Taming the Dnipro Rapids:

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Abstract

During the twentieth century, writers, artists, planners, and engineers dramatically re-imagined and re-drew the Dnieper River. This dissertation examines the renegotiation of Soviet conceptions of the natural environment and national geography in an era of large-scale nature transformation and hydro-engineering. The construction of the Dnipro Hydropower Station in 1927-1932 made the Dnieper modern. Twenty years later, the symbolic significance of agricultural fertility made the Kakhovka Hydropower Station both a modern and a nationally-oriented project for Soviet Ukraine. However, its enormous reservoir submerged the fertile Dnieper floodplain and forced the local population from their homes and private gardens. The ecological impact of the reservoir further threatened the idea of an agricultural paradise in southern Ukraine. My cultural approach to environmental history allowed me to write the cultural intelligentsia into the narrative of Soviet environmentalism. The existing narrative largely highlights the scientific intelligentsia while marginalizing cultural voices, especially before the 1970s. Embracing pastoral nature as well as pristine nature, figures such as Oleksandr Dovzhenko and Oles’ Honchar valued nature in a broader sense than the scientific intelligentsia who mourned the shrinking nature preserves.

Throughout this dissertation, I examine the evolution of environmental thought within the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia in the 1950s and 1960s. The overarching argument at the heart of this project is that this discourse was fundamentally linked with the Dnieper’s status as a
national symbol and the construction of the Dnieper Hydropower Cascade. The cultural intelligentsia articulated a form of environmental thought that was deeply rooted in the Ukrainian national idea and in many ways trigged by the war experience on Ukrainian territory and the third major famine in thirty years. This dissertation begins with voices that enthusiastically welcomed the transformation of nature as a powerful symbol of modern Ukraine. In the first three chapters, environmentalism is expressed as a celebration of the beauty and fertility of Ukrainian nature and the Ukrainian landscape. The final two chapters trace the gradual emergence of an explicitly environmentalist discourse among the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia, who began to make a direct appeal to protect nature based on these same values.
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While Dovzhenko was deeply immersed in his work on Poem of the Sea, he described his state of mind in a way that deeply resonated with my own thoughts, especially in the past year of intensive writing: “I write and write through the sleepless nights. Past and present pass before my eyes. Battles and tempestuous struggles rage in my mind. Blood, pain, tears, laughter, and sometimes mockery float to the surface from memory’s abyss and sail away in the flood of great events like foam on [the Dnieper’s] springtime rapids.” (Diary, 4 March 1953)

In truth, this entire project, from conception through research and writing, was at times quite humbling and difficult for me — intellectually, emotionally, and even physically. Therefore, it is with great pleasure and very deep gratitude that I recall even just a few of the many, many people who made this dissertation possible (and fun!). My greatest debt of gratitude is owed to my advisor Serhii Plokhii whose boundless kindness, patience, and enthusiasm for my project enabled me to push through every obstacle and fight off every bout of self-doubt. I aimed to complete dissertation chapters at the same rate with which he published books, but fell behind at times… A native son of the same lower stretch of the Dnieper River that captivated Dovzhenko and Honchar, Serhii gently but firmly guided me and this project from start to finish. Without his generous support, attentive supervision, and unlimited insight, this dissertation would surely have capsized on the infamous Dnieper rapids.

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Introduction

The transformation of the Dnieper River (Ukrainian: Dnipro) captivated Oleksandr Dovzhenko, the famed Soviet Ukrainian filmmaker.\footnote{Unless quoting directly, I will use the Anglicized spelling of the river (Dnieper), rather than the transliterated Ukrainian (Dnipro), Russian (Dnepr), or Belarussian (Dniapro) spellings.} The construction of the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station (DniproHES) at Zaporizhzhia was a showcase of the First Five-Year Plan and the subject of his early film, Ivan (1932). Nearly two decades later, Dovzhenko followed the construction of the next giant Dnieper dam with great interest and spent considerable time at the worksite, downriver at Kakhovka. He put this lived experience on the banks of the Dnieper River in southern Ukraine into what became his swan song, Poem of the Sea, which chronicled the creation of the massive Kakhovka reservoir. Although he died just days before filming began in 1956, his wife produced the film, posthumously earning Dovzhenko the Lenin Prize in 1959. Dovzhenko’s Poem of the Sea provides insight into what water meant to Soviet Ukraine in this era of high modernist hydro-engineering.\footnote{For a detailed analysis of this film, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.}

