

Oleksandr Dovzhenko and the Soviet Secret Police

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The article reviews the specifics of the surveillance process of the Ukrainian film director Oleksandr Dovzhenko organized by the Soviet secret police. The main focus is on agents' reports about the director's work on the films *Earth*, *Ivan*, *Shchors*, and the screenplay for *Ukraine in Flames*. The article reveals that Dovzhenko was under permanent secret police surveillance, starting from the end of the 1920s until the end of his life in 1956. This surveillance was well organized; it was large-scale and complex in its nature and covered not only his professional but his private life as well. The purpose of the surveillance was to collect and analyze compromising, i.e., anti-Soviet information against the film director and, if necessary, to open a criminal case against him, and make an arrest.

KEYWORDS: Oleksandr Dovzhenko, Soviet secret police, agents' reports, *Earth*, *Ivan*, *Shchors*, *Ukraine in Flames*

Oleksandr Dovzhenko still arouses genuine interest among scholars not only in Ukraine but also abroad. He is the director of world-renowned films including *Zvenyhora* (1927), *Arsenal* (1929) and *Earth* (1930). *Earth* was included in the 12 Best Films of All Time at the 1958 Brussels World Fair (Expo 1958) film poll based on film experts' and reviewers' votes. His talent was multi-faceted and encompassed cinema, literature and visual arts. For many years, he was figure number one in Ukrainian cinema and little changed through several decades. To a certain extent, interest in Dovzhenko is dictated by his relations with the higher Soviet Party and state functionaries.

Dovzhenko is the most researched of all Ukrainian film directors. Yet his personal and professional life was not fully studied because there was no access to the Communist regime's secret police archives. The situation began to change after Ukrainian independence in 1991, which resulted in these archives being opened up for public use, thus allowing new research on the topic.

The relevance of the article stems from the need to fill the gaps in Oleksandr Dovzhenko's little-known or completely unknown biography, based on an analysis of data from the Soviet secret police archives, mainly from the Branch State Archive of the Security Services of Ukraine in Kyiv. This will help to produce a more detailed biography of the filmmaker; it will also help to create a coherent concept of Ukrainian cinema.

Analysis of recent research and publications

A list of scholarly works on the life and career of Dovzhenko would be several dozen pages long. Among the most renowned researchers of the relations between Dovzhenko and the Communist secret police are Viacheslav Popyk,[1] Oleksandr Bezruchko,[2] Leonid Cherevatenko,[3] Roman Rosliak,[4] Yuri Shapoval,[5] as well as Serhiy Trymbach[6] and Vasyl Marochko.[7] The two latter scholars mostly used already published documents in their research.

The purpose of the article is therefore to establish the specifics of the surveillance process of Oleksandr Dovzhenko as organized by the Communist secret police with the help of agents. The main focus is on how these agents' reports reflect the film director's work on his films *Earth*, *Ivan*, *Shchors*, and the screenplay for *Ukraine in Flames*.

Who were the agents of the Communist secret police?

In order to keep citizens frightened and submissive, the Soviet totalitarian system tried to establish total control over each of them. The higher status a person had within the Party, government, or artistic hierarchy, the wider the scale of control over that person was.

Cinematographers were among those under the watchful eye of the Soviet state security apparatus. Screen creations had a substantial influence on the masses, or as the Bolsheviks' leader Vladimir Ulyanov-Lenin stated, "of all the arts the most important for us is the cinema." Therefore, the Soviet secret police paid special attention to film directors, who could not be allowed to deviate from the "general Party line" or, God forbid, should their works contain even the slightest doubts in the Bolshevik policy, let alone anti-Soviet elements.

As the leading film director in Ukrainian cinematography – and, unofficially, the third in the Soviet cinematography after Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin – Oleksandr Dovzhenko did not have a chance to avoid being monitored by the state secret police.

In general, several dozen agents kept an eye on him and reported to their superiors. Dovzhenko's closest circle – his father, sister, and wife – were also actively monitored by the secret police. It is an established fact that even the filmmaker's personal chauffeur was an agent...

Not many would volunteer to collaborate with the secret police. In the 1920s, future agents were mostly recruited among those who had

[1] V. Popyk, *Pid softamy VChK-DPU-NKVS-NKDB-KDB. Dokumentalna opovid za materialamy arkhivnoi spravy-formuliaru na Dovzhenka Oleksandra Petrovycha*, "Dnipro" 1995, no. 9/10, pp. 21–59.

[2] O.V. Bezruchko, *Oleksandr Dovzhenko: Rozsekrecheni dokumenty spetssluzhb*, Kyiv 2008, p. 232.

[3] L. Cherevatenko, *Dovzhenko vyzvolenyi*, "Kino-Kolo" 2005, no. 25, pp. 108–135.

[4] *Oleksandr Dovzhenko. Dokumenty i materialy spetssluzhb*, collection of archival documents: v 2-kh t., preface, ordering, comments, notes R.V. Rosliak; introductory article S.V. Trymbach,

R.V. Rosliak, Kyiv, 2021, vol. 1 (1919–1940), vol. 2 (1941–1989).

[5] Yu. I. Shapoval, *Neproshchenyi. Oleksandr Dovzhenko i komunistychni spetssluzhby*, Varshava – Kyiv – Kharkiv 2022, p. 353; *Oleksandr Dovzhenko*, Kharkiv 2022, vol. 1, p. 510; vol. 2, p. 671.

[6] S.V. Trymbach, *Oleksandr Dovzhenko: Zahybel bohiv. Identyfikatsiia avtora v natsionalnomu chaso-prostori*, Vinnytsia 2007, p. 800.

[7] V.I. Marochko, *Oleksandr Dovzhenko: Zacharovanyi Desnoi*, Kyiv 2019, p. 576.

committed various misdemeanors. An example would be the agent ‘Chemist’, in whose apartment a huge quantity of gold articles was found.[8] Yet the situation changed dramatically in the 1930s: the state secret police did not have to look for criminal offences any longer, as a political joke or a carelessly expressed thought would be sufficient reason for condemning an innocent person to a lengthy imprisonment or even death. Thus, between imprisonment or execution and collaboration, almost everyone would choose the latter.

An analysis of the documents allow us to state that the highest numbers of agents were among literary-artistic intelligentsia.

‘Arrow’ was an extraordinary agent of the Soviet secret police. There are over 70 revealed reports that are, in one way or another, about Oleksandr Dovzhenko. In general, the ‘oeuvre’ of the abovementioned agent consists of hundreds of reports that have been miraculously preserved. It was under this alias that a known Ukrainian writer, Yurii Smolych, operated, and he was recruited back in 1935.

A high literary level is central to the reports of another agent, ‘Petro Umans’kyi’, which date from 1937–1938 and 1940–1941. His real name is Mykola Bazhan and this is a known Ukrainian poet, translator, script writer, and critic, as well as public and state figure. It was he, Dovzhenko’s closest friend and ally, who supplied first-hand information to the Soviet secret police.

