

DOI: 10.31866/2410-1915.23.2022.260971

UDC 17.03:2-185.3]:008+1+7

## CONFESSIONAL GROUNDS IN CULTURE, PHILOSOPHY, AND ART

Olena Kunderevych

*PhD in Philosophy, Associate Professor,**ORCID: 0000-0001-7248-5033, l.kunderevich@gmail.com,**Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts,**36, Ye. Konovaltsia St., Kyiv, 01133, Ukraine*

---

### **For citations:**

Kunderevych, O. (2022). Confessional Grounds in Culture, Philosophy, and Art. *Culture and Arts in the Modern World*, 23, 102-110. <https://doi.org/10.31866/2410-1915.23.2022.260971>.

---

The purpose of the article is to identify the peculiarities of the repentance, penitence, and confession concepts' grounds in art and philosophy, to characterise examples of the reflection of these concepts in art. Research relevance. A necessary component of philosophical reasoning, cultural studies and everyday life practices is the rethinking of many concepts of moral consciousness. Reasoning on ethical values is essential in all cultures and at all times. The topics of moral quest, self-deepening and purification are relevant today. Turning to the analysis of the reflection of such concepts as *confession*, *repentance*, *penitence* in culture and art requires research attention. The research methodology is based on general scientific and special methods of knowledge, in particular analysis, synthesis, the logical method and the method of generalisation. The scientific novelty is in revealing the concept of *repentance* in the confessional grounds of philosophy and literature — as a primordial and constant concern of the human spirit for itself. Conclusions. It is revealed that remorse arises when, having committed a fundamentally wrong act, a person recognises it as a violation of the moral law and condemns it, but does not have the strength to condemn themselves so much as to renounce entirely the passion that led to the crime, so they do not seek real transformations of their soul. The article has demonstrated that spiritual quest, a person's ascent through moral self-improvement, occur in a person at any period of their life. It is proved that the emphasis on conscience, a person's moral self-purification, repentance has been inherent in the national cultural tradition since Kyivan Rus. And in the following centuries, this moral attitude was decisive in the spiritual life of our ancestors many times, returning hope in difficult historical moments. It is generalised that a sincere search for the ways of the good and genuine repentance and confession is possible to others and oneself.

*Keywords:* confession, repentance, penance, conscience, spiritual quest, confessional motifs, creativity, art

### **Introduction**

Relevance of the research topic. Throughout its cultural development, humankind has formed ethical norms in religious and philosophical systems. Every individual's

conscience should coincide with them if they do not want to start their development from the very beginning. The relevance of reasoning on ethical values is important in all cultures and at all times. Rethinking many concepts of moral consciousness is a necessary component of abstract and philosophical reasoning, cultural studies and vital everyday practices.

The natural urge for harmony and beauty is the driving force for self-improvement, creating the personal history of an individual and humankind. The artists' appeal to the theme of the moral quest, self-deepening, purification and ascent of the individual to the highest stage of his spiritual development is important in ethical and aesthetic spheres. "The artist who has realised the reality of art cannot stop and not strive further, to reality itself. They want the Tabor light, the scattered rays of which they catch in the focus of their art, to illuminate the whole world" (Bulgakov, 1994, p. 332).

Analysis of research and publications. The works of French neo-Thomists, particularly by M. Gabriel, are characterised by their confessional genre and problematics. The theme of "penance" in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is revealed in theoretical thought and reflected in artistic work: poetry, prose, cinema (S. Mirkina, Ch. Aitmatov, J.-L. Borges, J. Fowles, T. Abuladze).

Consideration of the cultural and philosophical-ethical aspects of the problem of repentance and penance are expressed in Ukrainian scientific literature. The phenomena of "penance" and "repentance" are considered in V. A. Malakhov's works (1988). The works of a number of Ukrainian philosophers and cultural scientists regarding confessional grounds are of considerable interest to M. V. Popovych, V. H. Tabachkovskiy, V. I. Panchenko, N. V. Khamitov and others.