After an absence of many years, General Fedorchenko - a central character in Dovzhenko’s story - returned home to his native village by the Dnieper River. The General had done very well for himself, but he was not the only one transformed by the ‘Soviet Experiment.’ The landscape of his youth buzzed with activity. Not far downstream, construction of the giant Kakhovka Hydroelectric Station (Kakhovka HES) was well underway. However, the reason for his homecoming was not to survey the future, but to bid farewell to the past. Water held behind the dam at Kakhovka would soon submerge this village and many more along the river between Zaporizhzhia and Kakhovka. Manmade and inland, this gigantic reservoir was called the “Kakhovka Sea,” even before it was filled with water. To prepare the reservoir basin, residents were forced to tear down their modest homes and rebuild them on higher ground outside of the
flood zone. Some such families would be resettled to the south, where Soviet planners drew irrigation canals to carry the Dnieper’s water from the future Kakhovka reservoir to fertile agricultural fields throughout the Ukrainian steppe. In addition to the relocated settlements, the entire area had to be cleared of trees, which release harmful chemicals if left to decompose underwater. While large work-crews tackled forested areas, private gardens and orchards were chopped down by those who dedicated a lifetime to lovingly tending them. Axe in hand, the General stood in front of the pear tree in his parents’ backyard. The tree reminded him of his youth, of the late summer and fall when he would reach up into its branches and refresh himself with the sweet fruit. As he looked wistfully at the tree, a passing local questioned the utility of the Kakhovka hydropower project, asking, “After all, hasn’t the Atomic Age already come?” The General responded without removing his gaze from his beloved pear tree: “Yes, but our sea is not a matter of energy in the usual sense. It is primarily about irrigation, that is, the life and well-being of our South.”

In his films, screenplays, and private writing, Dovzhenko articulated a conflicting sense of loss and awe at the modernization of the Dnieper and of Soviet Ukraine. Although Dovzhenko died in 1956, his screenplay for Poem of the Sea, makes him an early ‘sixtier’ [shistdesiatnyk] of Thaw era Ukraine. In this dissertation, I establish the filmmaker’s enormous impact on the cultural intelligentsia of the 1950s and 1960s. Specifically, Dovzhenko’s celebration of Ukrainian nature and love for the Dnieper River continued to be an important lens through which

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3 Oleksandr P. Dovzhenko, Vybrani Tvory (Kyiv: Saktsent Plius, 2004), 239.

4 In her monograph on Honchar’s journalism, public speeches, and articles, Halych dedicates 20 pages to Honchar’s admiration for Dovzhenko. She contends that she is the first to produce a scholarly analysis of the Dovzhenko’s influence on Honchar. Her section on Dovzhenko in Hochar’s journalism focuses on a comparison between an early Thaw era article and a second article from the late 1980s. She uses them to trace an evolution in Honchar’s attitude toward the Soviet state, finding that modest reservations originated in the late 1950s and 1960s but did not become overtly critical until after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. However, her analysis does not address Dovzhenko’s influence on Honchar’s environmentalism and his conception of Ukrainian nature and national geography, see V. M. Halych, Oles’ Honchar: — Zhurnalist, Publitsyst, Redaktor: Evoliutsiia Tvorchoi Maiternosti (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 2004), 303-23.

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the Ukrainian cultural community related to Ukrainian national geography and the natural world long after Dovzhenko’s death. This image of Ukrainian nature was infused with the filmmaker’s romanticism and his rebellious spirit.

The Dnieper River flows from its meager source in western Russia, gains strength from Belarusian tributaries, and dives down through the heart of Ukraine, where it becomes stronger and wider. In Ukraine it roars across cascading dams and reservoirs before emptying into the Black Sea. However, not all of its water reaches this destination. From the seventeenth century through the early twentieth century, the driving aim behind river development and solution to the ‘Problem of the Great Dnipro,” was transforming the Dnieper into a reliable shipping artery to the Black Sea and from there to the Mediterranean. During the Soviet period, priority was first given to energy production but then shifted to agriculture. Rather than disappearing into the Black Sea, much of the Dnieper’s water was transported in irrigation canals far and wide across the arid Ukrainian steppe, though a significant amount of water is now lost to evaporation from the surface of enormous manmade reservoirs along the river. In fact, a contemporary satellite image of Eurasia reveals that the Dnieper and the Volga are the two most visible rivers in Europe, if not all of Eurasia. While they are two of the longest rivers in Europe, their visibility from the sky can be explained by two factors. Both the Dnieper and the Volga were extensively hydro-engineered in the Soviet era, resulting in a series of artificial seas that significantly widened both rivers to such a degree that they are clearly visible from space. These rivers also stand out because their lower reaches cut across the flat, dry, grassy steppe. This topography means that their manmade reservoirs required massive surface areas in order to hold any meaningful quantity of water, thus flooding especially large areas of fertile wetlands, cultivated fields, and longstanding settlements.