Yurii Smolych and Mykola Bazhan are not the only writers who actively collaborated with the Soviet secret police by helping to carry out an investigation (the agent-operative work) into Dovzhenko. Among others, there were Kost’ Herasymenko (agent ‘Pavlenko’) and Yurii Dol’d-Mykhailyk (agent ‘Grigorii’). The latter is the author of a once super-popular novel *And a Single Soldier in the Field*, which evidently was created not without assistance from the ‘competent government organs.’[9]

The poet Andriy Malyshko received the alias ‘Krivonos’ in 1942, when he was recruited to precisely spy on Dovzhenko. He had no chance to say ‘no’ to this cooperation with the secret police, yet he chose his own tactics: he would not always make contact with them; he did not provide the necessary information (to date, there is not a single one of his reports on Dovzhenko found); he delayed the assignment, and so on. This tactic may appear strange but it bore fruit: the state secret police refrained from cooperation with Malyshko and even withdrew him from the agents’ network.

In the 1930s, the state secret police were actively recruiting agents among the workers of the Kyiv Film Studio. Apart from Yurii Dol’d-Mykhailyk, who was working in the script department of that studio,

[8] *Oleksandr Dovzhenko. Dokumenty i materialy spetssluzhb*, op. cit., vol. 1 (1919–1940), p. 56.

[9] R. Rosliak, *Zaverbovaniy ahent «Hryhorii» перебуvaie u blyzkykh stosunkakh z Dovzhenkom*

i korystuietsia yoho doviroiu, “Naukovyi Visnyk Kyivskoho Natsionalnoho Universytetu Teatru, Kino i Telebachennia Imeni I.K. Karpenka-Karoho” 2021, no. 27/28, pp. 191–208.

there was 'Albert,' who was first mentioned in secret police documents in 1932. He became active in the 1930s and between 1939 and 1941 he authored nearly twenty-five reports, a significant proportion part of which were about Dovzhenko's work on his film *Shchors*. Analyzing and comparing the archival documents allowed me to conclude that Hryhorii Zel'dovych was 'Albert.' He was an editor at Kyiv Film Studio, and specifically he worked on Dovzhenko's film *Ivan*. Later on, he was the editor of the Committee for Cinematography of the People's Commissariat of the USSR.[10]

In 1932, another staff member at Kyiv studio appeared in secret police documents regarding Oleksandr Dovzhenko – agent 'Chornyi [Black]'; a composer by profession. Text analysis of the agent's reports and memoirs of the composer Ihor Belza leaves no doubts that this is the same person who, incidentally, wrote the music to the films *Arsenal* and *Ivan*...[11]

I should note that I was able to establish the name of another composer, Pylyp Kozyts'kyi, who worked at the Kyiv Film Studio and was an agent with the alias 'Patriot'. His reports regarding O. Dovzhenko, however, were very neutral.[12]

The examples of the composer I. Belza and editor H. Zel'dovych, who worked together with Dovzhenko on films, are not unique. The state secret police took an active interest in other members of Dovzhenko's film crew. Among those successfully recruited was the agent 'Timofeev', a cameraman. I was able to reveal that it was Iurii Iekel'chuk,[13] who worked on Dovzhenko's *Ivan* as a co-author, as well as on *Shchors*. Their creative union did not act as an impediment to him writing reports on the film director.

As was mentioned above, few future agents had a choice of either cooperating with the state secret police or refusing. In fact, the latter was not an option, since that would lead to inevitable arrest and, at best, exile to Siberia. Cooperation with the Communist secret police provided at least a hope for survival inside the grindstones of terror organized by the Bolsheviks. Yet not all the agents were able to avoid it, and the sad lot of Mykola Sachuk is testimony to that. He was an editor and clerk at Kyiv Film Studio, who was also a critic and a journalist. He wrote several reports about Oleksandr Dovzhenko under the alias 'Kholmskii'. He was arrested in 1937 and sentenced to 10 years in forced labor camps. In his letter of complaint addressed to the People's Com-

[10] Idem, *Kto vy, mister „Al'bert”? Aleksandr Dovzhenko v dokumentah sovetskih spetssluzhb. CHast' pervaya*, Live Journal, 1.12.2019, <https://dem-2011.livejournal.com/653175.html> (accessed: 9.11.2022).

[11] Idem, *Ahent „Chornyi”: „Dovzhenko proizvodit vpechatlenie sovershenno izdergannogo, izmuchennogo cheloveka*”, “Kino-Teatr” 2020, no. 6, pp. 39–41, http://archive-ktm.ukma.edu.ua/show_content.php?id=2537 (accessed: 13.11.2022).

[12] Idem, *Ahent „Patriot”: „Dovzhenko, uznavao moem areste, byl sil'no vzvolnovan*”, “Kino-Teatr” 2021, no. 2, pp. 45–46.

[13] Idem, *„Kosvennyj podhod k Dovzhenko iz agentury imeet kinooperator «Timofeev»*”, “Ukrainska kinooperatorska shkola. Vybrane”, Collection of scientific articles, Kyiv 2020, pp. 153–198.

missar of Internal Affairs of the USSR, he referenced his own past as an agent, yet it did not seem to help. His further destiny is unknown.

The attempts of the Soviet secret police to organize an all-encompassing process of surveillance on Oleksandr Dovzhenko resulted in numerous additions to the list of agents: the painter Mykola Hlushchenko with the aliases 'Iarema' and 'Painter'; the priest Vasyly Potiienko with the aliases 'Sorbonin' and 'Editor'; a compatriot of the filmmaker, Hryhorii Iakovets, alias 'Iakovlev'; a personal chauffeur P. Smyrnov, and many others.

In fact, even a theory that Dovzhenko's wife, Iuliia Solntseva, was collaborating with the Soviet secret police does not seem too fantastic, although this is not proved by any documents.[14]

The abovementioned persons are just the tip of an iceberg of dozens of agents who kept an eye on Dovzhenko and reported back to their chiefs. Further scholarly research and analysis of the documents from the secret service archives will provide an opportunity to reveal more names. However, it will hardly ever be possible to produce an exhaustive list.

The period between 1917 and 1919 – known as the Ukrainian Revolution – in Dovzhenko's biography was little studied until recently. Researchers mostly refer to his autobiography, which was written in 1939, during the massive repressions, and is now perceived with certain reservations. Thus, there are statements in the artist's autobiography that not only cannot be supported by the documents but even contradict the documents released from the secret service archives. For example, Dovzhenko stated that he served voluntarily in the Red Army from 1918–1920 as a school teacher at the headquarters of the Shchors Division.[15] Yet the documents from his case-formulary [16] suggest something entirely different: the future film director was a soldier in the army of the Ukrainian People's Republic. Little is still known about how he entered the Ukrainian national armed forces, and ultimately, the army of the Ukrainian People's Republic. There is, however, a document that testifies to the following: Dovzhenko was arrested at the end of

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[14] Idem, „*Vo sne Dovzhenko chasto govorit po-ukrainski*”, „Kino-Teatr” 2020, no. 2, pp. 41–42, http://archive-ktm.ukma.edu.ua/show_content.php?id=2443 (accessed: 11.11.2022).

[15] A.P. Dovzhenko, *Sobranie sochinenij*, vol. 1, Moskva 1966, p. 42.

[16] A case-formulary is the name of an operational accounting case which the state secret police would open on a certain person in view of information received that provided grounds to suspect the person of actively engaging in anti-Soviet activities – this is a definition from the *Counter-Intelligence Dictionary* published in Moscow in 1972 (p. 84). A case-formu-

lary contained the compromising data on a person. When the amount of these data reached a 'critical mass,' a criminal case would be opened. After a person's death, the case would usually be destroyed. The case-formulary on Oleksandr Dovzhenko was started at the end of the 1920s. In 1946, when he was living permanently in Moscow, his case was deposited in an archive. (There were a lot of data on the director in his Moscow case-formulary but its whereabouts are unknown.) The Branch State Archive of the Security Services of Ukraine contains four volumes of the case-formulary on Dovzhenko with a substantial body of documents.

