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Vitalina Buchatska

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Oleksandr Dovzhenko's Fight for Ukraine

Vitalina Buchatska

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Requirements for Departmental Honors in History

Bridgewater State University

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Dr. Kathryn Evans, Thesis Director
Dr. Leonid Heretz, Committee Member
Dr. Ann Brunjes, Committee Member

1. BIOGRAPHY

The information in this biography is from the book The Life of Oleksandr Dovzhenko by Ivan Semenchuk. The photograph is from the Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine (downloaded on 12/07/2017 from www.tinyurl.com/y8uk4ze9).



Oleksandr Dovzhenko was a Ukrainian Soviet writer, cinematographer, screenwriter, and painter who is considered to be one of the best film directors of Slavic cinematography.

Oleksandr Petrovych Dovzhenko was born in Viunyshche, a part of the town Sosnytsia in Chernihiv oblast, Ukraine, on September 10th, 1894. He was born to a poor family and had thirteen sisters and brothers, who almost all died very young; only Dovzhenko and his sister Polina grew to adulthood. Dovzhenko's parents did not have any formal education; his father,

Petro, was of Ukrainian Cossack¹ descent and worked as a farmer, fisherman, resin worker, and conveyor of goods on Desna², and his mother, Odarka, was a housewife, and had a very nice musical voice and ear known to her family and neighbors.

Dovzhenko's father labored to provide his son with formal education. In school, Dovzhenko was a smart and creative student. Since childhood he had a strong imagination, and confessed that he sometimes confused the events in reality and his dreams. In 1907, he was admitted to the college in the town of Sosnytsia, where he recited his favorite poets, directed plays, sang songs, and mastered the violin. When Dovzhenko was sixteen, he was admitted to the Hlukhiv Pedagogical Institute (now named after him) where he studied hard to try to get a scholarship to cover tuition expenses. He never received the scholarship, but his father longed for his son to continue studying, so he sold a parcel of his land to give him this opportunity. Dovzhenko enjoyed studying, but during his early years, students were prohibited from reading and talking in Ukrainian, so he often remembered how they had to gather secretly to read and discuss the works of the great Ukrainian authors such as Taras Shevchenko, Lesya Ukrainka, and Marko Vovchok (21).

In 1914, the same year that World War I started, Dovzhenko graduated from the Hlukhiv Institute. He could not be accepted into the army because he was diagnosed with a heart disease, so instead, a nineteen-year-old boy became a teacher in the college in Zhytomyr. There he met his first wife, Varvara, who first heard about "freedom," "equality," and "brotherhood" from her husband³ (23). While his wife stayed in Zhytomyr, Dovzhenko desperately longed to study in Kiev, and although due to the health issues it took him longer than planned, he became a teacher

¹ Democratic, self-governing male communities that were located predominantly in Ukraine.

² A river in Ukraine and Russia.

³ Dovzhenko and Varvara lived in a common-law marriage for about four years.

in Kiev the same year. Their long-distance relationships did not last for long. Unbeknownst to Dovzhenko, Varvara had left the country with another man.

Meanwhile, Dovzhenko was focusing on his teaching career. On November 15th, 1918 Dovzhenko and his students organized a protest against the drafting of students into the army. In response to their protest, they drew fire from the militia, and as a result, eight students died and many were wounded. No student revealed the name of the organizer – Dovzhenko – but they all understood what the price of their convictions.

During 1918-1920, Dovzhenko was the member of Borotbists party⁴, which he later confessed to be a mistake. In June 1920, he became the Secretary of State for Education in Kyiv Province and at the same time served as Commissioner of the Taras Shevchenko Ukrainian Drama Theater. In 1921, he accepted the position of USSR Assistant Ambassador for Poland, and in 1922 he became Assistant Ambassador for Berlin. Meanwhile, Dovzhenko found out that his beloved Varvara had moved to Prague with another man and, sick, was fighting between life and death. Dovzhenko visited her in Prague, and learnt that she had been falsely notified of his death, which prompted her to move to Prague. She still loved Dovzhenko, so he forgave her and they officially got married in 1923 and moved to Berlin.

During 1922 and 1923, Dovzhenko studied art and started painting. At the same time, the anti-Soviet campaign became stronger in Berlin, so he had to leave the country. Nevertheless, after his return to Ukraine, Dovzhenko decided to change his profession from a diplomat to an artist, because of his longing for creativity. He painted caricatures, many of which were published in a variety of magazines and books.

⁴ Borotbist from Ukrainian “fighter.” A left-nationalist Ukrainian communist party.

In 1924, Dovzhenko started writing scripts, and the first ones he wrote for children. There was a lack of scripts for children, so he endeavored to create something new. In 1926, a turning point happened in Dovzhenko's life when he moved to Odessa and found himself directing films. There he finally found a vocation that he would endeavor to do for the rest of his life.

Dovzhenko understood that cinematography would be his life's work after he wrote his first script *Vasya-Reformer*, a comedy about a witty and creative student, Vasya, whose life is full of adventures. Dovzhenko loved the genre of comedy and was striving to create a successful one. His other attempts in this genre were *The Strawberry of Love* and *Barber Jean Kovbasyuk*, for which he was criticized by the Head of the Odessa Film Factory, Pavlo Nechesa.

In 1927, a script written by the authors Mike Johansen and Yuriy Tyutyunnyk *Zvenygora* was under review at the film factory where Dovzhenko worked. Although most of the board members voted against the script, Dovzhenko decided to film it. However, he changed the plot and made an entirely new script. The result was rewarding – the film was praised by many critics, and in 1928 one of the most successful Ukrainian actresses, Yulia Solntseva, became interested in the film and its author. There was an immediate connection between Dovzhenko and Solntseva that they could not explain, and Dovzhenko's wife, Varvara, understood that her husband had fallen in love with another woman. Varvara confessed she was not the “friend for life, an inspirational woman” (69) that Dovzhenko needed, but she wanted him to be happy, so she left the city to free Dovzhenko from any obligations. Despite Dovzhenko's attempts to return to his wife, they separated for the last and final time.