The Dnieper River has long been and continues to be a highly contested site. Poets,
planners, and politicians have invested it with symbolic power to serve their own agendas. This river was harnessed, conquered, and exploited as a cultural, political, and natural resource. Writers such as Nikolai Gogol and Taras Shevchenko invented the Dnieper as a cultural symbol of nation and empire. During the twentieth century, this river was dramatically transformed—mentally, rhetorically, and physically. Writers, artists, and engineers re-imagined and re-drew the Dnieper. Massive hydroelectric dams, reservoirs, and canal systems submerged hundreds of villages and significantly altered the surrounding ecosystems. Dnieper transformation projects pervaded the Soviet imagination. The Dnieper Hydroelectric Station (DniproHES) was the centerpiece of Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan. After WWII, the Kakhovka Hydropower complex (Kakhovka HES) was a symbol of Stalin’s “Plan for the Transformation of Nature” and the “Great Construction Projects of Communism,” setting the stage for other gigantic, and often overly ambitious, hydro-engineering projects pursed by Stalin and his successors. In fact, the vast majority of Soviet ‘show’ projects were aimed at controlling water. Thus, the engineered Dnieper was a showcase of the Soviet modernization project. It was also the symbol of a modern Ukraine. Even today, the Dnieper River pervades the Ukrainian cultural imagination, not simply because of its lasting symbolic power, but also because it continues to pervade the lives of millions of Ukrainians in very concrete ways.

My dissertation examines the renegotiation of Soviet conceptions of the natural environment and national geography after WWII. Inspired by Christopher Ely’s work on the cultural construction of the Russian landscape in the nineteenth century, I use the Dnieper River to trace a renewed appreciation for un-engineered nature against the background of the Soviet era’s high modernist ideology, which celebrated enormous hydro-engineering and nature

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5 Magnitogorsk, the Turksib railroad, and BAM (the Baikal-Amur railroad) are exceptions that come to mind (though it is also interesting that the BAM construction was named for the bodies of water it connects).
transformation projects. As the Dnieper was increasingly harnessed to serve the Soviet economy, voices emerged in defense of beautiful, native nature, that was accessible to the local population broadly. Soviet writers defended their native nature and national geography for many of the same reasons that the romantic writers and artists of Imperial Russia turned to nature a century earlier. They reacted to the trauma of a large-scale attack on the natural world brought on by rapid industrialization, collectivization of agriculture, and a world war that profoundly scarred the landscape. The Dnieper River was especially impacted by these attacks. In Ukraine, the association of nature and national geography with fertility and freedom was particularly important.

In the last few decades before the Soviet Union collapsed, a growing number of writers and other cultural figures abandoned the ubiquitous panegyrics in support of hydro-engineering and nature transformation. Instead, they began to question the wisdom of these projects and call attention to the ecological impact of unchecked industrial development. This shift was supported by a period of increased openness to public discussion and even modest criticism during Khrushchev’s Thaw, but continued to steadily grow in the 1970s before erupting after the Chernobyl disaster of 1986. The cultural intelligentsia increasingly joined forces with the scientific intelligentsia after the late 1950s. In 1968, Oles’ Honchar published his novel, *The Cathedral*, which expressed an environmentalist critique of Soviet society, linked with a celebration of Ukrainian national history and culture on the banks of the Dnieper. After 1986, these themes mobilized a broad popular movement, which Jane Dawson has called ‘Eco-Nationalism.’ Honchar was the most prominent voice to join this cause.8 In his study of the

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8 On Honchar’s role in the Ukrainian environmental movement after Chernobyl see, Serhii Plokhy, *Chernobyl: The*
Chernobyl catastrophe, Serhii Plokhii wrote that Honchar’s scathing critique of the Soviet state after 1986 not only “signaled a major change of attitude on the part of Ukrainian political and cultural elites towards nuclear power and nationhood,” but galvanized the Ukrainian public sphere to an unprecedented degree.9

This dissertation aims to address the following questions: How did Soviet Ukrainian ideas about nature and national geography respond to the transformation of the Dnieper River after WWII? Was the Dnieper successfully transformed into a symbol of modernity? Why did the liriki begin to turn against the fiziki in the 1950s and 1960s, even before Chernobyl? What were the post-war precursors to eco-nationalism, which rose to the surface and exploded in the wake of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster? And finally, what was particular about the Ukrainian context?