December 1919 by representatives of the Volyn Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Profiteering, Corruption, and Banditry – or simply Cheka – when attempting to cross the border between Poland and Soviet Ukraine. Dovzhenko was incriminated with participation in the Petlyura's Army, which he had joined voluntarily, as well as unlawful border crossing with forged documents in the name of a village school teacher.

On December 27, 1919, by the decision of the Secret-Operative Department of the Volyn Extraordinary Commission, Dovzhenko was sentenced to a concentration camp till the end of the Civil War.^[17] Yet the very same day the sentence was overturned at the meeting of the Governorate Party Committee of the Borotbists [*Fighters*], which would later amalgamate with the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine.

The fact that Dovzhenko was arrested in 1919 became grounds for the conspiratorial theories about his probable recruitment. Indeed, first Dovzhenko, with weapons in hand, was fighting against the Bolsheviks and was sentenced for that, and then not only was he quickly released from custody but, shortly after that, he became a Soviet Ukrainian diplomat: starting from 1921, he worked at the Plenipotentiary Diplomatic mission of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic in Poland, and the following year, he was sent to Germany to assist the authorized representative of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic. Yet this hypothesis is not supported by any archival documents. After all, it is hard to imagine Dovzhenko as an agent, considering his quite impulsive and unrestrained personality. Many people noted that Dovzhenko would speak his mind, and for that reason he made quite a number of foes.

Odesa Film Studio

In 1923, after the end of his diplomatic career and after studying at a private art school in Germany, Dovzhenko returned to Ukraine and started working as a caricaturist for the Kharkiv newspaper *Visti*. Three years later, he abruptly changed his career: he became a film director at the Odesa Film Factory of the All-Ukrainian Photo Cinema Administration (VUFKU).

The first two films Dovzhenko directed – an eccentric comedy *Love's Berries* 1926, and adventure *The Diplomatic Pouch*, 1927 – were something of a pen test, and did not differ much from the movies of that time period.

The next film, *Zvenyhora*, 1928, on the contrary, had a bombshell effect, with many critics interpreting it as the first ever Ukrainian film. This was a motion picture that, according to the film critic Serhiy Trymbach, “has its own time and space, a unique discourse of movie language, as well as screen speech.”^[18]

[17] Tsentralnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromadskykh obiednan Ukrainy [Central State Archives of Public Organizations of Ukraine] (further – TsDAHO Ukrainy), f. 263, op. 1, spr. 52928 fp, ark. 25.

[18] Oleksandr Dovzhenko. *Dokumenty i materialy spetssluzhb*, op. cit., vol. 1 (1919–1940), p. 22.

Zvenyhora elevated Oleksandr Dovzhenko to the leading position not only within Ukrainian or Soviet filmmaking circles but also on the world stage. His next two films – *Arsenal*, 1929, and *Earth*, 1930 – confirmed his artistic talent. At the same time, however, he came under the watchful eye of the secret police.

In 1927, Oleksandr Dovzhenko ‘excelled’ again, this time as an active member of a group of creative Ukrainians working at the Odesa Film Factory, who tried to start their own creative association. That triggered opposition from cinematographers of other ethnicities, primarily Russians, who considered that to be a display of ‘Ukrainian nationalism.’ A stormy meeting of cinematographers at the Film Factory took place, where Dovzhenko indignantly declared the following: “I am getting a feeling that if he is alone, he is just a Ukrainian but if two Ukrainians gather, that’s already suspicious, and if three of them gather, that is a counter-revolution.”[19]

Shortly afterwards, the meeting minutes were placed on the desk of the Odesa regional committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine, accompanied by a report on the matter from the Odesa Chekists.[20] It was approximately then that active operative work on the film director started.

A letter sent in September 1928 from the Counterintelligence Department of the State Political Directorate of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic to the Odesa Regional Division of the GPU of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic contained the following lines: “According to the information we have, citizen Oleksandr Petrovych Dovzhenko [...] at present, since June 1926, is working in the city of Odesa, at the Film Factory of the VUFKU, as a film director. We ask you to identify him; after that, we will send the incriminating materials on him to you.”[21] That same month, the archived criminal case of Dovzhenko dating from 1919 was forwarded from the Volyn regional division to the Kharkiv regional division of the GPU of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic.[22]

Dovzhenko started working on his next film, *Arsenal*, in 1928 at the Odesa Film Factory but he left for Kyiv to do the filming. Even there he was unable to escape secret police surveillance. After he transferred to Kyiv Film Factory, he ended up in the permanent ‘care’ of the Kyiv secret services.

In the spring of 1930, Dovzhenko’s most famous film, *Earth*, was released. It was based on the dramatic processes of collectivization in Ukrainian villages. Work on this film proceeded under the permanent supervision of the state secret police. Thus, on September 16, 1929, the

Earth

[19] Derzharkhiv Odeskoi oblasti, f. P-7, op. 1, spr. 1037, ark. 49–50.

[20] Ibidem, ark. 44–50.

[21] Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhby bezpeky

Ukrainy (further – HDA SB Ukrainy), f. 65, spr. S-836, t. 1, ch. II, ark. 6.

[22] Ibidem, ark. 10.

Kyiv regional division of the GPU of the Ukrainian SSR prepared agent information about the director's refusal to film an episode of *Earth* at the Kyiv Film Factory and his demands to organize an expedition to the city of Sukhumi. As a result, the Film Factory suffered losses of 7 thousand rubles.[23]

In his report, agent 'Kasholin' noted that Dovzhenko did not behave like a Soviet film director: he would repeatedly reject the set decorations and make the designer re-do them; instead of finding an actor in Kyiv, he invited one from Moscow, etc. Again, all of this generated extra expenditure during filming.[24]

Right after the film was released, it triggered heated debates. It even went as far as the dissatisfied student activists of the Kyiv Institute of Cinematography, who, unable to retaliate directly against Dovzhenko for the film, tried to evict the director's father from his apartment. Dovzhenko wrote about this in a letter to his friend Ivan Sokolians'kyi.[25]

Demian Bedny, a Kremlin court poet, was particularly active in bullying the film director. In April 1930, he published a column titled *Philosophers* in the Moscow newspaper *Izvestiia*. In it, he called *Earth* a kulak film: "*Earth* is a kulak film. It presents Ukraine to us as kulak-like rosy-cheeked, satiated, and drunk." [26] This column stunned the film director, and he wrote about that in his autobiography: "[...] I literally became grey-haired and old within several days. That was a real psychic trauma..." [27]

As was noted in a special report of the Kyiv Regional Division of the GPU of the Ukrainian SSR in April 1930, Demian Bedny's column resulted in a critique of and polemics about the film, taking on an acutely political stance. The Ukrainian and even Russian intelligentsia called *Earth* a masterpiece, yet the workers and 'wide proletarian community' believed that the film portrayed the class struggle in the village wrongly.[28]

Ivan

In 1932, Oleksandr Dovzhenko started working on his first sound film, *Ivan*. The film was about the process of the remodeling of a Ukrainian villager at the Dniprohes construction. Naturally, this was required to happen within the mainstream Bolshevik ideology of the time. Though not a failure, the film could not be called a success. There were discussions in the press again, with Ukrainian criticism being especially destructive. The secret police did not stand aside either: they carefully monitored all the processes around the film and informed the relevant authorities, ordered reviews, etc. It is worth mentioning that

[23] Ibidem, ark. 16.