Dovzhenko continued creating scripts and movies and in 1928, *Zvenygora*, a movie about the mobilization and construction of economic life in Ukraine, was launched in all theatres in Ukraine and in some exhibits in Prague and the Netherlands. Meanwhile, he started working on,

Arsenal, a film about the uprising of the workers at the factory “Arsenal” against the Ukrainian National Republic. At that time and even nowadays *Arsenal* is considered to be one of the best Ukrainian movies by many critics. For *Arsenal* and all the following movies (*Earth*, *Shchors*, *Chronicle of Flaming Years*, *The Enchanted Desna*, and *Poem of the Sea*) Dovzhenko wrote the scripts himself.

In 1929 Dovzhenko married Solntseva, who became his muse, a friend for life, and a co-director of many of his movies.

In 1932, Dovzhenko shot his first sound film, *Ivan*, a story of a young rural boy who becomes a leading engineer at the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station⁵. The movie was of great success in Europe and was exhibited in the Venice Film Festival. However, in the Soviet Union it was accepted as counter-revolutionary, and Dovzhenko was almost arrested and killed for his convictions which were reflected in the movie; it was immediately banned. Not long after that, the chief of the Committee of Cinematography, Shumyatskiy, informed Dovzhenko that Stalin was visiting their Film Factory. He advised him to write a letter to Stalin asking for help, while at the same time Shumyatskiy himself tried to convince Stalin that Dovzhenko was unfairly accused. Meanwhile, Russian cinematography was in decay, and Stalin was looking for an artist to elevate Russian cinematography and culture. Thus, he granted Dovzhenko an apartment in Moscow and a job at Mosfilm⁶. At the same time, in 1933, Ukraine was destroyed by Holodomor⁷, when Dovzhenko, devastated, had to leave his homeland.

In January of 1939, Dovzhenko finished his movie *Shchors* about the revolutionary Ukrainian workers fighting for their liberation. A protagonist, Mykola Shchors, a commander of

⁵ The largest hydroelectric power station on the Dnieper River located in Zaporizhia, Ukraine.

⁶ One of the oldest and largest film studios in the Russian Federation and Europe.

⁷ Also known as The Great Famine and Famine-Genocide in Ukraine in 1932 and 1933 that killed from 7 to 10 million people.

the Red Army, was renowned for his courage during the First World War and had attained great success in his military career, although he died young at the age of twenty-four. Ivan Duboviy, Shchors' deputy, was helping Dovzhenko with the shooting, but in the process of filmmaking, Duboviy was arrested and then shot. It was a tragedy for Dovzhenko, and he spent four months in the hospital because of a heart attack. In addition, some people insistently hinted that Dovzhenko should make one more protagonist in this movie – Stalin. Although Dovzhenko refused, the film was of a great success, and Dovzhenko received a lot of positive reviews.

During the Second World War, Dovzhenko wrote, “Terrible things are happening in Ukraine. Terrible things. More than half a million of people are destroyed, and how many will die of famine, from shells, bombs, and executions... Investigators from tribunal will seek revenge on Ukrainian people, will seek revenge on all the people. They already have” (qtd. in Semenchuk 149). These thoughts along with others such as “Where is Stalin? [Why does not he deal with this?] Who do I tell? [and ask for help]” (qtd. in Semenchuk 149) Dovzhenko expressed in his *Ukraine in Flames*, the novel written in 1943 but not published until 1962, as it was prohibited by Stalin and Beriya for its truth about the disaster of Ukrainian people and their country. In *Ukraine in Flames*, Dovzhenko created the Kravchyna family as a metaphor for Ukrainian people. Because of the war, the family was scattered all over Europe – many died, and those who were alive could not recover from the disaster. Dovzhenko tried to reveal the truth about Ukraine and its unspoken losses when he stated, “Only that person who was in Ukraine and saw it in fire knows Ukraine, and not according to newspapers or salutes celebrates its victories, sticks paper flags into a dead geographical map” (qtd. in Semenchuk 172). This evident hint about Stalin and his shallow knowledge of the situation in Ukraine outraged the political leader, and Dovzhenko was accused of nationalism and hostility towards the Soviet people.

Many believe that Dovzhenko's *Ukraine in Flames* could have become a masterpiece of world cinematography if only he had been allowed to shoot it. He spent so much time and effort on this novel that after it was prohibited, Dovzhenko became so frustrated and overwhelmed that he could no longer create. Instead, his thoughts were with his people, "honest, silent, and hardworking, who never in their lives infringed on foreign, but suffers and perishes, baffled and bereaved in the Aryan place of execution" (qtd. in Semenchuk 154). He was "spiritually exiled" by many, and became so isolated that it exacerbated his heart problems. Newspapers and journals refused to publish him, and the director of the screenwriting studio advised him to correct the "mistakes" he made in his *Ukraine in Flames* and to make the protagonist Russian and not Ukrainian. The delicate soul of the artist could not accept this, and he understood that he would not be able to "silence [his] 'sin'" and that he would "be erased from the world of living and would not be resurrected until [his] death" (176).

Dovzhenko dreamt of being buried in Ukraine and wrote in his *Diary*, "Before my death, I will ask Stalin to take my heart out of my chest and bury it in my native land in Kyiv somewhere above the Dnipro⁸ on a mountain before burning me in the crematory" (qtd. in Semenchuk 180). However, he died and was buried in a small estate near Moscow in 1956.

During the last years of his life, Dovzhenko was working on the movies *Chronicle of Flaming Years*, *The Enchanted Desna*, and *The Poem of the Sea*, all of which were later finished by his wife, Solntseva. These films, along with Dovzhenko's other movies and writings, made him one of the most influential Slavic artists of the twentieth century. His art is unique because it reflects his personal sufferings, represents the history of the Soviet Union, and depicts the reality of life in Ukraine.

⁸ One of the major rivers of Europe (total length 850 mi) and the longest river of Ukraine (610 mi).

2. ABOUT THE *DIARY*

Oleksandr Dovzhenko's *Diary* contains his memories from 1939 to 1956. He burnt first the three volumes written before 1939 after he found out that his novel *Ukraine in Flames* had been banned by Stalin. The remainder of Dovzhenko's *Diary* was revealed only in the 1960s, several years after the author's death.

Dovzhenko may be the only Ukrainian artist of the twentieth century who, despite all the torment of the Ukrainian cultural elite, managed to achieve worldwide recognition. His movies such as *Arsenal*, *Zvenigora*, and *Earth* were exhibited in the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, France, and Germany, and many artists and critics recognized Dovzhenko as one of the best screenwriters and cinematographers in the world. Charlie Chaplin described Dovzhenko's importance: "Slavic cinematography gave the world one artist, thinker and poet – Oleksandr Dovzhenko" (qtd. in Semenchuk 75).

