



## President and Fellows of Harvard College

---

Dovzhenko, Stalin, and the (Re)creation of "Shchors"

Author(s): GEORGE O. LIBER

Source: *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3/4 (December 1997), pp. 271-286

Published by: [Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41036706>

Accessed: 29-02-2016 17:16 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*President and Fellows of Harvard College and Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## Dovzhenko, Stalin, and the (Re)creation of *Shchors*

GEORGE O. LIBER

In his 1939 autobiography, the Soviet Ukrainian filmmaker Oleksander Dovzhenko claimed that the just-released film *Shchors* (on Mykola Shchors, a Red Army commander during the Bolshevik Revolution) was his best. He wrote:

Working on the script for *Shchors* and shooting the film was the most satisfying experience of my life. It took eleven months to write the script and twenty months to film it. That was a whole lifetime. I put to full use in *Shchors* all the knowledge and experience acquired in twelve years of hard labor. I made it with all my love and strength as a memorial to the people, a token of my love and deep respect for the hero of the great Ukrainian October. I felt that my creative urges were being expressed not in flimsy celluloid, but in durable stone or metal fated to survive the centuries. I wanted to be worthy of the people and of the trust placed in me by the great man [Stalin]. When I fell ill during the work I could not bear the thought that I might not be able to finish it.<sup>1</sup>

But Dovzhenko's filming of *Shchors* had been more complex and more frustrating than this account intimates. In a letter to a close friend written on 8 December 1939, only several days after writing his autobiography, he admitted: "I completed *Shchors*. It was a very difficult film to make and took a good five years of health from me. And I still have not gotten over it."<sup>2</sup>

Dovzhenko did not leave a complete summary of his experiences filming *Shchors*.<sup>3</sup> What descriptions do exist are fragmentary, if not hagiographic, accounts written by others. It becomes obvious when reading between the lines of these narratives that the creation of *Shchors* presented Dovzhenko with his greatest challenge. Stalin's personal involvement in the film's production restricted the full expression of Dovzhenko's creativity. In response, the filmmaker became very frustrated, very angry, depressed, and ill, and even contemplated suicide. Despite official delays and emotional outbursts which paralyzed his work, Dovzhenko completed his project and created a socialist realist film with double meanings.

The film portrays Ukrainian Bolshevik resistance to the intervention forces of the Central Powers in 1918 and to the army of the Ukrainian National Republic (UNR) commanded by Symon Petliura during the Civil War. Young Mykola Shchors leads the Bohun Brigade and the salty old peasant, Vasyly' Bozhenko, heads the Tarashchansk regiment. Both forces amalgamate under Shchors' command.

*Harvard Ukrainian Studies* XXI (3/4) 1997: 271–86.

After Kaiser William II's abdication in November 1918, the hopes of German soldiers stationed in Ukraine of returning home are raised, but their officers oppose any such moves. Shchors initiates a policy of fraternization between the Ukrainian and the German enlisted men, which undermines the authority of the German officers; subsequently, the way is cleared for the Germans to leave Ukraine.

The film then centers on Shchor's defeat of Petliura at Chernihiv. The Bolshevik hero soon follows this victory up by capturing Kyiv. A UNR counteroffensive forces Shchors to retreat; he is injured in a battle at Berdychiv. Recuperating with other wounded partisans, Shchors discusses his dreams of the future. The scene then shifts to a distraught Bozhenko who has learned that counterrevolutionary agents murdered his wife; Shchors consoles him. The two leaders regroup and rout an invading Polish army. This victory, however, becomes short-lived. In the summer of 1919, Petliura's troops sweep across Ukraine. Mortally wounded during one of Petliura's attacks, Bozhenko dies. His men carry him to his grave, where Shchors delivers the eulogy. The film ends with Shchors reviewing the troops at his newly established school for Red Army officers.<sup>4</sup>

Although it comprised an unevenly developed plot, *Shchors* conformed to the guidelines set by the official Soviet policy of socialist realism. The film depicts a dedicated, selfless, and zealous revolutionary hero who overcame great odds by his faith in Lenin and by the force of his will. As a politically and militarily infallible protagonist, Shchors dominates the film. When *Shchors* appeared in 1939, it joined a group of films, such as the Vasiliev Brothers' *Chapaev* (1934) and Sergei Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), that dealt with, as one scholar put it, "powerful individuals from Russian and Soviet history, all of which were designed to provide precedent and legitimation for Stalin's authority."<sup>5</sup>

Dovzhenko completed *Shchors*, his first reinterpretation of the Revolution and Civil War since *Arsenal* in 1929, during the peak of Stalin's power. In creating this film, he skillfully negotiated between the conflicting demands of his own creative muse and Stalin's interpretation of the Revolution and Civil War. In doing so, he took great risks and managed to square the circle, but at great emotional cost to himself.

### *Stalin's Initiative*

As he edited *Aerograd* at the end of 1934, Dovzhenko hoped to start shooting two new films in 1935: *Tsar* (described as "a social satire based on the Imperialist War of 1914–1918") and *Paradise Lost and Found* ("about a new ice age").<sup>6</sup> But Stalin had other plans for the filmmaker.