[24] Ibidem, ark. 13–13 zv.

[25] O.P. Dovzhenko, *Tvory v piaty tomakh. T. 5. Zapysni knyzhky. Shchodennyk. Lysty*, Kyiv 1983, p. 301.

[26] D. Bednyj, „*Filosofy*”, „*Izvestiya*” 1930, no. 93 (April 4, 1930).

[27] *Dovzhenko bez hrymu: Lysty, spohady, arkhivni znakhidky*, compiler and comment by V. Aheievoi, S. Trymbacha, Kyiv 2014, p. 426.

[28] HDA SB Ukrainy, f. 65, spr. S-4468, t. 2, ark. 30.

of all Dovzhenko's films, *Ivan* has the highest volume of data amassed by the state secret police.

Thus, one of the agents reported Dovzhenko as stating that he would make a totally different film that would make the whole world shake with horror: a film where a hundred and fifty million starved people eat soya and cabbage, while a handful of satiated and dumb maniacs, after their opulent meals in dedicated diners, would proselytize socialism to the starving and fool them with assorted rubbish about the success of building socialism. Even though Dovzhenko would obviously not stand a chance of making such films in the reality of that time, the agent noted that he still tried to reflect his own nationalistic views in *Ivan*. For example, the endless images of Dnipro scenery taken aesthetically from far away were meant to show Dovzhenko's longing for Ukraine, while the frame composition and editing testify to the absurdity and chaos of the construction. The agent assumed that he was not the only one who Dovzhenko shared his thoughts with, therefore, he concluded that the film should be analyzed thoroughly before its release.[29]

One of the film's 'reviewers' was an operation officer from the Secret Political Department of the Joint State Political Directorate of the USSR, M. Shivarov. In his report, he pointed to the film's weaknesses as being not persuasive, poster-style, and superficial. In this Chekist's opinion, certain scenes were an ideological failure. Among them was a scene where a grief-stricken mother whose son has died in a construction site accident runs to the Dniprohes authorities across the cranes and steam trains, risking her own life. The scene supposedly created thoughts about the helplessness of villagers against the chaos of industrial construction. Another considerable drawback of the film was the character of a truant, played by Stepan Shkurat, who was portrayed in almost a positive way and looked more convincing than the main character, played by Petro Masokha, who looked completely unconvincing,[30] while it was to be the other way round... And yet as strange as it may seem, unlike the previous reviewer, the secret police officer deemed that the film could be released.[31]

The Ukrainian press mercilessly criticized *Ivan*. The journalist Feodosiy Taran was especially zealous in that regard: his review of the film titled 'Regarding O. Dovzhenko's Film *Ivan*' was published in the Kharkiv newspaper *Komunist* on November 12, 15, and 16, 1932. And the result of a Special Commission of the Central Committee of the

[29] Ibidem, spr. S-836, t. 1, ch. II, ark. 66.

[30] On December 17, 1932, during his lecture to the students of the Directing Department of the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography, Oleksandr Dovzhenko blamed... Petro Masokha, the lead actor, for *Ivan*'s failure: "The actor was cast wrongly – his qualities did not match the conceived image. That's why working with him was not a question of deve-

loping his acting potential but rather hiding all his qualities that contradicted my vision" (A.P. Dovzhenko. *Sobranie sochinenij v chetyrekh tomah*, vol. 4, Moskva 1969, p. 392). This blaming came as a surprise to the actor, since Dovzhenko had not said a word to him about this.

[31] HDA SB Ukrainy, f. 65, spr. S-836, t. 1, ch. II, ark. 69–70.

Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine – it included a representative of the GPU in the Ukrainian SSR – was revealing and deleting the ‘politically incorrect scenes’ from the film. Thus, over ten scenes were either completely removed or shortened.[32]

Criticism of the film caused an appropriate reaction from the Ukrainfilm Trust authorities and even the All-Union Association Soiuzkino that led to made efforts to neutralize the negative effects. As one of the agents put it in his report, the authorities of Ukrainfilm were taking measures to ensure a positive evaluation of *Ivan* in Moscow. In particular, they made an attempt to organize a discussion of the film, although it actually took place later on. Moreover, among Soiuzkino employees, a rumor was spread that many people in Moscow disagreed with the negative evaluation of *Ivan* in Ukraine. Also, senior Soiuzkino officials demonstrably invited Oleksandr Dovzhenko to their Moscow homes.[33]

In Moscow

That, however, had no effect on Ukrainian Party functionaries and the film was essentially banned. Thus, Dovzhenko’s situation in Ukraine became quite dangerous. In view of the threat to his life, Dovzhenko and his wife Solntseva fled to Moscow at the end of 1932.

In her memoirs, Solntseva described it as follows: after the filming of *Ivan* was over, she and her husband were vacationing in Sukhumi. At that time, they received a letter from Boris Shumyatsky, the head of the Soviet film industry, telling them not to return to Ukraine but instead to go straight to Moscow, and not even leave their train carriage during the stops on the way. As it later transpired, an arrest warrant had been issued in Kyiv for the film director. At least, this is the version that Solntseva stuck to.[34]

In Moscow, Dovzhenko was introduced to the omnipotent Josef Stalin. The dictator liked the film, especially the episode where the mother of the perished son goes through numerous doors looking for the construction authorities. In Stalin’s opinion, that was a good representation of Soviet bureaucracy. After Stalin, the official critique of *Ivan* changed sharply, and, by order of the Kremlin, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine adopted the following resolution at its meeting on April 3, 1933: “To assign c.[omrade Volodymyr] Zatonsky the task of removing any obstacles to screening Dovzhenko’s film *Ivan* throughout the movie theaters of Ukraine.”[35] Dovzhenko was saved from a seemingly imminent demise.

In the part of his autobiography that was not included in the five-volume edition published in Kyiv in 1983, Oleksandr Dovzhenko presented the following version of his rescue:

As soon as I’d arrived in Moscow, I, in a state of great concern, immediately wrote a letter to comrade J. Stalin asking him to protect me and help me in

[32] Ibidem, ark. 79.

[33] Ibidem, ark. 63.

[34] S.V. Trymbach, op. cit., pp. 312–313.

[35] TsDAHOU Ukrainy, f. 1, op. 6, spr. 282, ark. 131.

my creative development. Comrade Stalin heard my request. I am deeply convinced that comrade Stalin saved my life. If I had not turned to him in time, I would certainly have perished, both as an artist and citizen. I would not exist. I did not even realize that immediately, but I will never forget it, and each of my recollections about this great noble person fills me with a feeling of deep filial gratitude and respect towards him.[36]

Aware of the potential threat to his life in Ukraine, Dovzhenko decided to ride out the tumultuous times in Moscow, where he started working on his next film, *Aerograd*. Yet even in the capital of the Soviet Union, he had no chance of avoiding the watchful eyes of the Chekists. His case-formulary was forwarded from Kharkiv – then the capital of Soviet Ukraine – to Moscow, where his monitoring went on. The data of the Moscow Chekists cover the film director's moods, him being called for an interrogation regarding possible contraband activities, finishing the screenplay for *Aerograd*, casting Japanese actors for that film; etc. Those documents are dated 1934.