In his movies and writings, Dovzhenko tried to reveal the truth about the disaster of the Ukrainian people under the rule of the Soviet government. He criticized the officials for the lack of education in history and literature, for the blind worship of Stalin, and for the artificially made famine that destroyed from seven to ten million Ukrainians. Nevertheless, Dovzhenko often disguised these thoughts in his works, as he was always under surveillance. He was forced to reject his inner Petliurivets⁹ warrior, meaning he had to abandon his political views under the influence of Cheka¹⁰.

Although being Ukrainian was essential to Dovzhenko's sense of identity, and he had many grievances against the Stalinist system, his *Diary* illustrates that he remained a believing

⁹ A Ukrainian national leader, writer, journalist, Chairman of the Directorate of Ukraine and Ukrainian National Republic.

¹⁰ The All-Russian Emergency Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage.

Communist and identified with the Soviet Union in addition to Ukraine. During his lifetime and even today, many wonder how Oleksandr Dovzhenko managed to survive under Russia's totalitarian system, while others criticize him for being a traitor; not many know how difficult it was for him to overcome his rebellious spirit and live by the cruel rules for the sake of art. The artist belonged to "the part of the generation who saw their dreams of national independence crushed and, taking the 'national communist' gamble, suppressed their true feelings and decided to work for the conqueror" (Shkandrij 640). He became a confidant of Joseph Stalin, a Soviet political leader, who remained suspicious of Dovzhenko and openly criticized his "nationalism," but this was Dovzhenko's only opportunity to continue working on his movies and texts. Although Dovzhenko was compelled to create anti-historical works, he often resisted doing so, and as a result, he was exiled and his works were banished. However, in his *Diary*, parts of which Dovzhenko had burnt, he managed to express his true beliefs and real truth about the events of the twentieth century Ukraine.

Ukraine in Oleksandr Dovzhenko's *Diary* is a country whose national consciousness is heavily affected by famine and war. Dovzhenko not only witnessed the deaths of many people when Ukraine served as a buffer zone in World War II, but also together with millions of Ukrainians, he overcame man-made famine. The artist was inevitably influenced by these disastrous events and his "psyche and artistic development were at internal division in line with the larger socio-political conflict in Ukraine" (qtd. in Uzwyshyn 409). Compassionate to his country and its people, Dovzhenko strived to recreate the image of Ukraine of that time and call attention to the problem of colonization through his art.

Dovzhenko's *Diary* is proof of the spiritual suffering of the artist who was considered a traitor by his own Ukrainian people for living in Moscow, while at the same time being exiled by

the Russian government because of his “nationalism,” his love of Ukraine and its people. Nevertheless, the artist “managed to survive after being so many times accused of ‘nationalism,’ at a time when people were being destroyed for even smaller signs of deviation” (Nebesio 281). During the Second World War, Dovzhenko understood the terrible reality of Ukraine’s geopolitical situation – it was the buffer zone between Germany and Russia. In April 1942, Dovzhenko writes in his *Diary*, “My miserable world! Show me a place where as much blood was spilled as in Ukraine! There is no such second Ukraine! None” (). The artist was overwhelmed by his personal sufferings caused by the torture of his country and its people, the murderous battles and losses, and he expressed it all through art. Dovzhenko’s groundbreaking novel *Ukraine in Flames* contained all his pain and outrage, and was immediately noticed by the Russian government.

On January 31st, 1944, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held a public gathering about the “Anti-Lenin mistakes and nationalistic perversion in Dovzhenko’s *Ukraine in Flames*” (qtd. in Semenchuk 178). Dovzhenko was present during this meeting and witnessed its verdict: “*Ukraine in Flames* is a program of narrow-minded Ukrainian nationalism, hostile to Leninism, the politics of our Party, and to the interests of the Ukrainian and all Soviet people” (qtd. in Semenchuk 179). Nevertheless, Dovzhenko was not killed as were many of his friends-artists, but there was a life-long harm afflicted to his health and soul. On January 31st, 1945, he wrote in his *Diary*,

Today is the anniversary of my death. On January 31st, 1944, I was brought to the Kremlin. I was cut into pieces there, and the bloodstained parts of my soul were destroyed in disgrace and evil at all gatherings. Every vice, unkind, and revengeful person slandered my name and tread on me. I withstood it for a year and fell. My heart

could not take this unbearable burden of falsehood and evil (qtd. in Semenchuk 177-1788).

Dovzhenko wanted to break free from the rule of Russia and desired for the world to find out about the reality of life in Ukraine in the twentieth century. Therefore, in 1946 he sent his movie *The Fight for Our Soviet Ukraine* to the United States hoping people would find out about the lives of Ukrainians during World War II. Unfortunately, the movie was never shown, crushing Dovzhenko's dreams of making the history of Ukraine known to the world. As Oksana Pakhlyovska, a modern Ukrainian writer, protests, "Ukrainian culture is not objectified [expressed in a way that can be experienced by others], it has no exit to the world, it is incommunicado and for that reason also absent from the world context" (qtd. in Pavlyshyn 44). Through this project, I would like to translate Oleksandr Dovzhenko's *Diary* for English-speaking societies. This translation may promote not only an increased awareness of this important artist but also, potentially, the development of additional translations of Ukrainian texts into English. Another significant aspect of this project is its portrayal of Ukraine's tragedy and problem of Russian colonization, which is still ongoing today.

3. TRANSLATIONS OF THE *DIARY*

15/III [19]42

... Kosaryk's story about a dear old woman who was in charge of a military hospital.

– Every morning I come into a barn and turn around the dead ones, checking if there are any acquaintances of mine.

– Are you not afraid?

– No. Formerly, dead people were terrifying. Nowadays the dead ones are not terrifying.

Nowadays the live ones are. Even the war is not what it used to be... Before tsars were fighting for land, and now the fight is not for land, but for the class consciousness. That's why it is so cruel.

...What will happen with our people? Will they survive this terrible war or die from Germans, from illnesses, lice, famine, cruelty and tortures, and will our people come and will we be executed and exiled for cooperation? Will our sacrifices be wasted?...