During the fifteenth-anniversary celebrations of Soviet cinematography in early 1935, the Central Executive Committee (TsIK) of the Supreme Soviet honored Dovzhenko, together with the film director Vsevolod Pudovkin and

Boris Shumiatskii, the head of the Main Administration of the Soviet Cinema Industry. As M. I. Kalinin, TsIK's chairman and the nominal president of the USSR, awarded Dovzhenko the Order of Lenin on 27 February 1935, Stalin, who stood close to the podium, allegedly remarked of the filmmaker, "he has an obligation—to create a Ukrainian Chapaev."<sup>7</sup>

*Chapaev* appeared in 1934 and became extremely popular, selling over 50 million tickets in five years.<sup>8</sup> The film celebrates a newly resurrected hero of the Civil War, V. I. Chapaev, who commands a rifle division against various anti-Bolshevik armies. Chapaev, an uneducated peasant who fights courageously, possesses good political instincts and understands that the Bolsheviks represent the future. But without the guidance of their representative, the commissar, Chapaev would have been defeated. Under the commissar's watchful eye, Chapaev's class consciousness grows and he wins on the battlefield. Although he ultimately dies a heroic death in battle at the end of the film, his Red Army division triumphs. Thus, the hero might die, but the cause is invincible.<sup>9</sup> In suggesting that Dovzhenko make a film about a Ukrainian Chapaev, Stalin was, in effect, proposing that Dovzhenko cinematographically flesh out a highly sensitive topic—the Revolution and Civil War—which the Communist Party had begun to reinterpret along revisionist (Stalinist) lines by the early 1930s.

Following the presentation of the awards, Stalin asked Dovzhenko if he knew of Mykola Oleksandrovych Shchors and his significance. When Dovzhenko affirmed that he did, the Soviet ruler then advised him to "think about him."<sup>10</sup>

Dovzhenko had little choice but to agree to Stalin's proposal of producing a film on the Bolshevik military leader. On 12 March 1935, Dovzhenko publicly revealed for the first time that his next film would deal with Shchors, who hitherto had not been among the best known of Bolshevik figures in Ukraine.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, before 27 February 1935, most Soviet journalists and scholars could not identify Shchors. But after *Pravda* published (on 5 March) Stalin's remarks from the aforementioned fifteenth-anniversary conclave, which raised Shchors to cult hero status, they instantly "discovered" Shchors and reevaluated his contributions to the Bolshevik cause. Shchors now became "one of the organizers and commanders of the first units of the Red Army in Ukraine." Together with the help of the "fraternal Russian people and the heroic units of the Red Army," this Ukrainian Bolshevik liberated Ukraine "from counterrevolution."<sup>12</sup>

These hyperbolic declarations, however, contradicted historical reality. Shchors was born on 25 May 1895 in the village of Snov'ske (now Shchors) in the Horodnia county of the province of Chernihiv. The son of a railway mechanic, he completed his education at a school run by the Russian railway administration. He then received training as a military medic, serving in this capacity at the beginning of the First World War. After completing officer training school in 1915, he became a junior officer in the tsarist army.<sup>13</sup>

It is unclear when Shchors developed his Bolshevik sympathies, but he certainly identified with the Communist cause by September 1918, when he formed the pro-Soviet Bohun Brigade. In February 1919 his unit helped to capture Kyiv, and in March 1919 he became the commander of the First Soviet Ukrainian Division.<sup>14</sup>

Although Shchors clearly did participate in the Revolution and the Civil War, he did not play the central role the Party claimed of him after February 1935. Shchors was, in fact, a rather problematic hero. In August 1919, one month short of his death, Red Army military inspectors complained that Shchors, who had earlier objected to former tsarist officers giving him orders, had an inflated ego and was not qualified to be a division commander.<sup>15</sup> These same inspectors further argued that Shchors should be held responsible for his unit's defeat and face trial before a revolutionary court.<sup>16</sup>

Despite such evidence against him, Stalin's Party machine insisted on representing Shchors as a selfless Bolshevik revolutionary hero. Reviving a secondary figure from the Civil War's memory hole, Stalin exaggerated Shchors' accomplishments, not unlike the way the Party leader magnified his own feats. Now Dovzhenko had to apply Stalin's interpretation to film.

In order to coherently portray this myth, Dovzhenko had to gather details about the new Bolshevik hero. His research became extensive. Already in mid-March 1935, Dovzhenko met with several groups of veterans from Shchors' division then living in Moscow and listened "attentively" to their stories. He also heard the reminiscences of Mykola Shchors' brother, Hryhorii. In addition, Dovzhenko received over 13,000 letters and brief memoirs from all across the USSR from veterans who had served under Shchors.<sup>17</sup>

On 28 April 1935, Dovzhenko traveled to Kyiv in order to examine the materials that the Ukrainfilm's Historico-Literary Bureau had gathered on Shchors after Stalin proclaimed him the "Ukrainian Chapaev."<sup>18</sup> Dovzhenko's trip of April 1935, his first to Ukraine since his departure from there in late 1932, went well. He arrived triumphantly, having become Stalin's client in the spring of 1933 and having his mission to produce a film about Shchors publicized extensively in the spring of 1935.<sup>19</sup> For nearly a year, until March 1936, Dovzhenko traveled back and forth between Moscow and Kyiv in order to work on *Shchors*. As he proceeded to research Shchors, Dovzhenko continued to edit *Aerograd* (until November 1935).<sup>20</sup> Working on these two projects simultaneously, Dovzhenko likely pushed himself to the brink of exhaustion.