Starting work on *Aerograd's* screenplay was not easy; it was necessary to overcome a host of bureaucratic obstacles first. Therefore, Dovzhenko took quite a drastic step – he wrote a letter to Stalin and enclosed the screenplay with it. And something incredible happened: within only twenty-two hours, Stalin had a meeting with the film director:

Great Stalin met me the same day in the Kremlin like a good Moscow host; he introduced the excited and happy me to comrades Molotov, Voroshilov, and Kirov; he listened to my reading, endorsed it, and wished me happy work. – That's how the excited film director described the meeting. – I left his place and realized that my world had changed. Comrade Stalin, through his fatherly attention, lifted off my shoulders the long-term burden of feeling my artistic, and therefore political, inferiority that my surroundings had been instilling in me for years.[37]

Thus, life started to get better. Soon filming began on *Aerograd*. The film was released in 1935, and it was acclaimed not only by critics but personally by Stalin, which at that time meant a great deal. New possibilities were opened up in front of Dovzhenko, since he was graced by no less than the 'leader of all times and nations' himself. Also, a chance appeared for him to return to Ukraine, this time not as a regular film director but as someone who personally knew Stalin, with whom he had had several meetings, who listened to his opinion, and who would always protect and save him, as happened in 1932.

At least this is probably what Dovzhenko believed – and not without reason. This is how it would have been if not for one 'but'. The dictator was benevolent towards the film director until he made a mistake; that happened with the film novel *Ukraine in Flames*. But

“There is a debt to Dovzhenko – a Ukrainian Chapayev”

[36] R.M. Korohodskiy, *Dovzhenko v poloni: Rozvidky ta esei pro Maistra*, Kyiv 2000, p. 283. [37] *Ibidem*, p. 284.

that was all to come. Meanwhile, elated by Stalin's praise, Dovzhenko was making up his creative plans. The leader, however, had his own plans with regard to the film director...

On February 27, 1935, on the occasion of the 15th Anniversary of Soviet Cinematography, a meeting of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR took place. At it, cinematographers were honored with state decorations. Oleksandr Dovzhenko received the Order of Lenin. It was at that meeting that Stalin made Dovzhenko an offer he could not refuse. This is how it sounded in the Polish intelligence report, for it was also interested in the Ukrainian film director's personality:

In order to emphasize his attention towards Ukrainian matters even more, and to make it absolutely openly in front of everyone, Stalin used the ceremony of distributing orders to Soviet cinematographers. So, when Dovzhenko's turn came, he made a loud approving remark about the Ukrainian cinematography and added that "Dovzhenko owes a favor – may he make a Ukrainian Chapayev!"^[38]

Indeed, the Bolshevik ideology needed not only Russian heroes but Ukrainian ones as well, or else it would have appeared as if the Red Army had caused Revolution alone, and imposed its political order on other nations. Mykola Shchors (1895–1919), one of the Bolshevik military leaders in Ukraine, was appointed to be such a 'Ukrainian Chapayev.' The fact that Shchors was dead by that time certainly contributed to the 'appointment,' since he could no longer turn out to be an enemy of the people, while the majority, if not all, of the Soviet military officials – and not only them – in 1937–1938 would turn out to be such.

Dovzhenko, however, was afraid, and not without a reason, to go back to Ukraine, where the filming of *Shchors* was supposed to take place, and where he could be immediately branded a 'nationalist.' Stalin replied to him on this matter: "Well, I will pray for you. Do not be afraid." The quote was used by Dovzhenko in his conversation with the poet Mykola Bazhan, but it was agent 'Aleksandrov' who informed the Chekists about the conversation.^[39]

After his return to Ukraine, Dovzhenko started working on a screenplay for *Shchors*. Received by the Ukrainfilm Trust in 1936, the screenplay was awarded an overall negative review.^[40] One of its major drawbacks was that the character of Shchors was portrayed insufficiently well.

For a long time, the screenplay was not approved by Moscow either. There were reasons for this. It was Stalin who commissioned the film from Dovzhenko. Thus, Boris Shumyatsky, then executive producer for Soviet cinematography, understood all the potential risks

[38] Rossijskij gosudarstvennyj voennyj arhiv, f. 453, op. 1, spr. 55, ark. 4.

[39] HDA SB Ukrainy, f. 65, spr. S-997, t. 1, ch. II, ark. 317, 319.

[40] TsDAHO Ukrainy, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 7517, ark. 21–24.

for him personally should the screenplay be approved. He tried to avoid responsibility, procrastinated by all means possible, and did not give the film director a definitive answer. And then at some point, during a conversation with Dovzhenko, he said openly that since Stalin had ordered the film, he may himself review the screenplay. In the end, this is exactly what happened – Stalin read the screenplay, made numerous substantive remarks, and the film was put into production.

The secret police directly controlled the filming process as well. There is an archived letter from a *Shchors* film crew member dated July 1937. It was written by former Chekist Mykola Rylskyi to the ‘competent authorities’ of Kyiv region with regard to Dovzhenko’s ‘anti-Soviet sentiments.’ Rylskyi had switched to the field of cinematography, yet he had not abandoned his Chekist customs. Thus, soon after the letter, the bookkeeper of the film crew, M. Riabinin, was arrested and later convicted. He was charged with ‘counter-revolution,’ since he had refused to sign up for a state loan.[41]

The former Chekist did not stop after the bookkeeper’s arrest – Rylskyi started suspecting others of ‘Trotskyism,’ even Dovzhenko. He argued that the film director was not a member of the Communist Party; he’d been abroad, publicized his acquaintance with Stalin on every corner, and criticized the Soviet system. On top of that, according to Rylskyi, the *Shchors* film crew had heavy overspent: “The selected *Shchors* is ugly, caricature-like. *Shchors*’ commanders are all clumsy. Actors are being called for filming; they sit for 15-20 days without being filmed but are paid colossal money. The filming plan is non-existent.”[42]

Agent ‘Aleksiev’ reported about the difficult moral and psychological state of the film director. At the end of August, a military unit was involved in shooting mass scenes. The weather was overcast for several days, therefore, no filming took place. It was only on the final, ninth, day – after which the military unit would leave the summer camp – that the weather turned sunny and everything planned was filmed. Yet information was received the very next day about the arrest of the Commander of Kharkiv Military District, Ivan Dubovyi, who was subsequently executed. Having been M. *Shchors*’ deputy in 1919, he played a significant role in the film. In particular, an episode was filmed where the actor playing Dubovyi led the troops into the offensive.[43]

The arrest of Dubovyi resulted in practically all the filmed footage proving to be unsuitable. Moreover, there was a high probability of Dovzhenko being accused of losing his ‘political vigilance’: not only had he not detected ‘an enemy of the people’ in a timely fashion, but had even made him one of the leading characters in his film.

As a result of such distress, Dovzhenko had a heart attack, followed by long-term treatment. At the end of January 1938, after spend-

[41] HDA SB Ukrainy, f. 6, spr. 68266 fp, ark. 2.