2/VII [19]42

“Ukraine is fighting” – I am reading in newspapers. Ukraine has upset the Germans. There is neither sowing, nor plowing. Our wide fields are empty. Hitler will not have any bread, no matter how he oppresses people.

[Ukraine is] Fighting. Stating I do not want and I will not sow. ... Although they know perfectly well that there is no sowing and no plowing, because there is no one and nothing to plow, because there is nothing to sow. There is neither equipment, nor people. People are fighting the wars, many are dead, starved to death by famine, they are collected from the cities and villages straight from the streets, young women and girls are exported to Germany into

brothels, farmhands, and slavery for roadworks, digging ditches, trenches, building fortresses against us near Kyiv, Warsaw, Lviv, thousands of them dying and everyone will die, because there will be no way home for them. And if there is, then it won't be a happy and peaceful return with the ability to work, but it will be an exile and dishonor for life in Siberia and Kazakhstan as "German traitors," "fascist servants," "homeland traitors." From Siberia and Kazakhstan fugitives will return as masters to Ukraine, those who in the beginning of the war escaped with their cases on trucks, trains, saving their lives on the British border. What torture! My people fell into an abyss of woe and how much grief is there for them in the future! They will be divided again. Disunited, as if never united, dispersed, as a flock of cranes during the storm, and blamed for the sun rising and setting from the wrong side.

27/VII [19]45

Horskiy¹¹ was telling me about his conversation with Bolshakov¹². As a result, Ukraine became the topic of conversation again... I recollected all the taunting for all those long years on my-but-not-mine-land¹³, all the stupidity and evil, and imagined what would be waiting for me there. And I do not want to go to Ukraine. I would not have any life there. So, what do I do, how do I act, and how do I live?

My dear fellow Stalin, even if you were god, I would never believe you that I am a nationalist who should be dishonored and confined. When there is no hatred, no contempt, and no malevolence, not even to one nation in the world, nor to its fate, nor happiness, nor dignity, nor welfare, – how can love of one's own nation considered to be nationalism? Is nationalism a

¹¹ A Ukrainian officer and public figure, Sergeant Major of the Ukrainian National Republic, and a writer.

¹² A Soviet officer who belonged to Main Intelligence Directorate of the Russian Federation.

¹³ Reference to a line in Taras Shevchenko, the most significant Ukrainian writer of the 19th cen.

disobedience to the foolishness of officials and cold-blooded statesmen, or an artist's inability to hold back the tears when his people are hurt?

Why did you make my life a torture? Why did you deprive me of this joy? Why did you slander my name? But I forgive you. While you are being so small, I forgive you your small-mindedness and evil, because you are also imperfect, no matter how many people pray to you. There is God. But there is a name to him – a coincidence.

3/VIII [19]45

With great pleasure, I read the Berlin Memorandum. Now I do believe that the hideous nest of European criminals – Germany – is tamed and disarmed. Thank God. A new era has begun in the lives of Europe and in our lives. Great prospects are being opened before our youth. People are heroes and winners in such a total war! Oh, dear destiny, send them strength to recover their losses, give birth to children, and grow up in the victory of the summits they deserve. We have become a world nation, and our culture must become a world culture. No matter what, neither a drop of our sweat nor blood can be wasted.

Today on a stadium I was watching a rehearsal and admiring the youth, their calisthenics, muscles, movements. So much beauty, happiness, and strength. So much good taste and talent.

Truth to be told, Ukrainians were in the last place. Wretched clothing, indecisive composition, without invention, taste, and without national expressiveness, which other fraternal groups were so proud of – Kazakhs, Georgians, Armenians, Uzbeks.

This is the curse of our nation. Enough!

I am happy for all the good people of the [Soviet] Union.

5/VII [19]45

I don't want to be tormented! I don't want to mourn over my exile from Ukraine. I do not want to bury myself in a foreign land. Why do the spiritual worthlessness of the Ukrainian government and the CC¹⁴ party have to knock on my head with coffin nails? Why do I torture, mourn myself, why do I moan because of the separation with my people? Why does the crooked soul of sly Khrushchev¹⁵ dry my soul and torment it with the anger of insult and resentment?

I do not belong to Khrushchev. I am not his slave. And I belong not only to Ukraine. I belong to humankind, and as an artist I serve it, and not to conjectural viceroys of my Ukraine and their sycophants and drunken henchmen.

My art is universal. I will continue creating as long as I have strength and talent. I will and I want to live by kindness and love of humanity, of the most valuable and greatest, that created life, – to the human, to Lenin. And I do not care where I die. When today I cannot find the tomb of my tortured father, – I do not care.

14/VII [19]45

Yesterday on the streets of Moscow I met an artist Aksenov, who has been reading my short story "On Barbed Wire" for two years on his tours all the time with, as he says, tremendous success, which was proved by the most varied audiences. In Dnipropetrovsk and somewhere near Kryvorizhya he was prohibited from reading, based on a ban of my art. In order not to cancel his program and his most famous performance, he was allowed to read my short story either without using my last name or by replacing it with the pseudonym, for example, Hryhorenko or Ivanov,

¹⁴ Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was the highest body of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) that directed all Party and government activities.

¹⁵ A leader of the Ukrainian Communist party from 1938 to 1949, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964, and Premier from 1958 to 1964.

which he did more than once, as he admitted. I was listening to him and could not believe my ears. Then I thought: why am I surprised? Isn't that lie about me which Khrushchev created with his people and Bolshakov with his, in front of Stalin, bigger than all these provincial tricks? The regional government also want to live. They execute the telegraph orders of the capitals and that is all. At least they allow this artist to create pseudonyms. Beautiful. I should find an artist and ask about the details of my spiritual life on Ukrainian lands.

15/VIII [19]45

The end of the World War. People will start licking their wounds and make monuments as a tribute to commanders and their horses. Peace...

Humankind has ended its tragedy in blood and corpse stench by inventing an atomic bomb. The atom is split, a sin against the entire world is committed. The bomb is dropped. The gigantic state structure of divine Japanese empire of cannibals has fallen.