## **Purpose of the article**

The purpose of the article is to identify the peculiarities of the reflection of the concepts of repentance, penance, confession in art and philosophy works, to characterise the examples of the representation of these concepts in art.

## **Main research material**

The need to open our souls to someone else, confess frankly what worries us and remains on our conscience, what we would like to hide, but can carry within ourselves no longer, in private is a normal and natural need of a person as a moral and social being.

In "guilt cultures", repentance is often in the form of confession. People confess and repent to each other at all times. Still, it is only in the Christian tradition that confession and repentance have become custom and rule, a moral or rather a religious and moral norm and duty. It is confirmed by the entire history of Christian literature, both ancient and medieval, in which confessional grounds play a significant role, filling the works of various kinds, especially philosophical and theological reflections.

"Shame cultures" do not involve confession, even to the gods. These are the cultures of the Ancient East, although a similar type of moral orientation is sometimes

present in Western civilisations as well. “Shame cultures” do not imply confession but “ceremonialism”.

The classic example of the literary confession that gave rise to the “confession” as a special genre was *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* (Augustinus, 1999), the father of the Western Christian Church, a prominent theologian, philosopher and moralist. Although the work was written in the Patristic Period (around 400) and reflected the spiritual situation and ideological quest of the time, the authority of *The Confessions*, like other works by Augustine primarily, was very significant in the Middle Ages, it’s even possible to say “immutable”. Therefore, the moral-psychological teaching presented in *The Confessions* became, in a certain sense, normative for the Western European Middle Ages, mainly determining the nature and problems of scholastic ethics. At that time, stories with plots appealing to religion were quite common in the Christian world. The topics of the genre were usually based on stories about two opposed parts of life, the hard way of the cross to learn the true teaching — the gift of God in the form of unexpected spiritual insight and his grace, etc.

The content of *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* seems to fit into the shape of an ellipse with two centres, one of which is God and the other the Augustinian “self”, theocentricism is combined with egocentrism. The reason for theocentricism is the author’s deep and sincere religiosity. The reason for egocentrism is both in the peculiarities of the genre and in the fact that confession causes introspection, self-disclosure and self-deepening. In addition, it is a religious confession that helps to “purify” one’s soul for further communion with God. Rethinking his life story, Augustine concluded that all the events that happened to him were planned by providence. In this sense, he was given the role of a sinner saved by God. Whatever Augustine did or thought, no matter how far he strayed from the righteous path, God always turned everything to his advantage. He had freedom and anguish of choice (for Augustine, a very emotional and, at the same time, very versatile person, the choice was always tough). Still, even if he chose the worst, then this worst became a necessary element of ascending to the best.

His whole life story looks like an ongoing struggle between good and evil, but in this case, it is an internal, psychological struggle, a struggle with himself that is guided by providence. The example, experience and penitential path of St. Augustine confirm that rethinking of one’s own former life and a principled return to the service to a holy cause are the highest expressions of the human spirit. From the first to the last page of his work, Augustine doesn’t stop pondering what human happiness is and how to achieve it. Augustine’s ethics is a kind of Christian eudaimonia.

In Augustine’s opinion, the most important thing to understand is that no personal efforts can bring people out of their sinful state. Because to become a better person means to learn to refrain from sin. But no one can be restrained if God doesn’t give it to them. Much depends on a person’s will, but the very return of the choice from evil to good does not depend on him. It is not achievements that fall to a person’s lot, but only guilt, because the only thing that a person commits himself, or instead because of the impulse of his perverted nature, are sins and crimes. Therefore, according to Augustine, the feeling of guilt should be a fundamental, basic moral feeling of a person in this life, and the feeling of gratitude to God should be even more fundamental. In his opinion, this should be true piety and righteousness.