[43] *Ibidem*, t. 1, ch. II, ark. 106–107.

[42] *Ibidem*, f. 65, spr. S-836, t. 2, papka “Pis’mo Dovzhenko k Solncevoj”, ark. 4.

ing three months at a sanatorium near Moscow, the film director finally returned to Kyiv. He was planning to resume filming in the first days of February.

In his report from January 21, 1938, agent ‘Petro Umanskyi’ noted that the director was not too willing to start filming and that he complained about the crew members, especially his assistant Lazar Bodyk, not doing the necessary work in casting actors for the leading role of Shchors and for the supporting roles. The agent correctly noted that Dovzhenko’s dissatisfaction with the actor playing Shchors stemmed not only from their professional qualities but the very image of the division commander:

Although Dovzhenko does not say it openly, it is very noticeable in his conversations. For example: “As a figure, Chapayev provided more opportunities to a screenwriter and film director than Shchors does: he was always taut, disciplined, precise, and locked in his internal emotions.” I think that one of the reasons for the weak and unsatisfactory pace of filming *Shchors* is Dovzhenko’s creative resentment of the image of Shchors.[44]

According to ‘Petro Umanskyi,’ one of the factors that negatively affected the speed of the filming was that the director was afraid of being arrested. Yuliya Solntseva ‘contributed’ to this by persuading Dovzhenko that it was impossible to work in Ukraine, and that he was duly appreciated only in Moscow, therefore, that is where they should return to.[45] In the reality of that time – it was the beginning of 1938, and the mass repressions had not slowed – not a single Soviet citizen could not be certain s/he would not get arrested. Thus, Solntseva was probably right to a certain degree. Yet there was something completely opposite happening as well: she was trying to isolate, to rip away Dovzhenko from Ukrainian national culture in this way.

In his other report, dated February 24, 1938, ‘Petro Umanskyi’ noted that Dovzhenko had finally started shooting *Shchors*, and the actors for the leading roles had been appointed already. Yet his mood was still very despondent.[46]

In his report on August 1938, agent ‘Black’ pointed to the deterioration in the director’s health:

Within the last two years, Dovzhenko has developed heart disease, which the doctors consider untreatable (judging from the nature of the attacks, it is angina). Dovzhenko works hard now, and he re-does and re-shoots the material multiple times. He gives the impression of being totally torn apart, an exhausted person who is on the verge of a mental breakdown.[47]

The film director’s health was affected not only by the troubles related to the screenplay approval and organizing the process of filming. *Shchors* was to become a pivotal point in Dovzhenko’s life. If it was a success, then the film director could expect glory and all kinds of

[44] Ibidem, ark. 140–141.

[45] Ibidem, ark. 141.

[46] Ibidem, ark. 150.

[47] Ibidem, ark. 201.

honors from the government. If it was a failure, then, considering how many foes Dovzhenko had, it would mean the threat of arrest.

It seems that such a warning came at the end of August 1938, when Dovzhenko was involved in a car accident. He lost control of his car and was almost killed. It turned out that someone had made a notch on the axis of the steering wheel, and it tore off on the first corner.[48] It is hard to say if the Communist secret police had anything to do with this, yet following this event, the director's state of health quickly deteriorated.

Several months earlier, in March 1938, another extraordinary event took place. During the filming of the episode 'A Battle in Vyshnevs'kyi's Castle', it transpired that the gun was loaded with a real bullet instead of a blank. By sheer miracle, a tragedy did not occur.[49] According to other testimonies, one of those on the film set was lightly wounded.[50]

Thus, the filming moved on very slowly. As agent 'Samoilov' noted in his report on October 21, 1938, the film would not be finished by December 15 as planned. Only 70% of the material was filmed. Several important episodes were yet to be shot; editing and synchronization work was still to be done. Meanwhile, the film had been in progress since February 1938 with the budget of 3 million rubles, and nearly 5 million had already been spent.[51]

The film director had complicated relations with the Kyiv Film Studio authorities, as well as with its Party organization. According to Mykola Bazhan, whose words were reported by agent 'Strila' [Arrow], the studio authorities did not support Dovzhenko; many hated him and wished failure on his film. On the other hand, Dovzhenko himself was to blame for that: he turned many people against himself by his own intemperance and irritability. Mykola Bazhan had reason to believe that the failure of *Shchors* would have unpredictable consequences, not only for Dovzhenko but that it would affect Ukrainian culture as a whole negatively: "Dovzhenko's ruin is the ruin of Ukrainian cinema and the whole of Ukrainian culture." [52]

The writer Petro Panch, with whom agent 'Arrow' spoke, had a similar opinion: "Like Bazhan, Panch replied that this is death for Dovzhenko, for he had given his word to Stalin. Like Bazhan, Panch equated Dovzhenko's success with the prestige of the Ukrainian culture." [53]

In March 1939, Dovzhenko finally finished his work on the film, which turned out a success, and this fact caught the attention of the Communist secret police. On March 11, agent 'Verova' wrote:

[48] Ibidem, ark. 211–212.

[49] L.O. Bodyk, *Dzherela velykoho kino. Spohady pro O.P. Dovzhenka*, Kyiv 1985, pp. 142–145.

[50] H. Zatvornitskyi, *Notatky asystenta*, "Za bilshovytskyi film" 1938, no. 22 (May 13, 1938).

[51] HDA SB Ukrainy, f. 65, spr. S-836, t. 1, ch. II, ark. 215.

[52] Ibidem, spr. S-997, t. 2, ch. II, ark. 30.

[53] Ibidem, ark. 34.

The cinematographic masses are thrilled about the film *Shchors* by the director Dovzhenko. The film is viewed as a huge achievement of Soviet art. Thus, for example, Shklovsky says that this film is unsurpassed in terms of picturesqueness, simplicity, and rusticity. Film director Meyerhold points out that with *Shchors*, the whole art has ascended to the highest level. Many comrades consider this creation to be genius, and they place it higher than *Chapayev* in terms of this film's folksiness.[54]

The film was indeed a tremendous success, and it facilitated even greater trust from Stalin towards the film director – after all, Dovzhenko had been distinguished with the Stalin Prize of the 1st Degree. Yet monitoring on the secret police's part did not stop. Thus, in his report on February 19, 1940, agent 'Timofeev' pointed to the 'negative traits' in the film director's behavior. According to him, after Dovzhenko had fulfilled Stalin's request for *Shchors*, he started behaving not like a Soviet citizen: he was rude to workers even before that, but now his rudeness had taken on a much sharper form. As usual, accusations of nationalism and antisemitism abounded, and Dovzhenko's desire to film *Taras Bulba* was interpreted as a departure from the contemporary revolutionary subject matter.[55] I would point out here that this report was far from the only one written by cameraman Yuri Yekelchik. He would write similar things on March 4, 1940, and not only about Dovzhenko but other creative workers of the Kyiv Film Studio, many of whom by that time had already been executed.[56] Soon afterwards, Yekelchik, agent 'Timofeev', took on the role of a film critic:

The film *Shchors* took too long to shoot, nearly three years, and cost too much. Dovzhenko has invested a lot of his energy and work in this film. It resulted in a significant piece of art. Yet again, just as in all of his films, the drawbacks inherent to Dovzhenko as a film director make the film both not completely understandable and bulky. And even though some scenes are made better than in *Chapayev*, overall *Chapayev* had greater popular appeal and was more understandable than *Shchors*. [57]

Ukraine in Flames

Coming back to the relations between Dovzhenko and Stalin, an apt comparison from the film critic Serhy Trymbach comes to mind: the dictator was playing with the film director, and not just with him, like a cat with a mouse. A cat would release a caught mouse slightly, and when the mouse considered himself free, he then immediately would feel the full strength of the cat's claws. Dovzhenko was such a lab mouse. The Chekists had accumulated a huge amount of compromising data on him. Anyone else would have been sent to the GULAG long ago for such incriminating evidence – and that would be the best outcome. For Dovzhenko, however, it did not have any negative consequences. Stalin had been lenient with him up to a certain point. It was not altruism on his part – it was something else: if all the prominent Soviet film directors were to be wiped out, who would then make genius

[54] Ibidem, spr. S-836, t. 1, ch. II, ark. 253.

