically in his novel *Mamai* when describing God as a human-like being with his own weaknesses. In light of the undeniable fact of the cultural dialogue between the Baroque and postmodernism, the idea arises of the appropriateness of a dual interpretation of the strategy of vocal negation and the destruction of all that is sacred in the postmodern era: as genuine deconstruction and as a means of cognition, understanding and, perhaps, even revitalisation. In this context, L. Horlach's constant use of comic devices and elements of burlesque and travesty is evident. Particularly striking in this regard is the section about the journey to paradise ("по драбині, по драбині, / себе, нетяго, сам сідлай / та батогом смали по спині – / отак і попадеш у рай" (up the ladder, up the ladder, / saddle yourself, you lazybones, / and whip your back with a lash— / that's how you'll get to Paradise) [Horlach, 2015, p. 715], "Далі я заспівав про червону калину, ... /про знедолену матір та вірну дівчину, / про коня й козака, огірки та город" (Then I sang of the red viburnum, ... / of the destitute mother and the faithful girl, / of the horse and the Cossack, cucumbers and the vegetable garden) [Horlach, 2015, p. 619]). However, these humorous touches are full of kindness and enthusiasm; despite the playful tone, the narrative evokes pride and respect (for example, towards the Ukrainian people "На 'ти' були ми з Римом та Єгиптом..." (We were on first-name terms with Rome and Egypt...)) [Horlach, 2015, p. 632]).

L. Horlach's recreation of the traditions of the low Baroque in the novels *Mamai* and *Clean Field* reveals a tradition, already well-established in Ukrainian culture, of countering the fear of death and frustration through humour, an emphasis on the physical, and hedonism. The richness of the texts with such elements can be interpreted not only as a strategy for authentically depicting the worldview of the Baroque era, but also as a transposition of the experience of artist's generation in overcoming fear and breaking down barriers into the realm of the artistic text. The novel *Mamai* is characterised by the functioning of a Baroque carnival (with its characteristic costume changes, feasts and breaking of taboos), which is close in spirit to the postmodern: this is explained both by the influence of leading artistic trends on the text and by the concept of cyclical cultural development.

Conclusions

In the process of embodying Baroque themes in literary works (*Clean Field*, *Mazepa* and *Mamai*) L. Horlach goes beyond merely depicting the Baroque as a historical and stylistic phenomenon of the 17th–18th centuries; he projects it onto contemporary experience and worldview, presenting it as a distinctive cultural code of Ukrainian history and mentality. Since the artist's axiological system and poetics developed in the 1960s, a central place in his creative concept is occupied by the need, prevalent at that time, to actualise ontological memory and historical experience, and to create a model of history as a space of spiritual confrontation and existential choice. Antinomy, tragic tension, and the fusion of the sacred and the profane are features that characterise the crisis-ridden period of the struggle for identity and existence, both in the 17th century and at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries.

The emotional resonance between the worldview of L. Horlach's generation and that of the modern Ukrainian, with its Baroque undertones, is brought to the fore through the artistic devices of the lyric-epic genre, creating an additional layer (particularly significant during the formation of modern Ukrainian identity) for a contemporary interpretation of works depicting the events of the Cossack era: historical experience is interpreted through the concept of repetition and caution, whilst the tragedies of the past resonate with the present. A telling example is the tragic worldview in the novel *Mazepa* (originally titled *Ruin*), in which the writer fills the text about the collapse of I. Mazepa's state-building plans with his own experience of the destruction of value systems, disillusionment with the socialist system, and the frustration of the 1980s and 1990s.

The artist's reference to the mythologised figures of Ivan Sirko (*Clean Field*) and the Cossack Mamai (*Mamai*) was a natural development against the backdrop of the existential quests of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. At a time of crisis, society needs new ideals and points

of reference, which leads to the revival of the image of the Cossack bandura player as a national archetype (a trend we can also see in contemporary graffiti and pixelated drawings of Cossacks). The novel *Clean Field* presents an idealised model of a Ukrainian autonomous entity—the Sich—with an emphasis on heroic and chivalric traditions, representing an attempt to revitalise the national memory of illustrious ancestors and their struggle for ideals. In the novel *Mamai*, L. Horlach brings to the fore his own assessment of Ukraine's historical and political processes across different eras, using the motif of a journey through time and the archetype of the Wise Old Man. There is a play on the reader's perception, creating the impression of participation in this journey and the need to join in reflections on the past and the present. The elimination of the aggressive connotations associated with weapons is interpreted as a warning to Ukrainians regarding the need to defend their own interests, a warning that has proved prophetic. The mystical nature of the text and its rich use of mythological and symbolic elements (the garden, the horse, the tree, the sabre) form an organic blend of the characteristics of the Baroque worldview and the aesthetic trends of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

The reconstruction of the religiosity of the Baroque era in novels (through elements of biblical mythology, Christian symbolism, the motif of election, and fatalism), as well as the vital potential of the popular Baroque (with its focus on corporeality, hedonism, and carnivalisation) can be interpreted as a spiritual quest by individuals in a crisis situation (in both the 17th and 21st centuries), when existence itself is under threat and there arises a need for defence mechanisms against fear and frustration.

