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Portrait drama: Lesya Ukrainka in the intertext of visual art

Olga Tarasenko

Doctor of Arts, Professor

State Institution "South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University named after K.D. Ushynskiy"

65000, 26 Staroportofrankivska Str., Odesa, Ukraine

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3775-4899>

Abstract. The relevance of the study is conditioned by the growing interest of contemporary art history in the interdisciplinary analysis of visual images as carriers of cultural memory, identity and symbolic meanings, and the need to rethink the Ukrainian artistic experience in a European and global context. The image of Lesya Ukrainka as a key figure in national culture remains insufficiently understood in terms of portrait dramaturgy and intertextual interactions between visual art, literature, and philosophy. The purpose of the study was to interpret the portrait images of Lesya Ukrainka in the context of European visual practices considering their connections with baroque, romantic and neo-romantic traditions, and to understand their artistic and symbolic dimension in the development of cultural identity. A comprehensive methodological approach was applied, including hermeneutics, analytical psychology, iconography, iconology, comparative, historical and cultural, and semiotic methods. The study analysed the evolution of the female portrait image from normative and idealised representations to a psychologically in-depth visual embodiment of the creative personality, within which symbolic structures and dramatic organisation of the composition acquire a defining meaning-creating significance. The study covered portraits created during the life of the poetess and posthumously in various types of art (painting, graphics, sculpture, photography). The comparison of Lesya Ukrainka's portraits with European Works was conditioned by the need to contextualise her image within the broader artistic tradition. This made it possible to identify shared features in the techniques used to convey psychological depth and symbolism that are characteristic of romanticism, neo-romanticism, and modernism. The Ukrainian context, in particular the influence of "The Forest Song" (1911) and other works of the poetess, gave the portraits local specifics, which emphasised their uniqueness. The analysis showed the theatricality and psychologism of Lesya Ukrainka's images, and their connection with the universal motives of love, death, and the spiritual verticality. The symbolic components of the compositions actualised the ritual function of the portrait as a mediator between the past, present, and future

Keywords: artistic representation of poets; iconographic analysis; neo-romanticism; gender; theatricality; photography

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the sublime in art, particularly in the portrait genre of Romantic and Neo-Romantic visual art, is one of the key issues in contemporary art history. Romanticism, with its emphasis on subjective perception, emotional depth, and human interaction with nature and culture, opens up new perspectives for analysing artistic expressiveness. In the Ukrainian artistic context, the image of Lesya Ukrainka, a symbol of national identity and individual creative consciousness, is of particular importance. The analysis of portrait images associated with this figure allows tracing the

relationship between the personal and the universal in art, identifying the influence of European romantic and neo-romantic trends on the development of Ukrainian culture. The relevance of the study is conditioned by the need for a deeper understanding of cultural dialogue, symbolism, and subjectivity in art, which contributes to determining the place of Ukrainian Romanticism in the global artistic context.

The concept of the sublime in romantic art, in particular in painting, is central to the research of aesthetics and art history. According to N. Amstutz (2023),

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*Corresponding author



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the sublime, as understood by I. Kant, exists not in the object, but in subjective perception. The researcher emphasised the influence of philosophical ideas of I. Kant on romantic aesthetics, noting that romantic landscapes seek to convey infinity and transcendence through the interaction of nature and human consciousness. This approach allows considering romantic painting as a space for exploring the inner world of the artist and the viewer. In the context of portrait art, romanticism and neo-romanticism reveal unique aspects of subjectivity. The study of photo portraits of the 19th-20th centuries by A. Doussot (2023) revealed the role of background in constructing the literary identity of famous writers.

O. Lihus (2021) examined the historiographical aspect of Ukrainian Romanticism within the broader context of the interdisciplinary field of Romantic historiography. The researcher noted that the term “Neo-Romanticism” appeared in the scientific literature of the last quarter of the 19th century in France and Germany, and later in Eastern Europe, and Lesya Ukrainka introduced it into Ukrainian literature. O. Lihus concluded that the aesthetic “motto” of Ukrainian Romanticism throughout its development was the revelation of a vivid personal individuality through its national identification. Focusing on the literature, Z.O. Yankovska & L.V. Sorochuk (2021) pointed out the connection of European Romanticism with the “cordocentric” type of culture of Ukraine in the 19th century. The researchers established that Ukrainian romantic writers focused on the inner, spiritual world of the hero, who interacts with reality through their own system of values.

The research of Ukrainian art pays attention to the interpretation of the image of Lesya Ukrainka in both literary and visual contexts. Emphasising the importance of Lesya Ukrainka as a cultural symbol, T. Gundorova (2023) studied her biography in the most exhaustive way through archival materials and photographs. O. Lahutenko & A. Alieksiieva (2024) discovered and analysed portrait series dedicated to figures of Ukrainian culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their

research demonstrated how the portraits reflect the socio-cultural and political conditions of the era, forming a unique visual identity. M. Ponomarenko (2023) by applying iconographic and iconological analysis to the self-portrait of the Ukrainian artist M. Glushchenko, revealed the dialogue between the art of the early 20th century and the traditions of the Renaissance. Her exploration of the symbolic space and attributes in the painter’s portrait revealed a connection between individual and universal artistic expressiveness. This approach highlighted the importance of intertextuality in the visual arts.