Feeling guilty, a righteous person will constantly confess and repent of their sins to God, begging him for forgiveness and mercy with fear and hope. Feeling gratitude, a person will rejoice in each of his good intentions and actions as a gift of divine grace, and he will glorify God for this in his prayers, giving him his faith and all his love. It is the result of Augustine's confessional ethics, and it's also the last precept of Christian ethics in general. The logic of religious thought transforms its demands for self-deepening and self-purification into a demand for self-denial. In the Middle Ages, this transformation became a fact of ethical theory and everyday moral practice, a special "repentance culture".

Abstracting from purely Christian dogmas, one can see how an educated, intelligent, talented person seeks answers to questions that are intrinsic to everyone and condition life in one way or another. Namely, it is the question of the end of human existence and the meaning of life. A. Augustine finds the secret of humility in the Holy Scriptures, mainly in the Holy Apostle Paul: "What shall wretched man do? Who shall deliver him from the body of his death?" (Augustinus, 1999, p. 125). Having seen, felt, understood, internally reconsidered all his experience and life path, always accompanied by a search for truth, Augustine found answers to the above-mentioned existential questions in the Holy Scriptures, in contrast to the philosophical, mystical literature, namely the Neoplatonists, whom he was interested in his time. He writes, "This those writings contain not [the Neoplatonists' books]. Those pages present not the image of this piety, the tears of confession, Thy sacrifice, a troubled spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, the salvation of the people, the Bridal City, the earnest of the Holy Ghost, the Cup of our Redemption" (Augustinus, 1999, p. 125).

Augustine writes about the power of confession, which turns to God from the depths of the soul. The symbol of Christian sacrifice is the sacrifice of our heart, ourselves, for the sake of restoration and resurrection in the new world. Augustine asks himself an interesting question: do other people need to know about all this, or do such questions concern only one repentant person? Having long reflected on what he writes, and it is *The Confessions* he writes, he concludes that his confession concerns people; when they listen to it with love, they can take advantage of it. "What then have I to do with men, that they should hear my confessions — as if they could heal all my infirmities — a race, curious to know the lives of others, slothful to amend their own?" (Augustinus, 1999, p. 172).

The relevance of Augustine's thought is that a person reading his *The Confessions*, whether they knew him or not, no matter how much time has passed, sees him as he is now because the author confesses to his readers every minute. He confessed to God in his ancient sins and realised the remission of his sins. But it seems that people never ask, "What were you like once?". They are interested in "Who are you now?". "... Who have or have not known me, who has heard from me or of me; but their ear is not at my heart where I am, whatever I am. Who has heard from me or of me; but their ear is not at my heart where I am, whatever I am. They wish then to hear me confess what I am within; whither neither their eye, ear, nor understanding can reach; they wish it, as ready to believe — but will they know? For charity, whereby they are good, telleth them that in my confessions I lie not; and she in them, believeth me" (Augustinus, 1999, p. 173). Augustine's *The Confessions* teaches spiritual work, uncompromisingly highlighting a person's simultaneous greatness and weakness. Psychological confession as an au-

tobiography of the confessional type has found its continuation in the works of F. Petrarch (2014), Dante Alighieri (2016), J. W. von Goethe (2016), J.-J. Rousseau (2014), etc.

The defender of human nature was J.-J. Rousseau. He believed that civilisation broke a person's natural origins and led to evil and injustice. According to Rousseau, the ability to be "alone with oneself" distinguishes humans from herd animals. A person's ability to self-esteem, self-reflection, and self-improvement can serve as the basis for creating a charitable and just human existence, among others.

Having recognised the sensitivity to evil in themselves, whatever misfortune a person is going through tells themselves that they have got what they deserve. Thus, the evil events of our psycho-material being are the consequences of moral evil, insufficient love: "All the suffering we experience is a direct, imminent punishment for moral evil; it is a reduction of our well-being, which has a double meaning: first, a just retribution for the evil we have brought into the world and, second, a means of healing from moral imperfection", writes N. O. Lossky (2000, p. 144). Thus, punishment has a healing meaning for a person, as evidenced by the entire history of the development of culture, including "repentance culture".