The contrast of the Baroque, and the coexistence of high and low styles within the cultural sphere, came to the fore in the literature of the late 20th and 21st centuries, particularly in the poetics of chimerical prose and postmodernism. The influence of this trend (a return to the Baroque-specific combination of the “high” and the “low”) was also evident in L. Horlach's writing style, as confirmed by the poetics of the novel *Mamai*: the pervasive motif of a journey through time and space, the use of myths, fantastical elements, conventionality (in particular the unreliability of the narrator), intertextuality, the play on cultural codes, the deformation of chronotope, and the intertwining of the sacred and the profane, the high and the low. These features attest to the promise of research into the influence of Baroque aesthetics on the work of authors of chimerical prose, postmodernists, and indeed on all contemporary art in general.

Thus, the distinctive feature of interpreting Baroque themes in Horlach's work lies in their reinterpretation from the perspective of early 21st-century experience and their conceptualisation as a model of national existence. The Baroque transcends the confines of a mere stylistic characteristic, transforming into a philosophical paradigm that enables the author to explore the issues of statehood, leadership, righteousness, spiritual choice and cultural memory within the context of the modern era.

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Echoes of the Baroque: Reconstruction and Deconstruction of Tradition in Leonid Horlach's Fiction

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This article presents a comprehensive analysis of Leonid Horlach's verse novels within the context of the Baroque tradition in Ukrainian culture and contemporary literary trends. The relevance of the study arises from the need for a fresh reading of artistic texts on Cossack themes through the prism of universal cultural meanings, as well as the necessity of understanding the interaction between Baroque worldviews and the poetics of modern Ukrainian literature. The focus is on the problem of interpreting cultural universals and the specifics of their artistic embodiment in L. Horlach's work from the perspective of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

The aim of this article is to identify the dominant Baroque worldviews and cultural universals in the writer's verse novels and to examine the specific ways in which the author has reinterpreted them within the context of the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Achieving this aim requires the application of a range of methods, including universal-cultural analysis, which enables the identification of key semantic structures and the determination of their function within the literary text; typological and comparative-historical methods to establish links between Baroque poetics, the traditions of "chimerical prose" and postmodernism; intertextual analysis, aimed at identifying the interaction between texts and cultural codes; and literary hermeneutics, which provides a deeper interpretation of the ideological and semantic level of the works.

The object of the study comprises L. Horlach's verse novels *Clean Field* (1990), *Ruin (or the Life and Tragedy of Ivan Mazepa)* (2004), and *Mamai* (2010), which are devoted to the Baroque period in Ukrainian history, recreate Cossack themes, and at the same time demonstrate a complex syncretism of diverse artistic traditions. The article emphasises that the distinctive nature of the writer's work lies in the combination of a traditional syllabo-tonic verse system—shaped by the influence of the classical Ukrainian poetic tradition—with the latest artistic strategies characteristic of literature from the second half of the 20th century to the early 21st century. This synthesis allows us to view L. Horlach's novels as a phenomenon situated at the intersection of historical and cultural eras and literary paradigms.

The analysis has revealed that the key worldview themes in the novels are Baroque conceptions of the world as a complex, contradictory and dynamic system in which opposites are united—life and death, the earthly and the heavenly, the physical and the spiritual. Motifs such as the search for one's calling, travel, memory, historical continuity and national identity play a significant role. At the same time, these themes, whilst recurring, are subject to the author's interpretation, which takes into account the contemporary cultural context and the reader's changed perception of the world.

The article focuses in particular on the analysis of cultural universals, which are manifested in L. Horlach's works through a system of images, motifs and symbols. Such universal categories, which reflect fundamental notions of human existence, include the mythological motifs of paradise, hell and the garden; the archetypal images of the Cossack, the warrior, the kobzar and the traveller; the universals of the temple and the clean field; and symbols such as the candle and the bee, etc. In the novel *Mamai*, the image of the Cossack as the embodiment of national identity and spiritual freedom is portrayed with particular clarity; this corresponds to the tradition of the folk painting *Cossack Mamai*, whilst at the same time taking on new shades of meaning in the modern context. The article emphasises that L. Horlach's artistic sensibility, as well as the aesthetics and poetics of his novels, are shaped by the influence of both the Baroque tradition and later literary movements, in particular "chimerical prose" and postmodernism. This is evident in the use of irony and the grotesque, the blending of different stylistic registers, as well as a tendency towards intertextuality and the play on cultural codes. This multi-layered poetics contributes to the creation of a complex artistic structure in which different cultural layers interact and enrich one another.

The study also addresses the issue of how L. Horlach's novels are received from the perspective of the modern reader. The author of the article emphasises that the detached reception of the early 21st century allows for a fresh interpretation of Baroque themes, revealing their relevance in the contemporary cultural context. This leads to a re-evaluation of traditional images and motifs, which acquire new meanings in the light of modern socio-cultural challenges.

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