The combination of meetings, letters, and research trips generated an enormous volume of "facts" concerning Shchors. According to one newspaper correspondent who observed him, Dovzhenko often selected only a phrase or an allusion from these mountains of paper in order to create the Bolshevik commander's personal and professional characteristics.<sup>21</sup> After receiving 38 thick files on Shchors from Ukrainfilm's Historico-Literary Bureau, the filmmaker claimed that they described "the same things six, eight, and ten times, but in different ways . . . I am beginning slowly to become aware that those

who remember, 'remember' for a certain reason . . . I must admit that there is not one exact episode. I created everything."<sup>22</sup>

Written shortly after Stalin constructed the cult of Shchors, the reminiscences and memoirs appeared inconsistent to Dovzhenko. In light of the public campaign, the memoirs most likely delivered positive versions of the past, providing "facts" and vignettes which Shchors' former comrades-in-arms anticipated would please those collecting the memoirs. But the "facts" were insufficient: Dovzhenko needed to establish a coherent vision.

Building on the memoirs' fictions, Dovzhenko established a framework for Shchors' revolutionary activities. In doing so, he created an even greater fiction than Stalin's. For personal and professional reasons, he hoped that Stalin would be pleased.

Dovzhenko had good reason to be concerned. Between 27 February 1935, when Stalin first presented his idea to Dovzhenko, and March 1939, when the film finally appeared, the Soviet leader met with Dovzhenko several times. The first meeting took place in Stalin's Kremlin office on 22 May 1935. Initially, the Soviet leader asked the filmmaker questions about *Aerograd*. He then focused on *Shchors*.<sup>23</sup> Stalin, according to Dovzhenko's account, repeated that he only suggested that the filmmaker consider making a film about Shchors. Dovzhenko was not obliged to do so, Stalin claimed. If he had other plans, then he should work on them.

Dovzhenko thanked Stalin for his concern, but replied that the idea of making a film about Shchors excited him. At this meeting Stalin spoke much about Shchors, about the differences between Shchors and Chapaev, and about the challenges in creating a film about this Civil War hero.<sup>24</sup>

Stalin proposed that the film portray the struggle of the Ukrainian people with the "Ukrainian counterrevolution and with the German and Polish occupiers for their social and national liberation." At the same time, it was necessary "to show the Ukrainian people, especially their national character, their humor, their beautiful songs and dances."<sup>25</sup> The Soviet leader wanted to remind the director that *Shchors*, Dovzhenko's first film dealing with a Ukrainian topic in three years, should reflect the new Soviet interpretations of the Ukrainian past. Ukrainian songs and dances would provide the national form; the message, however, had to possess a socialist content.

Most importantly, the film would present a revisionist message: that the Ukrainians were an integral part of the Bolshevik Revolution and that they, assisted by the "fraternal Russian people" and the "heroic units of the Red Army," won the struggle against Ukrainian, Polish, and German counterrevolutionaries. *Shchors* would commemorate a Ukrainian Bolshevik leader and suggest that the efforts of the Ukrainians themselves, not a reliance on Bolshevik intervention from Russia, constituted the primary source of the Communist victory in Ukraine.

At the end of the meeting, Stalin mentioned a recently released record of Ukrainian folk songs. "Have you heard this record?" he asked the filmmaker.

“No, I haven’t,” Dovzhenko replied. “I don’t have a record player.”

An hour after Dovzhenko returned home from the Kremlin, the filmmaker received a record player, a gift from the Soviet leader. In an interview published shortly after this meeting, Dovzhenko claimed that he would keep the record player to the end of his life. “In what other country would workers and artists, scholars and authors,” he asked rhetorically, “feel such a direct intimacy with their beloved leader and feel our glorious Party’s and Comrade Stalin’s daily concerns?”<sup>26</sup>

But in the company of his closest friends, Dovzhenko asserted that Stalin gave him the record player and the Ukrainian record to remind the filmmaker of his nationalist past.<sup>27</sup> Stalin most likely knew of Dovzhenko’s service in Petliura’s army and of his arrest and conviction in 1919.<sup>28</sup> His gift represented a warning shot: if Dovzhenko did not produce a film that conformed to the Party leader’s standards (according to the filmmaker’s interpretation of Stalin’s motivations behind the gift), then trouble would follow.

#### *Searching for an Interpretation*

Not surprisingly, the filmmaker experienced problems in the making of *Shchors*. During the course of its production, Dovzhenko’s loyalty and political reliability came into serious question. His emotional stability deteriorated; fears, anxieties, and feelings of insecurity weakened him.

He often became ill for long periods. On 22 April 1937, Dovzhenko wrote a letter to his friend, Vsevolod Vyshnevskii, in which he mentioned his poor health: “I have a sclerosis of my blood vessels, especially in my head and aorta. I do not feel well. I quickly get tired and do not always think clearly.”<sup>29</sup> In order to take advantage of the winter weather necessary for critical scenes in the film, Dovzhenko had begun to film *Shchors* before the authorities had completely approved his screenplay. He hoped to save an entire year; the winter scenes were close to completion when Shumiatskii ordered Dovzhenko to stop.<sup>30</sup>

After a four-month illness (from September 1937 until January 1938), Dovzhenko started to film the now officially approved scenes.<sup>31</sup> Coronary disease then confined Dovzhenko to bed for three months in 1938.<sup>32</sup> Following the production of *Shchors* in March 1939, he again became sick and did not recover until September 1939.<sup>33</sup> The conflict between Dovzhenko’s wish to conform and his desire to preserve his own creative integrity may have caused his illnesses.