Thus, the analysis of contemporary research has shown that the concept of the sublime in romantic painting and portrait art is implemented through subjective perception, symbolism, and intercultural dialogue. These approaches, supplemented by comparative and intertextual analysis, help to better understand the meaning of Ukrainian art, in particular, the image of Lesya Ukrainka in the world cultural context. The purpose of the study was theoretical and methodological understanding of portrait representations of Lesya Ukrainka in painting, graphics, and sculpture in the European artistic context with the involvement of photographic materials based on the analysis of their stylistic, symbolic, and intertextual parameters.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Psychological portrait in art history analysis was formed on the material of the image of a creative person. For this purpose, both lifetime and posthumous portraits of Lesya Ukrainka, created in various art forms – painting, graphics, sculpture, and photography – were used (Table 1). Documentary biographical materials were also used, and memoirs were described by T. Skrypka (2015). Personal conversations with the artist Vasyl Chebanyk and Roman Petruk were conducted in compliance with ethical standards (informed consent, confidentiality, transparency, respect for authorship, objectivity) in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (2013).

Table 1. Main objects of research

Type	Object	Details	Storage location
Pictorial portraits	Ivan Trush “Portrait Of Lesya Ukrainka” (1900)	Plywood, oil, 30×40 cm	National Art Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv
	Fotiy Krasytzky “Portrait of Lesya Ukrainka” (1904)	Watercolour, 54×48 cm	One Street Museum, Kyiv
	Fotiy Krasytzky “Portrait of Lesya Ukrainka” (1904)	Oil on canvas, 54×48 cm	Lesya Ukrainka literary and Memorial Museum, Kyiv
	Roman Petruk “Ray of Dreams. Lesya Ukrainka” (2020)	Oil on canvas, 80×70 cm	Author’s property
Graphic works	Vasyl Chebanyk “Portrait of Lesya Ukrainka” (1966)	Viniplast, 22×7.5 cm and 35.2×30 cm	From the series of postcards “Classics of Ukrainian literature”

Table 1. Continued

Type	Object	Details	Storage location
Sculptural works	Taisiya Sudyina "Memorial plaque of Lesya Ukrainka" (1971)	Bronze, granite, 80×50 cm	65000, 27 Sviatoslav Karavansky Street, Odesa
Photographic materials	Photos of Lesya Ukrainka (1886, 1896, 1901, 1913)	They were used as a basis for creating portraits	

Source: compiled by the author

To study the portrait images of Lesya Ukrainka in visual art, a comprehensive methodological approach was used, combining hermeneutics, iconography, iconology, comparative, and historical and cultural analysis. These methods allowed revealing the multi-layered portraits of the poetess, their connection with European artistic traditions, and their place in the Ukrainian and world cultural context. A hermeneutical approach, based on the works of M. Heidegger (1962) and L.D. Tate (2016), used to interpret the meaning of portrait composition. Hermeneutics as a methodology allowed identifying deep semantic structures, considering the portrait as a dialogue between the visual image and the cultural context. In particular, the theory by L.D. Tate (2016) on the relationship between hermeneutics and poetics formed the basis for analysing the interaction of an artistic image and its symbolic meaning in the intertextual space. In addition to this approach, the ideas of E. Betti (2021) on hermeneutics as a general methodology of the spirit sciences provided a systematic interpretation of compositional elements. Hermeneutical analysis was used to interpret the symbolic content of Lesya Ukrainka's portrait images, in particular, in the context of her literary work and biography. Special attention was paid to the connection between her poetry and visual images reflecting the idea of the victory of love over death (a kind of literary self-portrait in the image of Mavka from the drama-fairy tale "The Forest Song" (1911) (Ukrainka, 2021).

The iconographic approach was used to investigate the compositional elements of portraits, such as angle, colouristics, clothing, and background, which have symbolic meaning. Semiotic method by J. Kristeva (1969) allowed interpreting the portrait as a multi-level sign structure in which visual elements (gaze, darkening of the eyes, compositional static) function as markers of pre-rational and existential states that go beyond iconographic reading. The works of Ivan Trush (1900), Fotiy Krasysky (1904), Vasily Chybanyk (1966), Taisiya Sudyina (1971), and Roman Petruk (2020) were analysed. The iconological method allowed interpreting portraits in a broader cultural and historical context, revealing connections with European traditions of Renaissance, Baroque, Romanticism, and Neo-Romanticism. A comparative analysis was carried out with portraits of El Greco (1584-1588), Dominique Ingres (1821), Francisco Goya (1811), Ilya Repin (1882), etc., emphasising the universal motives of love, death, and the spiritual verticality.

To identify and demonstrate the features of portrait images of Lesya Ukrainka, a comparative method was used, which allowed comparing portraits of Lesya Ukrainka with images of other creative figures, in particular actresses, and contrasting pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works with photography. Special attention was paid to the influence of photography on the development of the portrait genre, in particular, in posthumous images created based on photographs. The historical and cultural approach involved analysing portraits in the context of the era, in particular, the influence of romanticism, neo-romanticism, and modernism on Ukrainian art of the late 19th-early 21st centuries. Archival materials and historical sources on the activities of the Shevchenko Scientific Society were studied. This integrated approach not only revealed the multi-layered portrait images of Lesya Ukrainka, but also placed them into the global cultural context, emphasising the originality of the study and its importance for art history, cultural studies, and pedagogical practice. Thanks to this approach, the study of Lesya Ukrainka goes beyond traditional literary analysis, demonstrating the significance of her work for the establishment of national identity, the development of cultural self-awareness, and pedagogical ideas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lifetime portraits of Lesya Ukrainka. Portrait as a genre of visual art reproduces the individual features of an existing person, performing the function of preserving the image in time and space (Hegel, 1975). In different historical epochs, the portrait had a specific purpose. In Ancient Egypt, portraits provided a connection between the soul and the physical receptacle for eternal existence, in Ancient Rome – served as a ritual connection with the ancestors, emphasising the power of the family, and in Byzantine icons and medieval art, images of Saints reflected the transition from the sensual to the supersensible, where the spiritual plane dominated. Regarding the art of the Renaissance, inspired by ancient traditions, the emphasis shifted to a sensually convincing physical and social image of the individual. In the literature and visual art of romanticism and neo-romanticism, the primary focus became the exploration of the individual's inner state. The fundamental methodological approaches to the study of Ukrainian portrait painting are formulated in the works of P. Biletsky (1981) and V.V. Ruban (1986), in which the portrait is interpreted as a complex artistic structure, focuses