M. Merleau-Ponty (1999) began to study the phenomenon, that is, the primordial truly human act and completed it in his phenomenology of speech. He introduced the act of speaking to the concept of the phenomenon and concluded that now we have all the essential elements of the phenomenon. For Merleau-Ponty, the word becomes the central point of human spontaneity; that's why he believed that the phenomenology of the word would help reveal the human subject in its most fundamental dimensions. Art is an excellent material for emphasising the conclusions of existential phenomenology. "Phenomenology is identical to works of art; they are united by the desire to understand the meaning of the world and history" (Merleau-Ponty, 1992, p. 36).

M. Merleau-Ponty attaches particular importance to literature, to literary creativity, in which, he believes, speech ceases to be a mere means of communication of what is and becomes the body of the writer, the writer himself; language is no longer the servant of meanings but the very act of defining, and the only way for the writer to understand language is "to settle in it". Through this "settling", one can explore a diverse palette of meanings and interpretations.

An unredeemed sin remains a burden for a person forever. But this kind of moral state does not give rise only to crime or misconduct. Worries, doubts and anxieties that sometimes disrupt the normal course of human life can also be a heavy burden. The return to the permanent, the sacred, the primordial then come to the fore. "In Alexandria, there is a saying that only the man who has already committed a crime and repented of it is incapable of that crime" (Borges, n.d.). Having found the free path, a person feels a breath of freedom, right choice and long-awaited peace.

The past does not rest one in peace even after a long period of time very often, because a person is not able to change his every step. Every event is in the past, and it is impossible to erase it from our lives, no matter how we feel about it. Or if it is possible to change the past without resorting only to mystical experience, based on which, Jorge Luis Borges says: "Who cannot change the past, although he can change the images of the past, changed the image of death into one of unconsciousness" (Borges, 1999). Such changes are possible in the moral, spiritual realm due to genuine repentance, atonement, and completion of penance to the "last crumb". But confession and repentance

may not be real but fictional, like Sarah Woodruff's confession in famous novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Fowles, 2004). But even such confession allows us to understand the importance of suffering in a person's life, which makes the personal story "alive", fills it with meaning.

The problem of women's repentance in Ukrainian culture and literature, whose tragic fate has been highlighted by almost all representatives of the artistic world, starting with Taras Shevchenko, deserves separate consideration. The tragedy of fate, full of sincere feelings, will to live and love, but with a constant shadow of suffering, anguish, unbearable penance for their own and others' sins follow the heroines of Taras Shevchenko's works (2003): *Kateryna, Lileia and Son (The Dream)*. Olha Kobylianska was one of the first Ukrainian writers to portray female intellectuals searching for their way in life and, overcoming it, also passing the path of repentance.

The theme of preserving spiritual shrines, without which a person degenerates, becomes a fatherless nonentity resounds in full force in the novel *The Cathedral* (Honchar, 1989). The debunking of the psychology of spiritual poaching comes to the fore in this novel. Its important conceptual centres are contained in the reasoning that all of us who witness the destruction, in fact, also participate in it: we destroy it by standing aside.

The responsibility that contemporaries should have towards the past and the future is highlighted with particular force in the novel. The "ancestral covenant" motif is powerful here. And at the same time, the constant "thought of the future", of posterity, which must accompany every step of a person on earth, is emphasised. Of course, it takes spiritual courage to take on the responsibility of repentance for one's people. But such work of the soul is never in vain; it relieves the tension of evil memory, eliminates the germs of future misunderstandings and conflicts, turns the soul to the creative search for the good in itself and the world around us.

Literature proves quite convincingly that language is arranged in an unusual way, that it gives us more than it is contained in it. Art is always a "speaking word"; its works are incomplete because they express only what they are wanted to be expressed because, in them, the author hopes to give a name to what has not yet been named. The film *Repentance* (Abuladze, 1984) is an alarm that calls for universal repentance to the public conscience. Tengiz Abuladze's film is a real philosophical work. It is complicated because it speaks to us in a language of metaphors and symbols, mixing the real with the fictional, mixing epoch, costumes and styles boldly. In fact, repentance occurs twice in this tape. At first, it is false, incomplete, akin to self-justification, while genuine, sincere and deep repentance is only possible after an atoning sacrifice. And such a shock awaits Abel Aravidze from the unexpected and most painful side. The young man's suicide from a hunting rifle is retribution for all the lies and pharisaism of his family. Abel will come to his senses only after the death of his son, and his second repentance is complete and unconditional.