[55] Ibidem, ark. 269–270.

[56] Ibidem, ark. 271–274.

[57] Ibidem, ark. 312 zv.

films about the leader of all times and all nations? Even though Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Ivan Kavalieridze, and many others did fall out of favor ‘for losing vigilance’, none of them were executed, yet their nervous systems were badly damaged, which ultimately resulted in a shortened life span.

It seems that Dovzhenko really believed it was possible to have good relations with the dictator and that he would always be protected by him. This belief, in my opinion, produced the artist’s erroneous notion of creative freedom, at least for him personally, since the secret police in their documents had multiple records of the director talking about the lack of such freedom in Soviet society. The Second World War only deepened those beliefs of Dovzhenko’s, for there was more freedom, and one seemingly was not prosecuted for words that would have led to accusations of nationalism prior to the War. Yet he was deeply mistaken when he allowed himself to write what from the Soviet ideology point of view were unforgivable things in his film novel *Ukraine in Flames*.

The contract for writing the screenplay for *Ukraine in Flames* was signed on January 16, 1942, between Oleksandr Dovzhenko and Director of Kyiv Film Studio, Yakiv Liniychuk. According to the contract, the screenplay was to be submitted no later than April 15, 1942. The author was to be paid 30,000 rubles for the screenplay and for the rights to its screen production.[58] While working on the screenplay, Dovzhenko tried to present the events that were taking place during the war in his native land objectively, without any embellishment.

At the end of August 1943, Dovzhenko read the script of *Ukraine in Flames* to the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine, Nikita Khrushchev, whom he had known well since pre-war times. Khrushchev liked the film novel; he even suggested publishing it as a separate book in both the Russian and Ukrainian languages.[59]

The reaction of Ukrainian writers who read the screenplay was more cautious. Some even tried to warn Dovzhenko not to make a careless move. The film director, however, did not listen to this advice, for he was deeply convinced that only the truth should be written about the war.

Soon after that, dark clouds started gathering over Dovzhenko’s head. The first unpleasant call came after Dovzhenko published a short story titled *Victory*, and on July 9, 1943, the Head of the Central Committee’s Propaganda and Agitation Department, Georgy Aleksandrov, in his memo to Secretary of the Central Committee, Aleksandr Shcherbakov, accused Dovzhenko of many sins, above all, of ‘Ukrainian nationalism’: “The military unit portrayed by the author consists

[58] Tsentralnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv-muzei literatury i mystetstva Ukrainy (TsDAMLMLM Ukrainy), f. 670, op. 1, spr. 75, ark. 226.

[59] O.P. Dovzhenko, *Shchodennykovi zapysy, 1939–1956 = Dnevnikovyye zapisi, 1939–1956*, Kharkiv 2013, p. 259.

entirely of Ukrainians. This is not in line with reality, and it artificially separates the battle of Ukrainian people from the battles of other peoples of the USSR against the Germans.”^[60] Shortly after that, the turn of *Ukraine in Flames* came.

In his report on December 7, 1943, agent ‘Arrow’ noted that the film director was in a very depressed mood caused by the banning of his film novel. As far as Dovzhenko was aware, the ban had been imposed by Stalin himself.^[61] This put the director in a very complicated situation, since, foreseeing a possible ban of the screenplay, he intended to appeal to Stalin. Now, there was no such option left.

Khrushchev’s attitude toward the director had dramatically changed, too. Being a seasoned functionary, he understood perfectly well the risks of him supporting Dovzhenko. Therefore, he completely changed his thoughts not only about *Ukraine in Flames* but its director as well. In his attempts to prove he had nothing to do with supporting the film novel, Khrushchev put blame entirely on Oleksandr Dovzhenko. It is worth noting that the relations between the two did not resume even after Stalin’s death, when Khrushchev became leader of the Soviet Union.

It appears Dovzhenko himself did not realize for some time the danger he had got into. True, he acknowledged that certain moments in the screenplay were too sharp while some others were mistakes, yet he had no intention of stopping work on the film novel.

Rumors that Dovzhenko had created a ‘nationalistic screenplay’ spread quickly among literary and cinematographic circles. Yet there, in contrast to what Dovzhenko really thought, an idea prevailed that those were not just separate drawbacks but rather Dovzhenko’s worldview that made him perceive the events the wrong way, thus causing the ideological failure of his screenplay.^[62]

That was but the beginning of the criticism levelled at the film novel and its author. The climax came on January 30, 1944 at the meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the VKP(b). Apart from the highest Party and state leaders of the Soviet Union – Josef Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov, Georgy Malenkov, Lavrentiy Beria, Anastas Mikoyan, Nikita Khrushchev, and Aleksandr Shcherbakov – members of the Ukrainian delegation participated as well, in particular Demyan Korotchenko, Leonid Korniets, Mykola Bazhan, Oleksander Kornii-chuk, Maksym Rylskyi, and, naturally, Oleksandr Dovzhenko.

Josef Stalin gave a speech at the meeting and subjected *Ukraine in Flames* to a devastating critique. He accused Dovzhenko of an attempt to revise Leninism, of nationalism, and many other ‘sins.’ Dovzhenko would later note in his diary: “Today is the anniversary of my death. On the thirty-first of January, 1944, I was brought to the Kremlin. There,

[60] *Kino na vojne. Dokumenty i sviditel'stva*, author compiler V.I. Fomin, Moskva 2005, p. 382.

[61] HDA SB Ukrainy, f. 60, spr. 53141, robocha sprava ahenta “Strila”, t. 2, ark. 123.

[62] Ibidem.