primarily on the individualisation of the portrayed figure, revealing the psychological depth of the image and understanding its place in the cultural and historical context. The study of Lesya Ukrainka's portraits focuses on her image as an outstanding cultural figure, whose work and personality reflect a deep psychologism and existential dimension. Lifetime and posthumous visual representations appear not only as artistic artefacts, but also as carriers of symbolic meanings that reflect the spiritual intensity of the image and its correlation with the concept of "two worlds" outlined by G.W.F. Hegel (1975). This approach allows considering portraits as conduits to another dimension, similar to the role of psychopomps in ancient Dionysian theatre or the mysteries of the Modern Age. Portrait of Lesya Ukrainka, created by Ivan Trush (1869-1941) (1900) (Fig. 1), is a key example of Ukrainian portrait art of the turn of the 19th-20th centuries. Commissioned by the Shevchenko Scientific Society as part of a series of images of prominent figures of Ukrainian culture, this portrait reflects a deep psychologism.



Figure 1. Portrait of Lesya Ukrainka (1900)

Source: Local History (2024)

The portrait of Lesya Ukrainka, made from nature in late March – early April 1900, is an important iconographic document that captures the intersection of her personal biography and the intense creative period of the poetess. The time of its creation coincides with the arrival in Kyiv of Serhii Merzhynskiy (1870-1901), whose figure had a decisive influence on the emotional and spiritual state of Lesya Ukrainka. The subsequent death of S. Merzhynsky from pulmonary tuberculosis on 16 March, 1901, became a turning point in her life and work (Skrypka, 2015; Shpachynska, 2018). In the visual image of the portrait, this biographical context is indirectly reflected through the concentration of the gaze, internal tension, and restrained expression, which correlate with the psychological drama of the poetess. It was during this period that the dramatic poem "Possessed" was created, written in conditions of extreme emotional tension, and later the drama-fairy tale "The Forest Song" was completed, which confirms the trans-

formation of personal experience into an artistic form. The theme of Lesya Ukrainka's tragic love for S. Merzhynsky was immortalised not only in her literary works, but also in cinematic culture. The film "I Am Coming to You..." (1971), produced for the centenary of the poetess' birth at the Oleksandr Dovzhenko Kyiv Film Studio (director: M. Mashchenko; screenplay: I. Drach), represented another attempt to visualise Lesya Ukrainka's profound personal tragedy. Thus, the analysis of Lesya Ukrainka's work against the background of her personal life showed a close relationship between the emotional experiences of the poetess and her creative achievements, which is emphasised not only in her poetic works, but also in cultural interpretations created in subsequent years.

Ivan Trush focused his attention on the poetess's soulful face, using the contrast of light and shadow to convey her inner energy. The burgundy background evokes an allusion to the imprimatura that Titian frequently employed. A dark dress with a stand-up collar and an airy frill create an immaterial effect, emphasising the spiritual dimension of the image. Conditional space removes a person from a specific life situation. The image of Lesya Ukrainka is characterised by reflection. The look, deliberately obscured but clearly eloquent, reflects her emotionally intense state, resonating with the concept of poetic ecstasy. The portrait reflects the connection with eternity, avoiding the everyday context that corresponds to the portrait traditions of romanticism and neo-romanticism, where the psychological state of the individual dominates. The semantics of the visual image of the portrait can thus be interpreted as a visual parallel to the process of internal sublimation characteristic of Lesya Ukrainka's creative method. Thus, the portrait from 1900 appears not only as a realistic image from nature, but as a complex visual text that combines psychological characteristics, biographical memory, and symbolic representation of Lesya Ukrainka's creative identity.

To understand the drama of Lesya Ukrainka's psychological state in the 1904 portrait painted by F. Krasyt'sky at the poetess's request (Fig. 2), it is essential to note that it was created a year after the sudden death of her brother, the meteorologist and writer Mykhailo Kosach (1869-1903). In the first version, made in water-colour (Fig. 2a), the artist used transparent tonal layers that help to convey delicate mental and physical state of the model. According to memoirs of S. Krasyt'ska, while posing, Lesya Ukrainka looked at the icon of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, and the lighting was created by church candles (Shlensky, 2008). The history of the portrait's creation has an indirect connection with works characteristic of canonical Catholic iconography: the patrons were depicted in a state of eternal prayer before the image of the Mother of God for intercession before Christ. This portrait was rejected at the exhibition in Lviv (1905), after which F. Krasyt'sky created a

second version using oil painting techniques with an outdoor background (Fig. 2b).



Figure 2. Portraits of Lesya Ukrainka by F. Krasyt'sky
Note: a – fragment, watercolour; b – canvas, oil
Source: Museum of One Street (2015), Lesya Ukrainka. Encyclopedia of the life and works (n.d.a)

The circumstances of creating portraits form the existential background of the image of Lesya Ukrainka. The poetess's gaze in portraits translates the image into the plane of sacred dialogue – intimate and reflexive, devoid of external declarative. In this context, the visual image appears as a kind of “silent text”, semantically consonant with the linguostylistic analysis of the religious meanings of her writing. The sacredness of portraits functions not as an iconographic gesture, but as a psychological code through which the tension between the experience of earthly suffering and transcendental hope is actualised. Philosophical and pedagogical research by H. Vasianovych *et al.* (2025) allowed understanding the religious dimension of Lesya Ukrainka's work in the categories of universal spirituality and humanistic ethics associated with the ideas of freedom and the “philosophy of the heart” by H. Skoboroda. In the portraits by F. Krasyt'sky realised this dimension as a visual and psychological form of personal mystical experience. The combination of these approaches allows consider Lesya Ukrainka's portraits as an integral cultural phenomenon, in which the sacred is integrated with personal internal drama and an active cultural creative position. Approach of T. Gundorova (2025) on the topic of illness in the life and work of Lesya Ukrainka allows deepening understanding of the inner drama that is represented in her lifetime portraits. The researcher interpreted this experience as a socio-cultural phenomenon of modernity, which forms a specific optics of self-perception and cultural identity of the poetess, actualising the issues of creative subjectivity, physicality, and spiritual tension.