In seeking to implement Stalin’s suggestion, Dovzhenko feared that the actors he had selected, especially those in the primary roles, might not please the Soviet leader. After completing half the film with one actor in the title role, Dovzhenko started anew with another.<sup>34</sup> Finally, in the fall of 1937, the filmmaker chose a third actor, Ievgenii Samoilov, to play *Shchors*.<sup>35</sup> A Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del (NKVD) intelligence officer provided a

very perceptive report of the director's inability to find a good actor to play the main hero: "I think that Dovzhenko's dissatisfaction with the actors who played Shchors has a more complex reason than the incompatibility of this or that actor. Dovzhenko's creative dissatisfaction with the image of Shchors caused this hypercriticism."<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps. But Dovzhenko experienced a much greater frustration in the late 1930s. The historical context behind Shchors' image constantly changed. Between 1935 and 1939 Soviet historians rewrote the official history of the Revolution and Civil War, erasing the contributions of recent purge victims and replacing them with the newly expanded roles played by Lenin and Stalin. Dovzhenko's project became an integral part of this revisionist process. Censors, for example, arbitrarily altered sequences to conform to the latest changes in the official record.<sup>37</sup> Most importantly, Dovzhenko had to second-guess the contours of what was politically acceptable.

This had been Dovzhenko's problem with *Earth* (1930) and *Ivan* (1932). Over the course of their long-term production the Party changed course and left Dovzhenko, who could not transform his films as quickly as the Politburo could issue decrees, open to attack.

The Stalinist regime in the 1930s forced the filmmaker to submit every decision and every episode to groups of people "who knew what Stalin wanted." These critics, for example, asserted that Stalin wished Dovzhenko to show that Shchors' staff was better than Chapaev's; averred that the Soviet leader wanted Dovzhenko to depict a peasant insurrection in the film; expressed the hope that Dovzhenko would use Stalin's remarks concerning the national question; and strongly suggested that Dovzhenko make Shchors the leading political representative of the Leninist-Stalinist nationalities policy in Ukraine.<sup>38</sup>

D. V. Petrovs'kyi, a writer and a veteran of the First Soviet Ukrainian Division who knew Shchors personally, reviewed the screenplay and excerpts from scenes Dovzhenko had shot. He claimed that Dovzhenko fleshed out Bozhenko more than he did Shchors. Petrovs'kyi asserted that Arkadii Kisliakov, the second of the three actors who portrayed Shchors, did not fit the role and needed to be replaced. Most importantly, Petrovs'kyi professed that the portrayal of Shchors dying in the arms of Ivan Dubovy—his second-in-command—the climactic moment in one of the earlier versions of the film, proved highly unsatisfactory. It "does not uplift the viewer." In order to arouse the viewer's enthusiasm, Petrovs'kyi suggested that Dovzhenko add a revolutionary call to arms, such as "Let's recapture Kyiv!" to this scene. In the film's final frames, according to Petrovs'kyi, the First Soviet Ukrainian Division, inspired by Shchors' death, should retake Kyiv. This, Petrovs'kyi concluded, would be the proper cinematic response.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to these critics, Dovzhenko experienced more late-night meetings with Stalin, some of which were not as pleasant as the first few. The filmmaker later told friends about one frightening incident in Stalin's office,

when the Soviet leader refused to speak to Dovzhenko and when Beria accused him of joining a nationalist conspiracy.<sup>40</sup>

It is unclear why Stalin and Beria were angry with the filmmaker. But perhaps it had to do with the portrayal—or lack thereof—of Stalin's role. At the height of Stalin's "cult of personality," it was difficult to portray a hero of the Ukrainian people who did not mention Stalin.<sup>41</sup> Or perhaps Dovzhenko received orders to include Stalin in his film, but did not comply.<sup>42</sup> Most likely, however, the cultural commissars imagined Stalin's inclusion to be an unspoken assumption and realized that the filmmaker did not understand this new political custom. Whatever the reason for the official displeasure, the expectation of subscription to Stalin's personality cult remained as ever before; Dovzhenko, however, did not conform.

In his own defense, the filmmaker claimed that he could not introduce a scene of Stalin or characters discussing him without violating the historical or artistic truth of the film's material.<sup>43</sup> During the Civil War Shchors did not report to Stalin. Few rank and file soldiers even knew of Stalin at the time. In the scenes portraying Shchors' talks with his own troops (who would not have been able to identify Stalin, a member of the Party's inner circle since 1912), Dovzhenko could not show his hero equating Stalin with Lenin.

The filmmaker also did not include a scene where Shchors allegedly met Lenin. If he had captured this scene on film, he would have had to conform to the custom established by Soviet filmmakers in the 1930s of assigning Stalin to Lenin's side. Instead, according to one of Dovzhenko's colleagues, the filmmaker chose to do otherwise. "I did not want to show this," Dovzhenko told this colleague. "I therefore only limited myself to Shchors' mentioning his conversation with Lenin."<sup>44</sup> Stalin's absence from *Shchors* raised the issue of Dovzhenko's true feelings for the Party leader.

Dovzhenko's situation became more precarious after the arrest of Ivan Dubovyi, Shchors' former deputy, in early 1938 and his subsequent execution on 29 July 1938. An important Red Army officer, Dubovyi commanded the First Soviet Ukrainian Division, which he handed over to Shchors in the spring of 1919. After Shchors' death, he again commanded this division. From 1924 he commanded the Kyiv Rifle Corps, then in 1929 became deputy commander of the Ukrainian Military District (under Iona Iakir) and, after a reorganization in 1935, the commander of the Kharkiv Military District.<sup>45</sup> Dubovyi befriended Dovzhenko and became a military consultant for *Shchors* and also a character in the film.

