

**The Sacred and the Profane in Valeriy Shevchuk's
Novel *The Dark Music of Pines***

At the turn of the millennium the mankind faced the problem of outlook vagueness generated by postmodern philosophy, which having proclaimed the liberation from any limits of the epoch, absolute truths and binary opposition, suggested decentration and deconstruction, skepticism and doubt about social and moral norms as well as about the structures that created them. Literary critics such as T. Vayn, L. Drayden, D. Panter, G. Byron, etc. repeatedly studied the expression of psychological, epistemological, religious and social concerns, connected with the problem of the violation of human identity limits in Gothic literature, but there is lack of attention to the question of the correlation of the sacred and the profane and the peculiarities of their artistic realization and that determines the topicality of the article.

Valeriy Shevchuk is one of the most prominent neo-Gothic prose writers in Ukrainian literature of the end of the 20th – beginning of the 21st centuries. S. Andruciv, A. Gornyatko-Shumilovich, N. Gorognyuk, M. Zhulyncky, I. Prylypko, R. Korogodcky, V. Panchenko, L. Tarnashivska, etc. researched the peculiarities of his individual style. The scientists, namely M. Barabash, G. Grabovych, L. Tarnashivska and N. Fenko repeatedly emphasized that Gothic elements are organically embedded into the poetic manner of the writer's works.

The aim of our research is to analyze the realization of the categories of the sacred and the profane in Ukrainian postmodern neo-Gothic of the end of the 20th century (1999) on the example of Valeriy Shevchuk's novel *The Dark Music of Pines*.

The events of the Baroque-Gothic Valeriy Shevchuk's novel *The Dark Music of Pines* occur on the historical background of the 17th century. It's not a traditional romantic Gothic pseudopast, because the author is trying to convey the spirit of the time accurately referring to the documents, and historical figures act along with

fictional characters. However, the writer delivers his own interpretation and the version of the story and the characters. In addition, the historical background is the allegory of the present and Gothic dominants function as the link between the past and its heritage as the issues raised by the author are timeless and eternal: the meaning of life, the search of the own identity in the world of love, crime and punishment, sin and atonement.

The basis of the novel is a touching love story of two lonely and broken down people: a hermit Theophil Bilosir and a prostitute Teresa who found in his house a refuge from the persecution of Theophil's old rival and enemy Father Stephan Martyshkevych-Businsky.

The author plays up the traditional Gothic three-member system of images in a postmodern manner. The first character Theophil is an honest, strong and brave hunter and a former soldier who leaves the mundane world because of the unfaithfulness of his beloved wife Nastya, the emergence of the women in his house creates confusion and even irrational fear in his soul. The second character Teresa, a former prostitute, appears to be the same frivolous Nastya who is not an innocent and trusting heroine of romantic gothic of the 18th century but a lost soul and at the same time a temptress and a manipulator forced to use unworthy methods for survival. In the villainous image of a lustful, power-hungry and mean sadist and intriguer Father Martyshkevych-Businsky one can see the reflection of his predecessors – Ambrosio (*The Monk* by M. G. Lewis) and Skedoni (*The Italian* by E. Radcliffe), but if the last figures are depicted in sublime manner, Stephan (by the way, deprived of virile strength by Theophil for seducing his wife) arouses more contempt and disgust than fear.

However, the novel *The Dark Music of Pines* is not a product of the era of sentimentality or romanticism, but post-modernism; it collected many traditional Gothic motifs and images, but with consistent modification and inversion. The development of the events constantly contradicts common expectations, the characters are not the ones they were before. Therefore, the theatrical performance becomes the driving force of the plot. Playing with the reader, the author pays more

attention not to the creation of exciting or shocking scenes but to the disclosure of the mazes of the main characters' souls and their intricate past. He overburdens the novel with philosophical reflection in a baroque manner, which leads to inconsistency and fragmentariness of the narrative.

In the novel the sacred is not only inseparable from the profane, but is also realized through it: the holy, the religious is reproduced as ideal, embodied in the material world but not as something completely separated from human corporality, so the characters inner peace is possible only in a joint family life, which combines legitimacy (marriage), naturality (physical pleasure) and spirituality (understanding others, compassion, forgiveness and love).

Thus, neo-gothic dominants transfer Valeriy Shevchuk's novel *The Dark Music of Pines* into the philosophical and ethical dimension, serving as a connection with the past and its heritage. The problems raised by the author are eternal and universal. Combining the sacred and the profane, *The Rediscovered House*, which is recognized as a refuge from chaos and evil, that prevail outside, becomes the topos. Although literary Gothic represents spiritual world, it does focus on a dark, demonic aspect. Reflecting the hidden side of life – madness, perversion, obsessive desires, crime, degeneration and death – Gothic paves the way for new spirituality, which is supposed to restore cultural values through the return of sacred and religious forces turned to traditional images.