In this perspective, artistic and literary practice appears as a conscious inclusion of bodily experience in the development of a poetic and aesthetic programme. This theoretical context allows reading the visual image in portraits in a new way: instead of focusing only

on “realism” or “psychological portraiture”, portraits by I. Trush 1900 and subsequent lifetime images, in particular watercolour and pictorial portraits by F. Krasyt'sky 1904, appear as visual manifestations of the experienced physical and spiritual state. In these images, illness, reflection, and creativity form an integral artistic identity: posture, gaze, tonality, and compositional detachment determine the way Lesya Ukrainka sees the world, where bodily experience and cultural meaning are closely intertwined.

Comparison with other works of art. The transition from analysing Lesya Ukrainka's portraits to comparing them with the works of European artists is justified by the need to contextualise her image within the broader European tradition of portrait art. Parallels with other works help to better understand their symbolic and psychological content. For example, the portraits of Spanish grandees in the composition by El Greco “The Burial of the Count of Orgaz” (1586-1588) (Fig. 3a) and “Portrait of a Knight with His Hand on His Chest” (1584) (Fig. 3b) visually reflect the idea of duality of worlds, which is shared with the portraits of Lesya Ukrainka. The contrast between dark robes and light collars in El Greco's works enhances the spiritual dimension of the image, similar to the effect in the portrait by I. Trush.



Figure 3. Portrait images in El Greco's compositions
Note: a – The Burial of the Count of Orgaz (1586-1588);
 b – Portrait of a Knight with His Hand on His Chest (1584)
Source: Toledo Tourist Bracelet (2024), Prado National Museum (n.d.)

Academic basis of the composition of J.A.D. Ingres in “Mademoiselle Jeanne Gonin” (1821) (Fig. 4) also has common features with the portrait by I. Trush. Artists focused their attention on the model's face, highlighting it with light on a dark neutral background. What is common is a black dress with an accent of white lace, which directs the viewer's gaze to the centre. The work by J.A.D. Ingres is characterised by a three-dimensional plastic interpretation of the figure in space. The work by I. Trush is characterised by the dominant pictorial beginning. In the portrait of Lesya Ukrainka, there are

no lines fixing the model. The face and torso are in unity with the background. In contrast to the leader of academicism, the modernist artist does not seek to convey the specific characteristics of the material world (for example, fabric) but focuses on the expression of pictorial texture and tonal contrasts that help to convey the model's inner state.



Figure 4. Mademoiselle Jeanne Gonin (1821)
Source: Artchive (n.d.a)

The image of Lesya Ukrainka as a cultural figure echoes portraits of other artistic natures created in the style of romanticism and neo-romanticism. Portraits of actresses (Fig. 5) emphasised the kinship with the image of Lesya Ukrainka through the emphasis on passionate energy and inner drama conveyed through the eyes of the heroines, contrasts of light and shadow, colour, space. These comparisons were chosen because Lesya Ukrainka's portraits reflect not only her personality, but also a broader cultural context, where artists act as guides to the spiritual dimension.

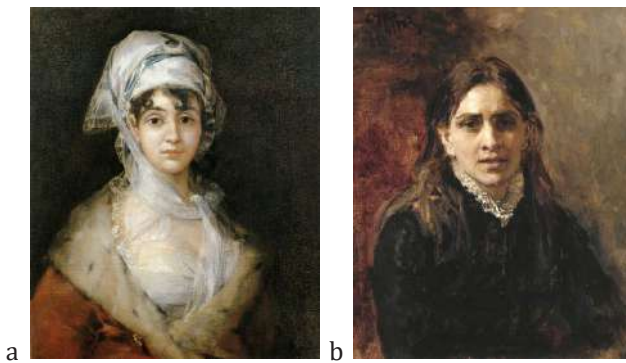


Figure 5. Portraits of actresses
Note: a – Portrait of the Actress Antonia Zárate by F. Goya (1810 or 1811); b – Portrait of the Actress Pelageya Antipjevna Strepetova by I. Repin (1882)
Source: PubHist (n.d.), Artchive (n.d.b)

Thus, the comparison of Lesya Ukrainka's portraits with the works of European artists allowed tracing common artistic principles and conceptual approaches

that emphasise the psychological depth and spiritual dimension of the image. Parallels with the compositions of El Greco ("The Burial of the Count of Orgaz", 1586-1588; "Portrait of a Knight with His Hand on His Chest", 1584) demonstrated the idea of two lights and the contrast of dark robes and light collars, which resonates with the portrait by I. Trush in 1900. The academic approach of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres in "Mademoiselle Jeanne Gonin" (1821) coincides with the portrait by I. Trush due to the concentration of attention on the face, chiaroscuro accents, and a black dress with white lace, although I. Trush moved away from academic detail in favour of pictorial expression. The image of Lesya Ukrainka also echoes the portraits of actresses in romanticism and neo-romanticism, in particular F. Goya ("Portrait of the Actress Antonia Sarate", 1810-1811) and I. Repin ("Portrait of the Actress Pelageya Antipjevna Strepetova", 1882), where the emphasis on the look, chiaroscuro and inner drama creates a kinship with the psychological and symbolic dimension of the portraits of the poetess. The portrait by Fotiy Krasysky in 1904 develops this artistic and psychological line. It reflected the state of loss and inner contemplation, and the use of watercolour techniques emphasised the fragility and spiritual sophistication of the image. Iconographic allusions bring the portrait closer to the sacred tradition, actualising the motif of the marginal state between the earthly and the transcendent.