Dubovyi's relationship with Iakir marked him. After the arrest, trial, and hasty execution of Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky (the deputy commissar of defense), of Iakir, and other important military commanders on 11 June 1937, Stalin called for the extermination of "enemies of the people" in the army.<sup>46</sup> Stalin's subordinates suspected that Dubovyi had made unauthorized contacts with Germans and Ukrainian nationalists abroad.<sup>47</sup> Arrested in early 1938,

Dubovyi confessed that he killed Shchors in battle “in order to take his place as commander of the division.”<sup>48</sup>

We can only imagine Dovzhenko’s vulnerability following Dubovyi’s arrest, confession, and execution, especially since the arrest took place in Dovzhenko’s presence at the Kyiv Film Studios.<sup>49</sup> In essence, the NKVD arrested Dovzhenko’s own military advisor in the middle of production and “unmasked” him as the murderer of the film’s title character.

This Kafkaesque turn of events not only complicated the conclusion of the film, but also put Dovzhenko in grave danger. Before Dubovyi’s arrest, the director envisioned Shchors to be dying on the battlefield and passing his command over to Dubovyi. Now, in order to save his own skin, Dovzhenko had to rewrite and to refilm *Shchors*.<sup>50</sup>

Dubovyi now became Dovzhenko’s central problem. Shchors’ deputy could not appear in the film, unless Dovzhenko presented him as “an enemy of the people”; Dovzhenko, however, felt that Dubovyi had been unjustly treated and executed.<sup>51</sup>

Dovzhenko did not want to portray Dubovyi killing Shchors in his film. But if the filmmaker did not want to follow the official interpretation, he had to edit Dubovyi out of the film. Once he excluded Dubovyi, then the cinematic Shchors could live beyond 30 August 1919, the date Shchors died. In a paradoxical manner, the only way that Dovzhenko could deal honestly with Shchors’ death was to deny that it happened.

Although the filmmaker did not have much room to maneuver, he sought to deal honestly with other issues beyond Stalin’s representation on the screen and Dubovyi’s relationship with Shchors. Despite the fiction of the film’s overall interpretation, that nationally conscious Ukrainians constituted the core supporters of the Bolshevik victory in Ukraine, Dovzhenko’s use of Ukrainian folklore ukrainianized the film. Although the film met the guidelines, “national in form, socialist in content,” the Ukrainian songs and dances overshadowed the revolutionary content in this “revolutionary film.”

At the end of the screenplay and the film, Dovzhenko had Shchors observe a parade of future Red Army officers at the military academy he headed. In the screenplay, Shchors asserted before a group of visiting inspector-generals who wanted to send his students into a hopeless battle: “I will not send my school of Red commanders into battle. I will lose a division, but will save my commanders, and I’ll have a division! A corps! An army!”<sup>52</sup> In one of the versions of the film, a narrator’s voice concluded: “If Red commanders exist, then there is a Red Army.” In and of itself, the statement reflected reality. But in the late 1930s, when the security organs arrested and executed tens of thousands of Soviet military leaders, might not this statement be an attack against Stalin?<sup>53</sup> Two years after Dovzhenko released *Shchors*, when German armies swept across the Soviet Union, it was obvious that a Red Army capable of effectively defending the USSR did not exist.

Although Dovzhenko did not have much creative flexibility under Stalin's shadow, his art, personal charisma, and his stubborn persistence allowed him to present his own covert interpretation of Soviet history on the screen. He adhered to the overall Stalinist interpretation, but undermined it by including scenes with double meanings. Dovzhenko succeeded in completing the film, but at the cost of his own physical health and of his own emotional equilibrium.

### *Emotional Breakdown*

By the summer of 1938 Dovzhenko, especially when inebriated, could not disguise his rage against the restrictions Stalin had imposed on him. In a conversation recorded by the Kharkiv Oblast NKVD and relayed to Beria, Dovzhenko expressed his fury against the Soviet authorities, Ukrainians, and the Party. In light of the purges, he claimed that he could not distinguish between the legitimate Soviet authorities and the "enemies of the people," who hid everywhere. He cursed Dubovyi, whose arrest had caused Dovzhenko to reshoot his nearly completed film. He damned Ukrainians, whom he claimed were all "traitors." Further, he asserted that Ukrainians did not possess a native culture because the authorities feared the emergence of an independent Ukrainian culture. The authorities stereotyped the creators of an indigenous Ukrainian culture as "potential enemies." As a result of these prejudices, Ukrainian cultural workers became "martyrs at Golgotha."

Dovzhenko then condemned the Party: "What kind of party is this? Why does it contain so many traitors? All of its leaders are traitors." Dovzhenko then maintained that it was easier for Shchors to get rid of the Germans in 1918 than it was for him to make a film about the Bolshevik hero. "Let them allow me to work!" he cried out.<sup>54</sup> During a meeting of Party members at the Kyiv Film Studio on 19 October 1938, Dovzhenko's colleagues criticized the filmmaker for his lack of self-criticism, his slow pace, his waste of film, and his cost overruns. Dovzhenko snapped and retorted that it was better "to die than to listen to such criticism."<sup>55</sup> Responding hysterically to his critics, he yelled, "I hate you!"<sup>56</sup> Inasmuch as a director no longer had the right to change the screenplay during the actual shooting of the film, Dovzhenko complained that this restricted his "creative possibilities." Upset by these constraints, Dovzhenko threatened to change careers. After regaining his composure, he admitted that directors needed to follow this rule, but he did not have the strength to do so. He then said that he would finish the picture when he could. No one had the right to rush him, he protested. He then abruptly walked out of the meeting.<sup>57</sup>