I was chopped into pieces, and the bloody parts of my soul were thrown to all the gatherings for disgrace and obliteration.”[63]

In his conversation with the painter Mykola Hlushchenko, aka agent ‘Iarema’, in February 1944, Dovzhenko bitterly noted:

All that has made a grave impression on me. Comrade Stalin started with an expose; it was picked up by the chorus of those present, then there was lecturing, and finally some serenity. Thus, I turned out to be a bourgeois nationalist who seemingly tried to publish his views by working around. These are the results of my 25-year-long service to the people. What deeply struck me – and I am telling you this as a big secret – is that nobody present at that meeting expressed their opinion sincerely and openly. Nobody bears in mind when I was writing my novel. It was the time when Ukraine did not have an inch of its own land. I have presented a general picture implemented with a painter’s temperament. Back then, not only I thought that way, but others did as well, and they saw the same mistakes.[64]

Strange though it might seem, Dovzhenko blamed many people but not Stalin. The film director, like the majority of Soviet citizens, harboured considerable illusions as to the dictator’s infallibility and thus, that his actions were right. As agent ‘Malov’ reported, Dovzhenko spoke about Stalin with sincere and deep feelings:

You know, if not for comrade Stalin, they would have pecked me down a long time ago. Throughout my life, during its most serious stages, he supported and helped me. And this time when I was summoned to him, that was an unforgettable meeting. I was taught a big lesson. He was in a rage; he scolded me; he expressed a lot of things that were bitter for me. But I felt that those were the words of a father. It was very hard for me to hear those words directly from him. But you know, it is easier to hear the truth from a father than anyone else. Now you understand that I cannot fall short of his trust. I feel that, deep in his soul, it was very painful for Stalin himself to tell me those things.[65]

In my opinion, the critique of *Ukraine in Flames* and its author should not be viewed as something isolated or accidental. As was mentioned above, during the war, the ideological vice was loosened somewhat, and many people got an erroneous impression that positive changes were about to come to the Soviet Union. Thus, this critique served to bring such dreamers as Dovzhenko down to earth, and the rest of the literary-artistic intelligentsia, ‘regain consciousness.’ In a wider sense, this step meant a return to the pre-war tactics of repression.

On February 9, 1944, during the session of the 9th Plenum of the Board of the USSR Union of Writers, the head of the Central Committee’s Propaganda and Agitation Department, Georgy Aleksandrov, criticized Dovzhenko’s novel.[66] Shortly after that, editorial boards and publishing houses received an instruction not to publish any of Dovzhenko’s works without special permission.

[63] O.P. Dovzhenko, *Shchodennykovi zapysy...*, p. 333.

[65] *Ibidem*, ark. 44.

[64] HDA SB Ukrainy, f. 65, spr. S-836, t. 3, ch. II, ark. 4.

[66] TsDAHO Ukrainy, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 84, ark. 91–95.

Yet the persecution of the filmmaker did not stop at that point. Sadly enough, it was in Ukraine that it was harshest. In Moscow, even if it was not completely forgotten, then at least the film director was not reminded of it on each occasion.

Thus, on February 12, 1944, during its meeting, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) in Ukraine adopted a resolution “On O.P. Dovzhenko”, according to which the film director was fired from his position as artistic director at the Kyiv Film Studio. He was also excluded from the editorial board of the “Ukraina” journal. In addition, both the All-Slavic Committee and Committee on Stalin Prizes at the Council of People’s Commissars of the Soviet Union were recommended to get rid of the disgraced artist.[67]

Already on March 12, 1944, a general meeting of the writers took place in Kyiv, in the quarters of the “Radians’ka Ukraina” newspaper. In theory, a discussion of the Soviet Writers Plenum was to take place during the meeting. Yet in reality, it came down purely to criticizing the film novel *Ukraine in Flames*. The writers Oleksandr Korniiichuk, Mykola Bazhan, Pavlo Tychyna, Leonid Novychenko, and Oleksandr Kopylenko were among the critics. In his report, agent ‘Okhotnik’ [*Hunter*][68] wrote about the meeting in detail, therefore, one of the writers must have been behind that alias.

In general, as Yuliya Solntseva succinctly phrased it – and I completely agree with her – in what was recorded by agent ‘Mogilevskii’, ‘elaborating’ on Dovzhenko had become an integral part of all the intelligentsia meetings, Party meetings, and so on. Mykola Bazhan would be especially zealous at those meetings, while before the film novel was banned, he called the chairman of the Soviet Cinematography, Ivan Bolshakov, demanding to produce the screenplay in a million-copy print run. Khrushchev, who had previously viewed Dovzhenko’s screenplay positively, now, according to Solntseva, did everything possible to take the campaign of persecution as wide as possible.[69]

In June 1944, at the plenum of the Union of the Soviet Writers of Ukraine another blow came for the film director, when *Ukraine in Flames* was subjected to devastating criticism yet again.

People are speaking from the plenum podium – they used to praise my screenplay of *Ukraine in Flames*, support my now-erroneous concepts, say that the screenplay was highly artistic, truthful, and reflected the real state of affairs, etc. And now they are defaming me – Dovzhenko was saying this with bitterness to agent ‘Malov.’ It made a striking impression on me that, as one cinematographer said, I was called a ‘nationalist,’ ‘Banderovite,’ and other hideous epithets.[70]

Several years passed but in Ukraine, attitudes towards Dovzhenko, who had been permanently living in Moscow since the war, barely

[67] Ibidem, op. 6, spr. 715, ark. 34.

[68] HDA SB Ukrainy, f. 65, spr. S-836, t. 3, ch. II, ark. 24–28 zv.

[69] Ibidem, ark. 42.

[70] Ibidem, ark. 60.

changed. In 1950, the Taras Shevchenko Institute of Literature published the second volume of *History of Ukrainian Literature*. A separate chapter of the volume was dedicated to the ‘ideological perversions’ in the works of Ukrainian writers, who were criticized for ‘nationalistic mistakes’, ‘bourgeois cosmopolitanism’, and so on. The author of the film novel *Ukraine in Flames* came in for criticism, too:

O. Dovzhenko has committed an especially astounding violation of the proletarian internationalism idea and principle of Bolshevik partisanship in his screenplay *Ukraine in Flames* and some other short stories. In these writings, the events of the Patriotic War are distorted, Soviet people are slandered, and the national politics of our Party subjected to revision.[71]

Dovzhenko found out about this from the poet Andriy Malysko during his visit to Kyiv. As agent ‘Arrow’ noted, Dovzhenko had fallen into despair:

My whole life is being crossed out. I have done a lot of good things [and] all that is nullified for just one mistake. I have given my life to the people. Well, I made mistakes, and I was punched badly for that. But I will not survive that, as it appears I have insulted my people. How can I live on now? But I cannot die like that either – I cannot let it happen that the nation’s youth would grow up knowing that Dovzhenko is a scoundrel.[72]

Such an attitude toward the filmmaker lasted almost until his death. Only after his death did attitudes towards him start to change: the Kyiv Film Studio and streets were named after him, a museum to him was organized in Sosnytsia, and his writings started being published.

I conclude that Oleksandr Dovzhenko was under permanent surveillance by the Communist secret police, starting from the end of the 1920s through to the end of his life. This surveillance was well organized – it was large-scale and complex, and encompassed not only his professional activities but his private life as well. The main reason that the film director was under such total control was primarily his professional affiliation. After all, no other form of art could compete with the cinema in terms of the strength and effectiveness of its influence on the masses. Within the system of Soviet ideology and propaganda, representatives of the ‘tenth muse’ occupied a special position, therefore, they were monitored quite meticulously. This was especially true for leading film directors such as Oleksandr Dovzhenko. Dozens of agents, among whom were his close friends, regularly informed the secret police about the director’s every step. On the other hand, the data in those reports, despite their authors often being involved and biased, are a valuable source of information for studying little-known, or totally unknown, moments of both his personal and professional life.

Translation: Svitlana Kukharenko

[71] *Istoriia ukrainskoi literatury*, vol. 2, Kyiv 1950, pp. 259–260.

[72] HDA SB Ukrainy, f. 60, spr. 53141, robocha sprava ahenta „Strila”, t. 4, ark. 366 zv.

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