Together, both works showed the priority of the psychological principle in Lesya Ukrainka's portrait representation, where biographical experience is transformed into an artistic sign, and personal experience acquires universal significance. Portraits function as complex visual texts that require interdisciplinary interpretation, in particular with the involvement of the philosophical concept of duality. The image of the poetess appears as a mediator between different levels of being, which strengthens her symbolic status and forms a stable iconography of Lesya Ukrainka in the national artistic context.

Posthumous portraits of Lesya Ukrainka. In creating posthumous portrait images, photography served as a primary retainer of appearance, similar to a wax mask made using the technology of an ancient Roman portrait. Through individual features of the physical form, the portraitist must convey the inner essence of the model. The convention of the language of black-and-white graphics is similar to photography, but the artist achieves expressiveness by generalising the main tonal relationships and compositional accents. In the graphic works of V. Chebanik (1933-2025), the precision of photography is combined with the conventionality of artistic language: the use of vinyl plastic provides linear expressiveness similar to woodcut printing and allows the creation of portraits that can be reproduced without loss of artistic quality. Full-face image of Lesya Ukrainka in the postcard series "Classics of Ukrainian

literature” (1966) (Fig. 6) demonstrated ritual static, calm frontal composition and psychological concentration on the gaze, which enhances the sense of presence and spiritual weight of the poetess.

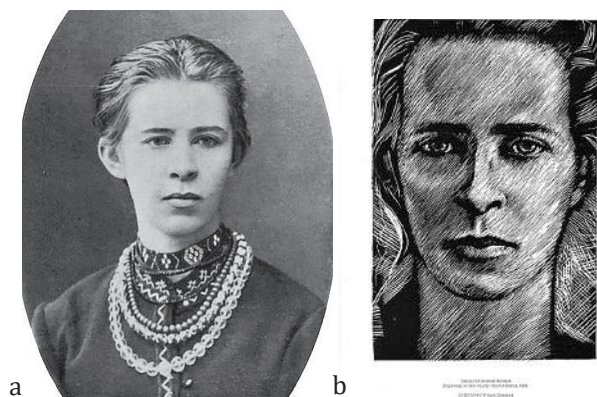


Figure 6. Comparison of a photographic portrait and an engraved image of Lesya Ukrainka

Note: a – photographic portrait of Lesya Ukrainka (1886); b – Lesya Ukrainka, series of postcards “Classics of Ukrainian Literature” (1966)

Source: Poltava Art Museum (2024), Lesya Ukrainka. Encyclopedia of the life and works (n.d.b)

In the versions of the portrait of 1966, the image of a poetess with an open gaze was created (Fig. 7b, 7c). The artist used the technique of cinema: a close-up of a fragmentary image of the face allows focusing attention on the eyes. The light silhouette resembles a fragment

of a halo. The basis for the engravings was the last photograph of Lesya Ukrainka (1913) (Fig. 7a), performed by her cousin Yuri Teslenko-Prikhodko, which reproduced the psychological state, angle, and clothing of the poetess, later manifested in portraits by Chebanyk.

I. Babii (2025) emphasised that photography has become an autonomous artistic practice, which is both a document and a source material for further artistic transformation. This approach was completely correlated with portraits by B. Chebanyk, where photographs served as a starting point for creating a generalised artistic composition. Portraits of Lesya Ukrainka, created by V. Chebanyk, demonstrated a connection with the tradition of a female photo portrait analysed by S. Kotliar & I. Zaspá (2021), where the photo performs dual functions: documentary – captures the appearance and psychological state of the model, and artistic – forms the image through composition, chiaroscuro, and emphasis on the gaze. The visual semantics of the poetess’s gaze correlate with the poetic faces of the drama-fairy tale “The Forest Song”, where L. Ukrainka (2021), metaphorically meant the eyes of people doomed to a short life, as “a look from another world”. In the portraits of V. Chebanyk, close-up face and open gaze emphasise psychological individuality, inner strength, and spiritual presence, combining the authenticity of the photo with artistic generalisation and symbolic meaning. Thus, pictorial, graphic, and photographic portraits enter into an inter-media dialogue with the literary text, forming a holistic image of spiritual exclusivity.

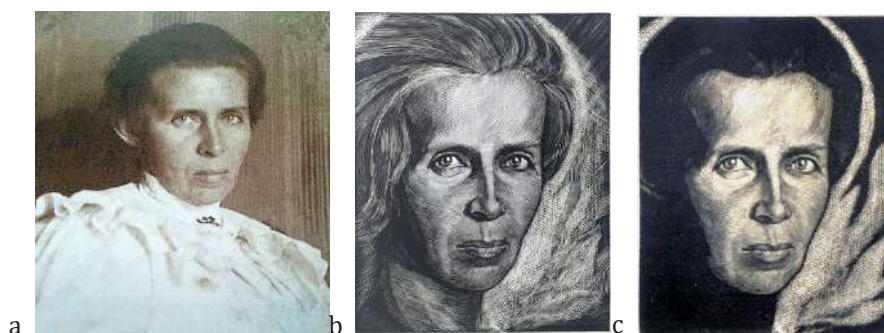


Figure 7. Comparison of a photographic portrait and engraved images of Lesya Ukrainka created by V.V. Chebanyk

Note: a – photographic portrait of Lesya Ukrainka (1913); b, c – Lesya Ukrainka by V.Y. Chebanyk (1966)