Not surprisingly, Dovzhenko remarked that life was "very difficult" for him during this period. He often declared that he did not want to live<sup>58</sup> and often threatened suicide, before and after Dubovyi's arrest.<sup>59</sup>

In the course of creating *Shchors*, Dovzhenko had many discussions with leading Party and government officials other than Stalin. They included Panas

Liubchenko (who committed suicide in 1937, after being accused of heading a counterrevolutionary nationalist organization in Ukraine), Stanislav Kosior (executed in 1938), Pavel Postyshev (executed in 1938), Boris Shumiatskii (purged in 1938), Nikolai Yezhov (arrested in 1939 and shot in 1940), Hryhorii Petrov'skyi, and Nikita Khrushchev, who served as the first secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine from 1938 until March 1947.

These meetings at the height of the purges must have heightened Dovzhenko's sense of insecurity and fears for his future. As he read the morning newspapers with their denunciations of those purged, he may have been pleased with the demise of his tormentors. But he also must have come to the realization that if the security organs arrested, tried, and executed his supervisors, then he could not be far behind on the blacklist. Once on a list, always on a list.

#### *Success*

Dovzhenko terminated the filming of *Shchors* in the fall of 1938 and immediately started editing the raw footage. On 4 March 1939, he brought his final version to the Committee of Cinematography in Moscow for approval.<sup>60</sup> When the first official viewing of the film took place, he lay on the sofa in an adjoining room and cried.<sup>61</sup> Semen Dukel'skii, the man who replaced Shumiatskii, saw the film with his assistant, but abruptly left the screening room when it ended, not sparing a moment to discuss the film with Dovzhenko. He immediately took the film "to the higher-ups"; only after they praised Dovzhenko's final version did Dukel'skii admit that he enjoyed the picture.<sup>62</sup>

Two weeks later, on 19 March 1939, delegates to the Eighteenth Congress of the All-Union Communist Party in Moscow saw *Shchors* for the first time.<sup>63</sup> The film officially premiered on 2–3 April 1939 at the Cinema Building in Moscow. The audience, which included Sergei Eisenstein and other famous Soviet directors, responded enthusiastically.<sup>64</sup> On 1 May 1939, *Shchors* premiered in Kyiv and became a popular film throughout the USSR, selling 31 million tickets.<sup>65</sup> Dovzhenko took great pride in his accomplishment and considered it his best film.<sup>66</sup> Stalin agreed.

Dovzhenko's completion of *Shchors* resuscitated Stalin's faith in the filmmaker and brought him many rewards: in the spring of 1939 Dovzhenko became a member of the Union of Soviet Writers; in November he received the title of Honored Artist of the Arts of the Ukrainian SSR; in December he won election to the Kyiv City Council; in the fall of 1940 the All-Union Committee on Cinematography appointed him the artistic director of the Kyiv Film Studios; and, finally, in March 1941 he received the Stalin Prize, First Class category, for his film.<sup>67</sup> But most importantly, the authorities allowed the filmmaker to live and work in Ukraine. Only one prize eluded Dovzhenko—reinstatement in the Communist Party.<sup>68</sup>

*Shchors* became Dovzhenko's political triumph, but at a heavy psychological cost to the great artist.

## NOTES

N.B. The Ukrainian archival citations of *fond/opys/sprava/pages* and the Russian equivalents of *fond/opis'/delo/pages* are rendered in the form 00/00/00/00.

1. Marco Carynnyk, trans. and annotator, "Alexander Dovzhenko's 1939 Autobiography," *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 19(1) Summer 1994: 25–26.
2. Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv-muzei literatury i mystetstva Ukraïny (hereafter TsDA-MLMU), 690/3/7/16–17; Oleksander Dovzhenko, *Tvory v p'iaty tomakh*, vol. 5 (Kyiv, 1966), p. 343.
3. If one is to believe Dovzhenko's diary entry of 10 April 1944, this film was very difficult to produce: "Write down the story of how *Shchors* was filmed from beginning to end: the parts played by Shumiatsky, Panas, and Koshara; the talk with Budyonny at Panas' summer cottage; reading the script at the Ukrainian Politburo; shooting the film; Dubovyi's arrest; X's phone call about the new version of Shchors' death; the trip to Moscow to see Stalin; how I conceived the ending of the film, etc., while filming *Shchors* I came down with a chest ailment; the film in Moscow; the "reception" at Dukelsky's; the reception at Stalin's." Alexander Dovzhenko, *The Poet as Filmmaker: Selected Writings*, ed., trans., and with an introduction by Marco Carynnyk (Cambridge, MA, 1973), p. 106. Dovzhenko, unfortunately, never described all of his experiences in filming *Shchors*.
4. This summary of the film's content is based on the excellent overview provided in Vance Kepley, Jr., *In the Service of the State: The Cinema of Alexander Dovzhenko* (Madison, WI, 1986), p. 122. Kepley devotes chap. 9 of his book (pp. 121–34) to *Shchors*. Dovzhenko's screenplays of *Shchors* appeared in A. Dovzhenko, *Izbrannoe* (Moscow, 1957), pp. 94–160; Oleksander Dovzhenko, *Tvory v tr'okh tomakh*, vol. 1 (Kyiv, 1958), pp. 129–214; Oleksander Dovzhenko, *Tvory v p'iaty tomakh*, vol. 2 (Kyiv, 1964), pp. 101–79; Aleksandr Dovzhenko, *Sobranie sochinenii i chetyrekh tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1966), pp. 180–252; Oleksander Dovzhenko, *Tvory v p'iaty tomakh*, vol. 1 (Kyiv, 1983), pp. 161–233; and Oleksander Dovzhenko, *Kinopovisti, opovidannia* (Kyiv, 1986), pp. 83–159.
5. Kepley, *In the Service of the State*, p. 122.
6. *Kino* [Moscow] 1934 (59); cited in M. V. Kutsenko, *Storinky zhyttia i tvorchosti O. P. Dovzhenka* (Kyiv, 1975), p. 100.
7. "Ukrainskii Chapaev," *Pravda* 5 March 1935: 6.