What is the atom bomb? – thousands of people are asking. How much misfortune will it bring? How much disaster will it cause? A powerful tool of communist energy is in the hands of the capitalists, who are led by a small shopkeeper. But what if we get this bomb? And we definitely will. Then whose atoms will be stronger? What if fascist bandits and underground maniacs-cannibals, who are in possession of enormous funds, and have stolen from Truman's young men or secretly bought half a dozen bombs and would destroy Moscow? What terrible possibilities of individual acts of terror that invention will bring. Deadly planes have disappeared, but the sky has not cleared. Somewhere far away in endless blue sky there seems to be a bipedal criminal, a harbinger of the final act of humankind's tragedy. Please, Lord, let me be wrong. Let it not be so.

3/IX [19]45

...So – peace. About what danger is the American shopkeeper Truman talking today, showing the atom bomb out of his pocket, – who knows? What is he afraid of? People are unharmed. Bomb is in the pocket. A lot of money. Is he not afraid of us having a bomb which will be bigger and more ferocious, and then we, humans, will live merrily, like on a feast before the last worldwide plague?

Truman's speech today was also historical: in one hand god, in another hand an atomic bomb, and a threat directed at an obvious on his lips.

The World War has ended.

Forty million of my Soviet brothers and sisters died in tortures. My eighty-year-old father died starving and I, gravely wounded by my own people, am barely staying alive.

What do I want? What do I need? Work. I want to work. And a little bit of happiness. I will have work, but I won't have any happiness. I cannot be happy when people around me are miserable. I am ashamed, so ashamed as if it were my fault that people are needy, poorly-dressed, homeless, and exhausted. It's as if I had deceived them, lied to them, and sucked out their lives, as if I had taken their holidays, peace, kind-heartedness, and made them unhappy, by making bad stupid people with cold frail souls their chiefs. Are they heroes or no? They are. Even more – twice, hundred times heroes and passion bearers. They engulfed Germany with their corpses and flooded it with their blood.

By my nature, I cannot be satisfied. I am together with the unhappy, poor, and homeless. I have always been noticing this. Apparently, this comes from my restless imagination and some old everyday trauma. Maybe it's because I am Ukrainian, because all my life terrible altars are

burning on my land, where inextinguishable souls die, because nowhere in the world people die like this and wander, sighing in vain in their futile hopes.

The World War was ended with an atomic bomb.

I want to work. And I want to believe till my death, that humanity won't need any tanks, guns, and all this stupid atavistic garbage, all those monuments dedicated to great murderers and their horses, and Hottentot honors to snipers, marshals and mad partisans who ruined ten times more of their own people than Germans. That there will be peace. And there will be no need for heroes-martyrs...

16/X [19]45

*Chronicle of Flaming Years*¹⁶ scares the head office. After reading it, Bolshakov avoided the conversation. Polikarpov, after reading it, accepted, but did not convey his thoughts, stating that it is difficult to comprehend; Kalatazov is already afraid of it, although before he had pretended to admire it. Let it be so. Better send it to Stalin. I will send it and ask him to send me a sign, because I cannot live like this. This is not life. One can lose not only talent, but also mind and desire to live in this state of paranoia, overinsurance (what an ugly cursed word!) and humiliation.

Neither wind, nor a wave is coming from Ukraine. I am dead.

5/XI [19]45

... I will die in Moscow, without seeing Ukraine. Before my death, I will ask Stalin to take my heart out of my chest and bury it into my native land in Kyiv somewhere above the

¹⁶ A drama written by Dovzhenko and later filmed by his wife, Yuliya Solntseva, in 1961.

Dnipro on a mountain before burning me in the crematory. Destiny, send happiness to people on a ruined, bloodstained land!

Disappear, hatred! Vanish, squalor!...

6/X [19]45

How sorry I am that I have the flu. How I wish to walk around the center of the capital among people and feel this mood of a solemn great holiday. To be alive again, to be young.

For the last two years of ostracism my soul has become so poor and empty. How terrible it is to live among your own people who must look at me as if I were dead or an enemy of the people. How difficult it is to be alone, when you want to be around people, share your thoughts, experience, and knowledge with them... I wish my great Soviet people happiness and glory as well. Because its happiness is like happiness! And my life is to serve it. And for myself I wish five films.

9/XI [19]45

*The Golden Gates*¹⁷

III

How, after escaping the captivity, I fell into partisans' hands.

How they treated me, how they interrogated me.

How they wanted to kill me, because they had to leave the swamp, but I begged them.

They suspected me of being a spy.

The whole week on a swamp day and night. Difficulties.

¹⁷ The unfinished project of Dovzhenko that was later filmed by his wife, Yuliya Solntseva, in 1969.

The partisan land. How easy it is to become guilty.

They accept me.

They are reading the letter of D-ko.

Punishment of the treacherous women. Write it with sour humor and evil. That's all.

A note. This exact scene, that I have just absolutely accurately and truly described, as a witness, I have recollected two times. The second time it appeared to be not that true, but instead more artistic. Elevated truth is dearer than the ordinary one. And beauty. As I started writing this to you, it means that I should also think about beauty as a character of my story. Such a beauty, as I say, is greater than truth, because it consists of both, verity and being the only teacher of life, so by this note I have to describe you exactly my second recollection of the same story. (Praying about the bullet).

The meeting with nationalistic bandits.

Bandera's plague: Veremchuk in the woods.

- Get out. No. We are throwing bombs. Please. Threw the bombs. Veremchuk recollects how difficult it is to kill a person. Veremchuk and a nationalistic viper.

14/XI 1945

The Golden Gates

III

One of the main lines of the books is Kravchyna's daughter, his favorite child, Mariia. He is looking everywhere for her. She is in captivity.

He is asking everyone about her. He is fighting with the soldiers and officers...

Show him meeting her. She has been raped. She is crying. She is cursing her life. She wants to die. He is begging her to live.

- They humiliated my human dignity.
- My dear, the whole war is humiliation of dignity.
- I am disgusting and dirty.
- You are as beautiful as this broken church. As this ruin. She is ugly and beautiful at the

same time.

- I am mutilated.
- The whole country is mutilated. How are you better than it?
- No one has compassion for me.
- Not compassion has brought us here, but wrath and hatred.
- Who will take me now?
- If no one takes you, it is only because there is no one to take. You should be glad that

ground has not taken you. It has taken in millions...

25/X [19]45

To the chief and chairman of cinematography, Ivan Bolshakov.