Source: Lesya Ukrainka. Encyclopedia of the life and works (n.d.c), photo by O. Tarasenko

This approach correlates with the “conversation over time” model proposed by M. Skab & M. Skab (2021) in which the past is understood as a living spiritual presence. The portrait becomes not only a reproduction of appearance, but also a tool for an intimate, reflective dialogue between modernity and the historical image. The gaze in the portrait transforms it into a sacral space where the past is experienced as an active spiritual presence rather than a static reconstruction of events

or external features. The symbolic and cultural role of portraits was emphasised by S. Dolesko & A. Alieksiieva (2022), who analysed the image of Lesya Ukrainka on the national currency as a symbol of statehood and cultural identity. Like banknotes, portraits by V. Chebanyk was transformed into a symbolic image, which formed a cultural memory, emphasised the historical significance and spiritual role of the poetess in national culture. Thus, posthumous portraits of Lesya Ukrainka,

created by V. Chebanyk, combined documentary accuracy, artistic generalisation and symbolic-ritual load, integrating psychological depth, cultural memory, and the sacred presence of the past into the artistic image.

Memorial plaque to Taisiya Sudyina (1931-2012) (Fig. 8) combined a bronze relief portrait image of Lesya Ukrainka with symbolically rich decorative elements, in particular gilded letters and stylised floral ornaments. The compositional solution has an expressive dynamic character. The flowing scarf organises the vertical axis of the composition and at the same time serves as a semantic link between the portrait image and the text inscription: “The outstanding Ukrainian writer Lesya Ukrainka lived in this house in 1889, 1890, and 1893”. The dark silhouette of the bronze relief is clearly outlined on a light grey granite background, which enhances the visual dominant of the portrait image.



Figure 8. Comparison of a photographic portrait and a sculptural image of Lesya Ukrainka

Note: a – photographic portrait of Lesya Ukrainka, Kyiv (1896); b – memorial plaque to Lesya Ukrainka, bronze, granite (1971)

Source: Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova (2021), photo by O. Tarasenko

T. Sudyina integrated the portrait into an expanded ornamental space, within which the psychological individuality of the poetess coexists with generalised symbols of vitality and continuity of cultural tradition. The dynamics of compositional elements – first of all, the movement of the scarf and the rhythm of the floral ornament – violates the static nature of the memorial object, creating the effect of internal movement. The material interaction of bronze, gilding, and stone emphasised the monumentality of the work, and its ritual function – affirming the presence of the image of Lesya Ukrainka in urban space as a sign of cultural memory.

Portrait painting by R. Petruk “Ray of Dream. Lesya Ukrainka” (2020) in Figure 9 presented the image of the poetess through the prism of her drama-fairy tale “The Forest Song”, interpreting it in the context of the idea of the spring revival of nature and man as a universal metaphor for spiritual renewal. The development of a

recognisable portrait image is based on a thorough study of lifetime photographic materials, which provides biographical authenticity and simultaneously serves as a starting point for artistic generalisation. Overcoming the boundaries of everyday space and historical time, the artist turns to the conventional style of Modernist portraits, in which a realistic interpretation of the face and hands is combined with an ornamentalised solution of the costume.

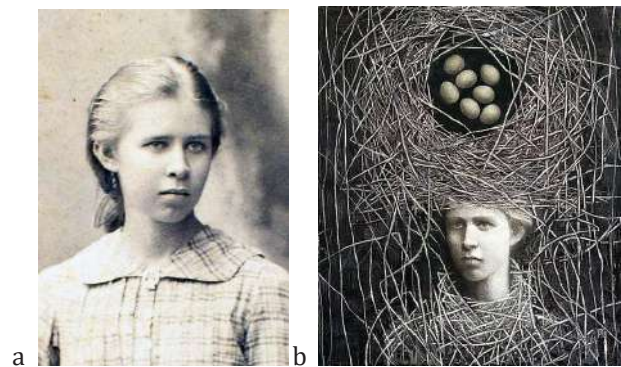


Figure 9. Comparison of a photographic portrait and a painted image of Lesya Ukrainka

Note: a – photographic portrait of Lesya Ukrainka, Odesa (1888); b – Ray of Dream. Lesya Ukrainka by R. Petruk (2020)

Source: Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova (2021), Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine (n.d.)

The symbolic dimension of the image is enhanced by the laconism of the composition and the expressive colouristic opposition of black and white, which functions as the semantic culmination of the visual narrative. In the theoretical concept of W. Kandinsky (2002), these colours are understood as the two limiting possibilities of “silence” – death and birth, which gives the contrast an existential meaning. The inclusion of the egg motif as a universal symbol of the creation of the world and microcosm, and a numerical allusion to Lesya Ukrainka’s poem “Seven Strings” (1890) formed a multi-level system of signs (Tresidder, 1997). Above the poetess’s head, a bird’s nest with eggs is depicted, which simultaneously resembles the shape of a round wreath – a symbol of a closed sacred space, an archetype of integrity, eternal return, and continuity of being. Within this space, the origin of life appears as an act of cosmic and spiritual order. Set among the bare branches of a dormant forest, the nest visualises a potential awakening and inner strength hidden in a state of silent expectation. In compositional and symbolic terms, it served as the semantic centre and visual equivalent of the “Ray of Dream” – the hope of rebirth after a winter sleep and oblivion, which echoes the idea of catharsis and the neo-romantic worldview of Lesya Ukrainka (Chumak, 2021).