Confessional grounds, the desire to save the world with its ugliness and evil are inherent in all art forms, which reproduce them in content and form, artistic means, and specificity. Cinema art has the ability to create a semblance of reality; literature encourages reflection and contemplation in private, theatrical performance mystically captivates the viewer and provides a real opportunity for a sincere, albeit text-driven, confession of an actor to the audience. Marina Tsvetaeva wrote about the combination

of aesthetic and moral imagination in art: “Along with the aesthetic imagination, the imagination of conscience exists and plays an indispensable role in people’s spiritual life — an intense search for spiritual ascents in real human contradictions and conflicts, revealing and anticipating a possible aspect of moral issues in general. For true art, this is its source of conscience” (Tsvetaeva, 1991, p. 235).

## Conclusion

It is revealed that remorse arises when, having committed a fundamentally wrong act, a person recognises it as a violation of the moral law and condemns it, but does not have the strength to condemn himself so much as to renounce completely the passion that led to the crime, so he does not seek real transformations of his soul. In such a case, the anguish of conscience is hopeless and fruitless: the past is recognised as absolutely repugnant and unbearable, but it cannot be separated from the realised abomination because the soul remains with its inclinations and desires, as during the commission of the act.

It is demonstrated that tragedies, conflicts, and suffering can relate directly to a person’s turning to repentance. It only seems that it’s natural, having reached the shameful consequences of evil, such as lying, to insight, to be ashamed of one’s fall and repent. But even admitting one’s guilt is very difficult for a person, especially for society. It is evidenced by the entire history of the cultural development of humankind.

It is proved that the emphasis on conscience, a person’s moral self-purification, repentance has been inherent in the national cultural tradition since Kyivan Rus. And in the following centuries, this moral attitude was decisive in the spiritual life of our ancestors many times, returning hope in difficult historical moments. The natural urge for harmony and beauty is the driving force for self-improvement, creating the personal history of an individual and humankind.

It is generalised that a spiritual quest, a person’s ascent through moral self-improvement, occurs in a person at any period of their life. A sincere search for the ways of the good and genuine repentance and confession both to others to oneself is actually possible. The optimistic idea of repentance assumes no grave breach of moral norms from which there would be no way back. Only the final refusal of a person to repent — unrepentance — generates a hopeless situation.

## References

- Abuladze, T. (Director). (1984). *Pokayanie* [Repentance] [Film]. Georgian Film [in Russian].
- Augustinus, A. (1999). *Spovid* [Confession] (Iu. Mushak, Trans.; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Osnovy [in Ukrainian]
- Borges, J. L. (1999). *Drugaya smert'* [Another Death]. Feniks. LibKing. <https://libking.ru/books/prose-/prose-classic/387940-2-horhe-borhes-drugaya-smert.html#book> [in Russian].
- Borges, J. L. (n.d.). *Poiski Averroesa* [Search for Averroes]. LitMir. <https://www.litmir.me/br/?b=4166&p=2> [in Russian]
- Bulgakov, S. (1994). *Svet nevechernii* [Light is not Evening]. Respublika [in Russian].