Using the chance of preparing for the cinema *Life in Blossom* I respectfully inform you that starting this day I will not be receiving my salary any more. I am asking you not to perceive this action as something that can irritate you or anything like that. I am doing this not to as a demonstration or out of disobedience. On the contrary, I want to particularly highlight my loyalty in regard to my salary. However, I cannot but think about the quality of the movie I have started shooting. Until now I have considered myself one of the best directors in cinematography. I got

so used to this thought that it, apparently, helped me to hold onto high moral level in production. Current salary of the third level twice a month oppresses my consciousness and brings sorrow and disbelief in my abilities. That is why, in order to save my soul from unnecessary and harmful allusions to my artistic inferiority, I ask to respect my request so I can easily bestow myself to my dreams and will not infringe upon the vision of my dignity. When I finish my movie, please, determine another way of payment for my work according to its quality.

Sincerely,

Laureate and so on Ol. Dovzhenko

26/X [19]45

... Through *the Gates* and especially through the third part there will be a passing thought: "Backward Europe. Advanced Asia."

So, allegedly we are not backward Europe, but advanced Asia.

Europe has a burning desire to forget about our victims.

They want to forget, not to notice us. Because they do not like us organically, they want us not to be present in their consciousness. They displace us into their subconscious. Only the politicians do not forget about our existence, threatening *momento mori*, and carefully guarding the old European world.

The old world is a f r a i d of us.

9/XII [19]45

We are the only country in the world of socialism where the word "intellectual" sounded (formerly) like a derogatory word. There was a notion of the "rotten intellectual." However, an

intellectual was never rotten. On the contrary, he was ardent, pure, progressive. It was not the intellectuals who were rotten, but petty bourgeois philistinism. Despite all the high government positions it occupies, it is still rotten and unbearably foul currently,

Today intellectuals have “won” an honor to be in a third place after workers and villagers. A very revealing distribution. I tell myself: human, remember – your ultimate goal – is to take the third place, the highest place, the most honorable, and the most progressive.

Love this word, let it be your symbol – human-intellectual, because there cannot be happiness in a country where there is no you, where you are abandoned, third-ranked, fake, or bogus, no matter what elevated words were written by the hand of such intellectuals as Marx, Engels, and Lenin on Tablets of Stone.

28/XII [19]45

One has to have iron nerves, a soul of stone, and a slave’s heart in order to bear what I did today. Today I had a meeting in my home: me, S., A. and S. We were working on a plan and list of corrections for my script *Life in Bloom* in accordance to N’s requirements. I have no strength to write what kind of meeting it was. A live picture worthy to have been written by Gogol, Shchedrin, Swift. And this was a live documentary à la *Satiricon* by Crocodiles. The most terrible thing is that S., S., and A (who by the way was silent the whole time) are all cultivated and smart people and all know that they create absurdity and cannot help but do so. They do not have their own freedom, thoughts, taste, dignity, and they’re not supposed to. How can we talk about art like that?

The meeting could not help but affect me. I was in a semi-shock. It was difficult and lasted for a long time. I am scared. Am I not an art worker? Am I an invalid? Am I on the eve of

death or poor wretched mutilation that no one needs? Am I the odd one out? In this wolfish reign of cinema-monsters?

1/1 [19]46

All of my writings contain scenes of farewell. Men bid farewell to their wives, sons – to their parents. Farewell and cry or, having waved their hand, suppress sobbing, looking around at their home as if for the last time. There is, one should think, something deeply national in this artistic motif. Something is stipulated by the historical past of the people. Farewell songs... Separation is our step-mother. It settled in our home long ago, and, apparently, no one could ever expel, smother, or steal it.

The main motif of our folk songs is sorrow. The motif of separation.

I am writing, separated from my people, my mother, my everything, my father's grave, with everything-everything that I loved in this world more than ever, which I served, in which I rejoiced.

As if I prophesied the misfortune in my works. Goodbye, Ukraine. Goodbye, my native dear motherland. I will die soon. When dying, I will ask to cut my heart out of my chest and at least bring it and bury somewhere in your bosom, under your sky. Take it. It prayed to you all the time, but without cursing any foreign lands.

16/II [19]46

I am writing a book. I will send it to you in three years. If I do not finish it, if I lose everything because of one mistake of my heart and die here because of sorrow in heavy solitude,

I ask you for only one thing – let one take my heart from my chest and bury it on my bloodstained native land, in Ukraine, on a Ukrainian land.

Can love of one's homeland be excessive? No. There is no such love. And mine was not like that, although I died because of it.

The only purpose of my difficult life was to glorify the Soviet people through art, – a purpose sent to me by destiny and mother and father.

There was no place for me on a victorious banquet of the people. I was exiled from my homeland by the big people, who are being small in their bigness.

Lord, help me.

12/IV [19]46

I saw a dream.

Golden rye in the field, wherever the eyes look. And the sky so blue and so colorful which never ever happens in the world. And when it does happen, and when it seems to be, then only in extraordinary times. There was the sky and steppe of Ukraine.

And in the foreground amidst the rye, three young beautiful women were standing with sickles. They were standing, wearing clothes that are no longer worn.

And they were crying. Silently.

Sky, rye, girls' beauty, sun, and the burning tears of the three unrealized women.

And there was not even a cry. There was unspeakable silent yearning and sorrow. Tears were not rolling down. They froze in the eyes.

Where are you?

29/II [19]47

Blessed be this day!

Today happiness popped into my window.

I have invented the victory of warm over cold, life over death. After Lenin's death in Spring: inundation, icefall, inundation, flowers blooming, roots growing, inundation, views of gardens in blossom, incredible celebrations in the sky, spring clouds, nice streams of blossoms, migrating birds in the sky.

The anthem of life,

Music,

And Michurin¹⁸ conducts it all, inspired and happy.

Joy is blooming in the artist's soul. His own youth and love passes along the recollection of spring.

And certainly the first spring anthem. Let it merge with music in the heart...

25/XI [19]48

// He was not a person of art. Everything about him: pace, manners, boring silly face and the same boring voice, – everything seemed to be contradicting his position.

When you talked to him for ten minutes, you started feeling that you were becoming stupid.

He looked like a huge piano for some reason with only three keys playing. Others were tapping commands.

¹⁸ The main character of Dovzhenko's movie *Michurin*, a biologist and a breeder who produced new types of crop plants.

Any minute of his life till the end was ousted by the following minute. There is no experience, no manners, no opportunity of ordinary deduction. //

30/X [19]49

Today there is a holiday in Ukraine... The reunion of the lands. Dreams of long centuries of my folk, mine and my youth came true.