8. John David Rimberg, *The Motion Picture in the Soviet Union: 1918–1952, A Sociological Analysis* (New York, 1973), p. 202; cited in Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917–1953* (Cambridge, England and New York, 1992), p. 172.
9. Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, pp. 172–76.
10. “Ukrainskii Chapaev,” p. 6.
11. Kutsenko, *Storinky zhyttia*, p. 104.
12. I. L. Hoshuliak, “90-richchia z dnia narodzhennia M. O. Shchorsa,” *Ukrains'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal* 1985 (6): 115–19; cited in Oleksander Fesenko, “Iak tvoryvsia mif pro ‘ukrains'koho Chapaieva,’” *Literaturna Ukraina* 17 August 1989: 8. The most popular interpretation of Shchors appeared in *Bol'shaia sovetskaia ènsiklopediia* (cited hereafter as *BSE*), 2nd ed., vol. 48 (Moscow, 1957), p. 277.
13. *BSE*, 2nd ed., p. 277.
14. *Ibid.*
15. See the quote in Fesenko, “Iak tvoryvsia mif pro ‘ukrains'koho Chapaieva,’” p. 8.
16. “Nikolai Shchors — legenda i real'nost',” *Iskusstvo kino* 1990 (9): 116.
17. Kutsenko, *Storinky zhyttia i tvorchosti O. P. Dovzhenka*, p. 104; and “Narodzhennia fil'mu pro Shchorsa,” *Proletars'ka pravda* 17 April 1936; cited in Kutsenko, *Storinky zhyttia*, p. 119.
18. Kutsenko, *Storinky zhyttia*, p. 106; Fesenko, “Iak tvoryvsia mif,” p. 8.
19. Aleksandr Rutkovskii, “Grad nebesnyi Aleksandra Dovzhenko,” *Zerkalo nedeli* (Kyiv) 9 December 1995: 15.
20. Kutsenko, *Storinky zhyttia*, p. 118.
21. “Narodzhennia fil'mu pro Shchorsa”; cited in Kutsenko, *Storinky zhyttia* p. 119.
22. Fesenko, “Iak tvoryvsia mif,” p. 8. A group of four surviving veterans from the 44th Soviet Ukrainian Division (later renamed the First Soviet Ukrainian Division) in 1918–1920 confirmed that the memoirs collected in the 1930s were “full of lies” and “historically unfounded.” See “Nikolai Shchors—legenda i real'nost',” pp. 109–117. These veterans provided a point-by-point refutation of many of the myths surrounding Shchors, including the “fact” that Shchors met Lenin (p. 110), that he received telegrams from the Soviet leader (p. 112), and that he joined the Bolsheviks in the fall of 1918 (p. 111).
23. The only accounts of this meeting are Dovzhenko's: “Na prieme u tov. Stalina. Beseda s rezhisserom A. Dovzhenko,” *Vecherniaia Moskva* 26 May 1935; and A. P. Dovzhenko, “Uchitel' i drug khudozhnika,”

- Iskusstvo kino* 1937 (10): 15–16. Stalin's Kremlin office appointment book confirms this meeting: "Posetiteli kremlevskogo kabineta I. V. Stalina," *Istoricheskii arkhiv* 1995 (3): 167.
24. Dovzhenko, "Uchitel'," p. 15.
  25. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
  26. *Ibid.*
  27. This passage appeared in the unpublished memoirs of F. Soluianova, cited in Rutkovskii, "Grad nebesnyi," p. 15.
  28. The documents compiled by the Cheka and the NKVD on Dovzhenko were published only recently (unfortunately, not in whole) in Ukraine: "Zakliuchenie po delu No. 112 na Dovzhenko Aleksandra Petrovicha, 25 let" and "Sovershenno sekretno. Spravka," in V'iacheslav Popyk, ed., "Pid sofitamy sekretnykh sluzhb," *Z arkhiviv VUCHK-HPU-NKVD-KHD* 1995 (1/2): 237–39, 241–42; and V. Popyk, "Pid sofitamy VChK-DPU-NKVS-NKDB-KDB," *Dnipro* 1995 (9/10): 21–60.
  29. Dovzhenko, *Tvory v p'iaty tomakh*, vol. 5 (Kyiv, 1966), p. 337.
  30. *Ibid.*
  31. *Za bil'shovyts'kyi fil'm* 1938 (7); cited in Kutsenko, *Storinky zhyttia*, p.130. Also see Aleksandr Dovzhenko, "Ia poterpel bol'shoi uron v zhizni," *Iskusstvo kino* 1990 (9): 124n.
  32. "Alexander Dovzhenko's 1939 Autobiography," p. 26n.
  33. Ivan Koshelivets', *Oleksander Dovzhenko: Sproba tvorchoï biohrafii* (Munich, 1980), p. 220.
  34. "Alexander Dovzhenko's 1939 Autobiography," p. 26n.
  35. The Kyiv theater actor, Mykola Makarenko (February–March 1937), the Moscow theater actor, Arkadii Kisliakov (May–summer 1937), and, finally, the Moscow actor, Ievgenii Samoilov (in the fall of 1937–1938), played Shchors. Lazar Bodyk, *Dzherela velykoho kino: Spohady pro O. P. Dovzhenka* (Kyiv, 1965), pp. 95–124; Aleksei Mishurin, "Na s'émkakh Shchorsa," in *Dovzhenko v vospominaniiah sovremennikov* (Moscow, 1982), pp. 103, 107–108; and O. Mishurin, "Polum'iane sertse," in M. Kovalenko and O. Mishurin, *Syn zacharovanoi Desny* (Kyiv, 1984), pp. 148, 170, 196–98.
  36. Popyk, "Pid sofitamy sekretnykh sluzhb," p. 260.
  37. Kepley, *In the Service of the State*, p. 122.
  38. Rossiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (hereafter RGALI), Moscow, 2081/ 1/ 941/ 2, 4, 5, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16.
  39. RGALI, 2081/1/ 941/2, 4, 5, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16.

40. Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ, 1983), p. 354.
41. I. Rachuk, "Ėsteticheskie vzgliady Aleksandra Dovzhenko," *Baikal* 1962 (1): 115–16.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Oleksander Hryshchenko, *Z berehiv zacharovanoi Desny* (Kyiv, 1964), p. 193.
45. For an outline of Dubovyi's career, see *The Stalinist Terror in the Thirties: Documentation from the Soviet Press*, Borys Lewytzkyj, comp. (Stanford, CA, 1974), pp. 117–18; and Koshelivets', *Oleksander Dovzhenko*, p. 209. For a standard Soviet biography, see N. S. Kheryshev, *Komandarm Dubovoi* (Kyiv, 1986). Kheryshev's biography does not mention Dubovyi's arrest or execution.
46. Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*, revised and expanded edition (New York, 1989), pp. 420–21.
47. Pavel Sudaplatov and Anatoli Sudaplatov, *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness—A Soviet Spymaster* (Boston and New York, 1994), pp. 21–22.
48. N. S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, with an introduction, commentary, and notes by Edward Crankshaw (Boston, 1970), p. 88.
49. Tat'iana Derevianko, the head of the Museum at the Kyiv Film Studios, related this to me during the summer of 1996.
50. Koshelivets', *Oleksander Dovzhenko*, pp. 209–10.
51. Bodyk, *Dzherela velykoho kino*, p. 107. Shortly before his own death in November 1956, Dovzhenko expressed his pleasure that the Party had restored Dubovyi's honor.
52. Dovzhenko, *Tvory v p'iaty tomakh*, vol. 2, p. 178; and Dovzhenko, *Kinopovisti, opovidannia*, p. 149.
53. Leonid Cherevatenko and Anatolii Lemysh, "Dovzhenko v pritsele VChK-OGPU-NKVD-KGB: K stoletiiu so dnia rozhdeniia A. P. Dovzhenko," *Kievskie vedomosti* 3 September 1994: 3. The quote from the narrator comes from this source.
54. TsDA-MLMU, 1196/2/7/1–6; also cited in Popyk, "Pid sofitamy sekretnykh sluzhb," pp. 261–63.
55. TsDA-MLMU, 1196/2/8/1 and 1196/2/4/1–6; also cited in Popyk, "Pid sofitamy sekretnykh sluzhb," pp. 261–63.

56. TsDA-MLMU, 1196/2/4/4; Popyk, "Pid sofitamy sekretnykh sluzhb," pp. 261–63.
57. TsDA-MLMU, 1196/2/4/4–5; Popyk, "Pid sofitamy sekretnykh sluzhb," pp. 261–63.
58. TsDA-MLMU, 1196/2/4/3.
59. Koshelivets', *Oleksander Dovzhenko*, pp. 207–208. See Dovzhenko's April 1937 letter to Vsevolod Vishnevskii, in Dovzhenko's *Tvory v p'iaty tomakh*, vol. 5, pp. 336–39.
60. *Moskovskii bol'shevik* 5 March 1939; cited in Kutsenko, p. 134.
61. Rachuk, "Ėsteticheskie vzgliady Aleksandra Dovzhenko," p. 116.
62. Bodyk, *Dzherela velykoho kino*, p. 151.
63. *Kino* 1939 (14); cited in Kutsenko, *Storinky zhyttia*, p. 135.
64. Kutsenko, *Storinky zhyttia*, p. 135.
65. RGALI, 2409/1/56; cited in Kutsenko, *Storinky zhyttia*, p. 137.
66. "Alexander Dovzhenko's 1939 Autobiography," p. 25.
67. Kutsenko, *Storinky zhyttia*, pp. 133–53.
68. Dovzhenko became a member of the Communist Party of Ukraine in early 1920 under mysterious circumstances. In the summer of 1923, when he studied in Germany, the Party did not renew his membership. I deal with this matter in my manuscript, *Triple Exposure: Alexander Dovzhenko's Ukrainian Visions, Soviet Illusions, and Stalinist Realities*, chaps. 2–3.