- Dante, A. (2016). *Nove zhyttia* [New Life] (V. Chaikovskiy, V. Korotych & I. Drach, Trans.). Folio [in Ukrainian].
- Fowles, J. R. (2004). *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Random House [in English].
- Goethe, J. W. (2016). *Poeziya i pravda. Iz moei zhizni* [Poetry and Truth. From My Life] (N. Kholodovskii, Trans.). Ripol klassik [in Russian].
- Honchar, O. T. (1989). *Sobor* [Cathedral]. Dnipro [in Ukrainian].
- Lossky, N. O. (2000). *Tsennost' i Bytie* [Value and Being]. AST [in Russian].
- Malakhov, V. A. (1988). *Iskusstvo i chelovecheskoe mirotnoshenie* [Art and Human Attitude]. Naukova dumka [in Russian].
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1992). Chelovek i protivostoyashchee emu [Man and His Opponent]. In *Chelovek i obshchestvo Problemy cheloveka na XVIII Vsemirnom filosofskom kongresse* [Man and Society Human Problems at the XVIII World Philosophical Congress] (Iss. 4, pp. 27–95) [in Russian].
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1999). *Fenomenologiya vospriyatiya* [The Phenomenology of Perception] (I. S. Vdovina & S. L. Fokin, Trans.; Ed.). Nauka [in Russian].
- Petrarch, F. (2014). *Taiemnytsia moho ztsilennia, abo Knyha besid pro baiduzhist do myrskoho (spovid)* [The Mystery of My Healing, or the Book of Conversations on Indifference to the World (Confession)]. Folio [in Ukrainian].
- Rousseau, J.-J. (2014). *Spovid* [Confession] (V. Verkhovynets, Trans.). Folio [in Ukrainian].
- Shevchenko, T. H. (2003). *Zibrannia tvoriv: Poeziia 1837–1847* [Collection of Works: Poetry 1837–1847] (Vol. 1). Naukova dumka [in Ukrainian].
- Tsvetaeva, M. I. (1991). *Ob iskusstve* [About Art]. Iskusstvo [in Russian].

## СПОВІДАЛЬНІ МОТИВИ В КУЛЬТУРІ, ФІЛОСОФІЇ, МИСТЕЦТВІ

Кундеревич Олена Вікторівна

Кандидат філософських наук, доцент,  
 ORCID: 0000-0001-7248-5033, l.kunderevich@gmail.com,  
 Київський національний університет культури і мистецтв,  
 Київ, Україна

Мета роботи — виявити особливості відображення понять розкаяння, покаяння, сповіді в художній та філософській творчості, охарактеризувати приклади відображення цих понять у мистецтві. Актуальність. Необхідною складовою філософських міркувань, культурологічних досліджень та щоденних життєвих практик є переосмислення багатьох понять моральної свідомості. Міркування про етичні цінності є важливими у всіх культурах та в усі часи. Особливої актуальності набувають сьогодні теми морального пошуку, самозаглиблення та очищення. Звернення до аналізу відображення в культурі та мистецтві таких понять, як «сповідь», «розкаяння», «покаяння», потребує дослідницької уваги. Методологія дослідження базується на застосуванні загальнонаукових і спеціальних методів пізнання, зокрема, аналізу, синтезу, логічного методу та методу узагальнень. Наукова новизна полягає у виявленні у сповідальних мотивах філософської та літературної творчості поняття «покаяння» — як споконвічної і постійної турботи людського духу про



самого себе. Висновки. Виявлено, що докори совісті виникають тоді, коли, здійснивши суттєво-хибний вчинок, людина усвідомлює його як порушення морального закону і засуджує, але не має сили засудити себе настільки, щоб повністю зректися пристрасті, яка привела до злочину, тож не прагне справжніх перетворень своєї душі. Продемонстровано, що духовні пошуки, сходження людини шляхом морального самовдосконалення відбуваються в людині у будь-який період її життя. Доведено, що наголошення на совісті, моральному самоочищенні людини, покаянні ще з часів Київської Русі було притаманним вітчизняній культурній традиції. І в подальшому цей моральний настрій неодноразово виявлявся визначальним у духовному житті наших предків, повертав надію у скрутні хвилини історії. Узагальнено, що щирий пошук шляхів добра та справжнє покаяння і сповідь як перед іншими, так і перед собою є насправді можливими.

*Ключові слова:* сповідь; розкаяння; покаяння; совість; духовні пошуки; сповідальні мотиви; творчість; мистецтво