All the working people are celebrating. Only I, as if cursed by everyone, and by everyone forgotten and hated by some, alone, it seems to be, in this whole world, am sitting and crying in solitude.

What infernal punishment was invented for me!

A cold, long, and silent death. As if I did not exist. As though I neither lived, nor worked, nor created anything. And did not love my native land and [as if] an exiled pardoned dog [I] lived, carrying a broken ill heart.

Everything hurts inside of me. As if there is no spot alive. Nothing makes me happy. I am buried in the worst way, and no one needs me... Who cursed me? Father? Mother? Neighbors? Enemies? For what? For my love and that dream, which came true and everyone is celebrating today in Ukraine.

Oh, my native land, my mother, and my sorrow. At least accept me dead.

It is so difficult to live for me.

(Only three days are left till the end of my script. Will I be able to withstand? Everything ripped inside of me hurts)...

13/IX [19]52

To write a whole plot line about boys' "immoral" treatment of girls. For ten pregnant women in a maternity house eight bastards. To learn the most interesting cases, stories, dramas.

To oppose them a nice married couple in love, happiness, children.

We have many more girls than boys. And girls are in woe. It is a terrible general misfortune.

To dedicate a whole separate chapter and a lot of attention to girls. There is so much to be said about them.

To recollect a girl who does not get married, because only unattractive men ask her to get married.

A lot of beautiful girls and boys caught my eye here.

The Poet of People

At a large meeting, a plenum session, a poet R¹⁹. was scolded.

Young authoritative people who were scolding and dishonoring him believed it was their sacred duty and a career exploit to scold and dishonor the old national poet. The poet was not forgiven anything, not a single wordly mistake. The drama of his life that spoiled it all happened at the times when the authorities were either walking without pants or pooping into diapers, [this] drama was in a particularly menacing and passionate way recollected as an unforgivable, unforgettable, and vile offense of the poet who deserves eternal punishment, contempt, and revenge. So that not even his party affiliation, not his talent, not one third of a century of his

¹⁹ Probably Maksym Rylskiy, a Soviet Ukrainian poet, translator, linguist, and a public figure.

artistic work, not gray hair, not an enormous work for people, for party, for communism will shield neither his shame, nor crime, and neither their vigilance, nor intransigence.

Even the unfathomable spiritual kindness of a poet was deemed to be unprincipled behavior and a disguise.

At this very time, the poet was sitting one floor below in the buffet and silently drinking something alcoholic. He was in everything like his people.

- Poet! Hurry up upstairs! There is a grandiose speech about you. N. himself is criticizing you. Quickly!

The poet sat a little more, leaning above the glass. What he was thinking about is unknown. Then he went upstairs upon hearing the mandatory applause.

The poet went upstairs... Upstairs in a respectful surrounding of all those, who needed to be, was a powerful formidable preacher himself.

“His eyes sparkle. He has a terrible appearance. His movements are fast. He is beautiful. He looks entirely as god’s thunderstorm” [translated from Russian].

Coming up to “god’s thunderstorm”, the poet politely bowed and while shaking his hand said, in order for the “thunderstorm” not to think he didn’t hear it, said:

- My congratulations! The speech was epoch-making. And so convincing in its form and content. I agree with every word.
- What do you think, is it not true? One should be candid in such cases, despite... – said the “thunderstorm”.
- I absolutely agree. I did not even expect such a thing from you. I am fascinated.
- Do not show off that much, – the speaker sternly frowned and a menacing shine appeared in his eyes. – You should cry and not make miserable attempts to joke.

– I am so thankful for your gracious advice. Indeed, I'd better go home and cry, – said the poet. Stay healthy and happy. I wish you all the best. Only two words as a farewell: you have come and will leave, while I stay...

The poet turned around and slowly went downstairs. His back was bent because of the heavy burden, his head grey, as if all the fire had burnt in it and only the ashes were left. At night at home he made a beautiful and pure-as-a-stream poem for his and other people about communism overcoming and prevailing in the whole world, despite all the dark powers who stand in its victorious way, and there will be brotherhood, love, and compassion in the world.

The most powerful machine of the epoch – the earth mover – has an absolutely unoriginal and ineffective appearance. With the help of this machine we will transform the Earth. All things that were dreamed of in fairytales or dreams can become the reality of our days. This is what the dredger is. And nothing showy. This is not a machine, this is a whole image.

21/X [19]52

When I am lucky enough to write a script in good health and if I do not lose my ability to work, I will create my movie in the Kyiv studio. I am coming back to Ukraine and will create among my people. I cannot write any more without them.

No matter how difficult it would be. No matter how I will suffer in Kyiv, I must, gather all the strength and not pay attention to those people who hate me, but to create for my people and pray to my people, while striving for the greater good – to build communism and live for the sake of the picture of great construction on Dnipro and in the steppes of Ukraine.

24/X [19]52

I am returning from the pharmacy. On my way to the Administration of Dniprobud²⁰ there are two young women. Simple workers. One of them has a baby, wrapped up in a white bedsheet. She is swinging the baby in her hands and is rhythmically swinging herself, happily smiling to her baby. And I, passing by in fifteen steps and seeing them only for 5 seconds, become so happy.

Then on a road a dump truck stopped. Another young working woman with a pure friendly face nodded to a driver. He stopped a car. She sits into a cabin, smiling at a driver – apparently, her friend – and I have tears of joy in my eyes. Why?

To Life. To its simple, allegedly ordinary phenomena of beauty, humanity, and tenderness...

25/IX [19]54

Today for some reason I recalled Charlie Chaplin's performance in press or in his speech according to Andriy Malyshko.

Chaplin stated that up till now the Slavdom has given to the world in cinematography only one artist – thinker and poet. He named me, after which, obviously, the Ukrainian part of the Soviet delegation ill at ease lowered their eyes, not knowing how to react...

23/X [19]54

²⁰ One of the largest construction companies of the Soviet Union, which specialized in industrial construction and construction of hydroelectric power stations.

Different... Yes! I came in to Petro Ivanovych's office. How many years since I have seen him! A cultivated person, plenty of charm. We have things reminisce about. In a word – a meeting of almost close friends. Elevated conversations, politically directed towards the summits of communism. Petro Ivanovych has advanced, greatly advanced! Here is how he has risen! And of course, the experience of a managerial position, appearance, voice, smile, and something elevated and nice, leader-like on his face...