The natural motif in the portrait by R. Petruk performs not a decorative, but a conceptual function that

directly correlates with the literary observations of T. Chumak (2021). The researcher emphasised that Lesya Ukrainka's neo-romanticism fundamentally differs from the Western European model by the absence of the motif of spiritual exhaustion; instead, nature in her poetics appears as a space of spiritual strength, self-reflection, and existential choice. The landscape in Lesya Ukrainka's lyrics is not a descriptive element, but acts as a discursive environment where key issues of freedom, will, struggle, and inner harmony unfold. In the pictorial image by R. Petruk, motifs of a sleeping forest, bare branches, and the potency of spring renewal visualise just such a life-affirming neo-romantic ideal, where nature is a source of inner strength, and not a space of melancholic escape.

The image of Lesya Ukrainka in the portrait is formed as a synthetic artistic model, in which biographical recognition is combined with symbolic and mythological generalisation. The appeal to "The Forest Song" allows interpreting the poetess not only as a historical figure, but as an intermediary between the natural and spiritual dimensions of being. This visual concept echoes the conclusions of O. Borzenko (2021) on the early work of Lesya Ukrainka, in which album lyrics and imagery act as a stage in the development of a reflexive artistic consciousness focused on inner experience and symbolic thinking. While in poetry this process takes place in verbal form, in R. Petruk's painting it acquires a visual and philosophical dimension, where Lesya Ukrainka appears as a symbol of rebirth, continuity of life and spiritual stability. The symbolic language of painting by R. Petruk (contrast of black and white, egg motif, numerical allusion to "Seven String") echoes the type of imaginative thinking found by O. Borzenko in Lesya Ukrainka's early poetry: a penchant for picturesque, melodramatism, and mythopoetic understanding of reality. If in her album lyrics the poetess explored the realm of intimate feelings and spiritual maturation, then in her paintings this process acquires a visual and philosophical continuation, where Lesya Ukrainka appears as a symbol of rebirth, catharsis, and the continuity of life. Thus, O. Borzenko and Petruk's portrait painting represented different but complementary levels of interpretation of Lesya Ukrainka's image – verbal and visual, united by a common logic of transition from personal experience to cultural and existential universalism.

Thus, the portrait painting by R. Petruka combined elements of realism and symbolism of modernism, creating the image of Lesya Ukrainka as a mythopoetic figure that goes beyond time and space. The artist formed a synthetic portrait in which the recognisable features of the poetess are organically intertwined with mythological and symbolic allusions. The use of natural motifs, contrasting colours, egg and bird's nest symbols forms a multi-level system of signs that reflects the life-affirming neo-romantic worldview of Lesya Ukrainka and her

concept of rebirth and catharsis. The painting shows the transition from a personal, biographical experience to a universal cultural and spiritual dimension. In this context, R. Petruk does not serve as an illustrator of poetic texts, but creates a visual reflection on the neo-romantic thinking of the poetess, organically integrating it with the aesthetics of modernism and the dramatic principles of portrait.

In the broader methodological aspect of comparing graphic portraits by B. Chebanyk, memorial relief by T. Sudyina and the portrait paintings by R. Petruk allows highlighting a holistic approach to the visual representation of Lesya Ukrainka in the 20th century. In all cases, the documentary prototype – a photograph or biographical fact – undergoes transformation through artistic generalisation, psychological interpretation, and symbolic coding. This technique creates a multidimensional image of the poetess, in which the authenticity of external features is combined with the depth of the inner world, the ritual significance of the memorial form, and the reflection of national and cultural identity.

Portrait images of Lesya Ukrainka should be considered not only as artistic images, but also as visual representations of a philosophical and cultural personality, in which the individual principle is combined with the socio-historical dimension. According to O. Chaplinska (2022), the poetess appears as a unique phenomenon of the spirit, whose personality is thought in opposition to public and mass perception, which allows interpreting her as a carrier of an autonomous spiritual and cultural position. In this context, a portrait – pictorial, graphic, or photographic – captures not so much external features as manifestations of inner will, spiritual integrity and the desire for freedom, which corresponds to the neo-romantic understanding of the individual as an active subject of cultural and historical processes.

Conceptually similar was the approach proposed by N. Sharma (2022), where female creativity was understood through the prism of the transition from the role of "muse" to the status of an autonomous author of her own narrative. Applying this approach to interpreting Lesya Ukrainka's image is productive, since during her lifetime the poet consistently established herself as an active intellectual and cultural figure, rather than as an object of inspiration. Her texts and public image form a female voice that resists patriarchal models of silence and marginalisation, just as in feminist literature of the 20th and 21st centuries, women's experience becomes central and narratively dominant. In the literary heritage of Lesya Ukrainka, a woman appears as a thinking, reflective, and morally responsible subject of history. Similar shifts can be traced in the visual representations of the poetess – both lifetime and posthumous – where there is a gradual departure from the idealised romanticised image of the "suffering muse" in favour of emphasising intellectual concentration, inner strength, and autonomy.

In comparison with the philosophical views of women of the 19th century, analysed by A. Stone (2024), common conceptual guidelines were identified: the desire for the synthesis of aesthetics and morality, recognition of individual autonomy, interest in the interaction of art and the social role of a person. Like the British philosophers of art, Lesya Ukrainka in her literary and visual images acted as an intermediary between the aesthetic form and the value idea, where beauty, morality, and spiritual mission appear as inter-related components. In the portraits of the poetess, this principle was implemented through the indissoluble connection of the artistic form with the philosophical message, which reveals the inner autonomy, willpower, and cultural responsibility of the individual.

The perspective of philosophical and visual understanding was supplemented by S. Povtoreva (2021), in which Lesya Ukrainka's portraits are viewed through postmodern optics. The researcher noted the restrained expression, internal tension, and lack of everyday markers, which correlates with the non-classical type of thinking of the poetess and her orientation to spiritual, moral, and aesthetic values. In this dimension, the portrait image appeared as an artistic and philosophical model of the individual, which combines intellectual autonomy and symbolic representation of spiritual freedom. Thus, the comparison of Lesya Ukrainka's work with the ideas of N. Sharma (2022) gave grounds to interpret her figure as a symbol of female creative subjectivity in the Ukrainian cultural context. Similar to contemporary feminist art, where the female gaze functions as a form of resistance and self-representation, the image of Lesya Ukrainka in literature and portrait art has established the model of a female creator who forms her own narrative and at the same time reinterprets collective cultural memory.