But here is a call from the secretary. A short conversation. Petro Ivanovych has to see someone. Some subordinate will come in now. How do I know this? I see: Petro Ivanovych, imperceptibly to himself and me, because of a habit, has become a different person... A visitor comes in... A conversation between a visitor and a strict stiff management is short. Gloomy management, heavy callousness and insensitivity of this nicest Petro Ivanovych. Talking some sense into the visitor, apparently a smart and miserable person.

He leaves, depressed, with a stern look directed at him.

The chair turns towards me and in front of me there is again the lyrical admirer of jokes, a little bit a skeptic, etc., etc., etc.

Nice Petro Ivanovych:

– Oh yes! So I have just come back home...

I think: God, where is this artistry coming from? Oh, an empty vessel... You are untouchable, impervious, and streamlined. You are omnipotent. How old are you? No one can count. You are as old as this world... Are you a stain of capitalism? Or were you such a son of a bitch during feudalism? And will you remain so in the time of communism? Oh, you will, you beast!

26/X [19]54

... Do not even say there is no conflict. There is a conflict. Yesterday in the evening I was sitting with A. for a long time. We talked about different topics and did not notice how two hours flew by. As always, I liked this person. That is why I was satisfied with my conversation with him.

– Tell me, what could you freely and let's say with impunity not do in Kakhovka for all these four years? [obscure in original]

– What do you mean? – A. raised his mighty head and barely squinted his eyes. He, apparently, was tired.

– I mean, could you not pave the streets, not plant trees, and not build the House of Culture?..

– Oh my God! – complicated intonations of amazement sounded in A.'s voice because of the naivety of my question, laughter, and bitterness.

– I am not supposed to do any of this. Are these all my crimes? Buildings, theater, asphalt, landscaping, architecture, everything that attracts you here, that pleases human eyes, that gives a feeling of a new well-maintained city, – is a continuous reproach to me. Everything presents to me, “What have you done here? Who are you? A hydropower engineer or an architect?”

A. started telling me the whole story of the creation of the town – this is striking.

This is the material on which to base a play, a novel, about the birth of the town which townfolk already like and are proud of, and for which the builder gets reproaches from high-ranking swine.

– What have you built here? Who gave you permission? Have you seen in K...? How does Ivanov-Petrov-Baranov work there? He built simple barracks, triple bunk beds for one hundred-one hundred and twenty-five people in one barrack and that is all! And they're all working! And

what did you think? That they're not working? They're working! Here you go. And you, here and there two-storied bathhouses and brick two-storied apartments and asphalt... this is what you waste money on?... And so on and so forth, extremely wild. And who do you think said so? The deputy minister.

I was stupefied.

– And how did you hold on? – A. brooded over it. – The Ukrainian government supported me. Yes, yes, they all supported me, and the Ukrainian Central Committee. Here the understanding of things is completely different...

And, actually, that's all...

According to current inhabitants of Nova Kakhovka, they are very proud of their House of Culture that was built in 1953 and remains the only House of Culture in their town.

In 2012, the townsfolk built a monument of Oleksandr Dovzhenko.

7/X [19]56

Colonel K. was telling me a real-life story about his friend. The plot is worthy of Shakespeare. During his flight the best commander of the unit died. In front of his fighting comrades he kills one by one three infantry fighting vehicles, goes ramming, hits the fourth car, and burns himself, falling like a fireball into enemy territory. His memory was honored with solemn words. He was posthumously awarded the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union...

The World War ended. It turned out that he fell into enemy's land alive, half-burnt, broken. He was cured. And...at home he finds out: he was deprived of the title of Hero and so on and so forth.

- Comrades, why?
- What do you mean why? You were ordered to be awarded the title of the Hero...
- Yes!
- Posthumously. And you are alive.
- So what? Did my exploit become less important because of it?
- The problem is not in the exploit. There was an order – posthumously. And if you are alive, it means you do not correspond with the form of the order. So...
- What – so?
- So you are no Hero. In order to be a Hero we have to introduce everything from the very beginning, but what are the grounds? Who can testify to your deeds?
- This one and that one.
- But they are all dead...
- So what does it mean, how can it be?
- And so it means that you are alive. Could you, being captured, shoot yourself?
- Hold on... What did you say?
- If you are a hero, how could you surrender yourself into captivity?
- I did not surrender. I fell together with a plane and by a miracle remained alive after being on fire.
- Yes. But how can you get the proof that it was you who was on fire and your hands could not hold a gun?

Colonel K. was telling me this and I listened to him and was horrified. This was one of the most terrible stories of my era...

23/IX [19]45

Blessed be my day! I am getting older. Today I had a dream that there is god in this world. He summoned me and ordered the angels to out-burn from my soul and cut out with fiery swords all grief and sorrow of oppression, fear for my Motherland, my family and wife, for me, and for everything that I love. And angels ripped off my bloody skin and threw it into the fire to make me pure. Then by holy will they cut out my talent and gave me a new one. And I became numb, forgetting all the words, letters, and their meanings.

– I relieve you from the burden of the Word, oh my person, – he said to me. – I did not give it to you. You laid hold of it as a child would of fire or a glass of poison. It is a lie nowadays on Earth. Your talent was my mistake, although I am god. Henceforth I release you from the chains forged in letters. Choose another talent. I do not prompt anything. You shall not be mistaken in your choice, otherwise you will be unhappy.

“Give me Music, oh dear god.”

“Take it.”

And I became a composer. Everything that I knew, felt, and saw with my spiritual sight, – everything became sounds. And I became free. I dissolved into millions of sounds in the greatest transcendental sphere and created for people whom I loved more than anything in the world, truth, all of it, without fear, false, slick, sweet and vile embellishments, without servility, stupidity, or connivance in the stupidity of old ignoramuses and cold-blooded ambitious men, immeasurably dreadful and insatiable, brutal disbelievers and haters of the human being.

What music did I create? Why has this blessed sound spread all over the world? How did it exhilarate and conquer all human souls? What was its meaning, its strength?

Dovzhenko did not finish his Diary with this entry. The reason it was chosen to be the last one here is so that readers can reflect on what they think of Oleksandr Dovzhenko and his art.

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