Thus, the portrait images of Lesya Ukrainka function as a visual projection of the very philosophical ideas that define her literary heritage and echo the aesthetic philosophy of women of the 19th century: the establishment of an active personality capable of influencing public consciousness, forming value orientations and creating a cultural space of autonomous subjects. The internal tension and drama of these images, captured in painting, graphics, and photography, are consistent with the concepts of neo-romantic and postmodern autonomous personality, and with the ideas of leading researchers about the role of aesthetic form as a means of moral, intellectual, and spiritual development of society.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of portrait images of Lesya Ukrainka in the context of visual art of the late 19th – early 21st centuries provided conclusions about the evolution of the portrait genre in Ukrainian art and its connection with European artistic traditions. Portraits of Lesya Ukrainka, created by I. Trush, F. Krasysky, V. Chebanyk,

T. Sudyina, and R. Petruk, reflect not only the personality of the poetess, but also broader cultural and historical processes, in particular, the transition from academic tradition to romantic and neo-romantic psychologism. These works demonstrated a paradigm shift in the portrait genre: from representing the social status characteristic of ceremonial portraits of the aristocracy, to emphasising the spiritual depth and emotional state of the individual, which is key for portraits of cultural figures of the 19th-20th centuries.

The study of the poetess's portraits in the context of European visual art revealed their multilayered nature and intertextual interaction with the traditions of Baroque, Romanticism, and Neo-Romanticism. The analysis of lifetime and posthumous portraits of Lesya Ukrainka, created in painting, graphics, sculpture, and photography, showed the evolution of the portrait genre from idealised images of women to psychologically deep images that reflect spiritual energy and existential consciousness. Compositional elements, in particular contrasts of light and shadow, colouristics and ornamentation, emphasised symbolic motifs of love, death, and spiritual verticality, which correlated with European artistic traditions (El Greco, J.A.D. Ingres, F. Goya). Lesya Ukrainka's portraits perform memorial and ritual functions, providing a link between the past and the present and contributing to the establishment of Ukrainian cultural identity. The application of a comprehensive methodological approach helped to establish a link between portraits and the global cultural context. Thus, the lifetime portraits of Lesya Ukrainka appeared not only as iconographic evidence of their era, but also as complex visual texts in which the portrait genre functions as a space of psychological, biographical, and symbolic representation of the individual. In the context of the European portrait tradition – from the ritual and memorial functions of antiquity to the psychological deepening of modernity – the images of Lesya Ukrainka showed a shift from external fixation of individual features to visualisation of internal, existential experience.

Further research may be aimed at studying the influence of Lesya Ukrainka's literary work on visual interpretations of her image, in particular, through the analysis of symbolism in her dramas and poetry. It is also promising to investigate the role of photography as an intermediary between painting and graphics in the portrait genre, which can reveal new aspects of interaction between different media in Ukrainian art. In addition, the analysis of the perception of Lesya Ukrainka's portraits in the modern cultural context, in particular through digital platforms, can shed light on their relevance in the 21st century.

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Драматургія портрета: Леся Українка в інтертексті візуального мистецтва

Ольга Тарасенко

Доктор мистецтвознавства, професор
Державний заклад «Південноукраїнський національний педагогічний
університет імені К. Д. Ушинського»
65000, вул. Старопортофранківська, 26, м. Одеса, Україна
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3775-4899>

Анотація. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням інтересу сучасного мистецтвознавства до міждисциплінарного аналізу візуальних образів як носіїв культурної пам'яті, ідентичності та символічних смислів, а також потребою переосмислення українського художнього досвіду в європейському та глобальному контексті. Образ Лесі Українки, як ключової постаті національної культури, залишається недостатньо осмисленим саме в площині драматургії портрета та інтертекстуальних взаємодій між візуальним мистецтвом, літературою і філософією. Метою дослідження було осмислення портретних образів Лесі Українки в контексті європейських візуальних практик з урахуванням їхніх зв'язків із бароковими, романтичними та неоромантичними традиціями, а також осмислення їхнього художнього й символічного виміру у формуванні культурної ідентичності. Застосовано комплексний методологічний підхід, що включає герменевтику, аналітичну психологію, іконографію, іконологію, компаративний, історико-культурологічний та семіотичний методи. Проаналізовано еволюцію жіночого портретного образу від нормативно-ідеалізованих репрезентацій до психологічно поглибленого візуального втілення творчої особистості, у межах якого символічні структури та драматургічна організація композиції набувають визначального смислотворчого значення. Дослідження охопило портрети, створені за життя поетеси та помертві у різних видах мистецтва (живопис, графіка, скульптура, фотографія). Порівняння портретів Лесі Українки з європейськими творами було зумовлене необхідністю контекстуалізації її образу в межах ширшої художньої традиції. Це дало змогу виявити спільні риси в техніках передачі психологізму та символізму, що є характерними для романтизму, неоромантизму та модерну. Водночас український контекст, зокрема вплив «Лісової пісні» (1911) та інших творів поетеси, надав портретам локальної специфіки, що підкреслило їхню унікальність. Аналіз засвідчив театральність і психологізм образів Лесі Українки, а також їхній зв'язок з універсальними мотивами любові, смерті та духовної вертикалі. Символічні компоненти композицій актуалізували ритуальну функцію портрета як медіатора між минулим, теперішнім і майбутнім.

Ключові слова: художнє зображення поетів; іконографічний аналіз; неоромантизм; гендер; театральність; фотографія