In the following chapters, I demonstrate that the environmental thought that erupted into eco-nationalism in the 1980s was not a simple “surrogate” for nationalism, anti-Soviet sentiments, and resentment for centuries of russification as Dawson and others have argued.10 In fact, Soviet Ukrainian society was very attuned to the natural environment, especially to the human-nature relationship. Ideas about nature, nature protection, and national geography were closely tied to the Ukrainian national idea, but not inherently opposed to the Soviet idea. In the 1950s, the cultural intelligentsia sincerely embraced a new, modern, engineered, ordered ‘second nature’ and blended it with Ukrainian national history and culture. The construction of DniproHES in 1927-1932 made the Dnieper river modern, it made Soviet Ukraine modern, and it remained an overwhelmingly positive symbol of modern Ukraine throughout the Soviet era. An exhaustive propaganda campaign in the early 1950s successfully linked the Kakhovka HES

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9 Ibid., 288-89.

project with the aim of irrigating the Ukrainian steppe. In this sense, water mattered more than energy. The symbolic significance of agricultural fertility made Kakhovka HES both a modern and a nationally-oriented project for Soviet Ukraine. This is why Dovzhenko fully embraced the Kakhovka project, at least until the last two years of his life when he began to have doubts. Flooding the fertile Dnieper floodplain to fill the Kakhovka reservoir, which forced hundreds of thousands of inhabitants from their private gardens and orchards, undermined this initial success. With time, even greater ecological damage emerged, further eroding the image of an agricultural paradise in Southern Ukraine.

The Dnieper River has been a national symbol for Ukraine since at least the nineteenth century and linked with Cossack history and their hard-fought freedoms long before that. Although I set out to write a cultural history of the Dnieper river in Ukraine, the geographical imaginations of all of my major actors increasingly focused my attention on the lower Dnieper. With their voices and their words, I suggest that the imagined heart of Ukraine was located in the lower reaches of the Dnieper, where the river and the steppe converge. The topography of both the wide river and the vast steppe endowed this space with a sense of spiritual freedom and independence. In fact, five out of six main elements of the Ukrainian national idea intersect in that one place: the Dnieper River, the steppe, freedom, fertility, and Cossack history.11 Therefore, I argue in this dissertation that the nature and landscape imagery that these cultural voices employed constitutes a type of soft environmentalism. In the first three chapters, this environmentalism is expressed as a celebration of the beauty and fertility of Ukrainian nature and the Ukrainian landscape. In the final two chapters, voices within the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia began to make a direct appeal to protect nature based on these same values. The environmental thought of the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia after WWII was not just a proxy

11 In a sense, the Dnieper links holy Kyiv and thus the sixth national element, religion, to the heart of Ukraine.
for nationalism. Instead, the modern Ukrainian national idea was very much rooted in the modern Ukrainian landscape.

**Historiography: Nature, National Geography and Hydro-Engineering**

Through the lens of cultural history, this dissertation addresses three strands of Soviet environmental history from WWII through the Thaw era: nature transformation, nature protection, and national geography. Some form of environmental thinking has long existed in the Slavic world, including pagan folk beliefs. In Ukraine, this environmental thinking was particularly linked with its lush natural landscape and with agricultural fertility, embracing agriculture on both a small and large scale. This core national idea was cultivated throughout the Soviet period. Among the cultural intelligentsia during the 1950s and 1960s, an emerging ‘cult of the wilderness’ took on a hybrid meaning in the Ukrainian context, closer to the German concept than the American but incorporating elements of each.\(^{12}\) Both the dangerous Dnieper rapids and the savage steppe, or ‘wild field’ [*dyke pole*] had been tamed by the Ukrainian Cossacks before they were conquered by Soviet dams and collective farms.\(^ {13}\) Therefore the nature that needed protection was not virgin land untouched by human hands.

The Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia embraced a hybrid nature. This was the nature of marsh grasses and steppe thistles, but also the nature of cultivated meadows, private gardens, and backyard pear trees. Moreover, they defended the accessibility of nature as a respite from modern urban and industrial life. This was the nature of leisure activities such as fishing and boating, tree lined streets, riverbank beaches, and urban parks when Ukrainians could sit quietly.

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and look out over the Dnieper River. In environmental discourse, human-mediated or human-constructed nature is referred to as “second nature” and distinguished from “first nature” or natural nature. 14 Throughout this dissertation, I examine the evolution of environmental thought within the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia in the 1950s and 1960s. This strain of environmentalism grew out of Dovzhenko’s love for the nature of his native land and evolved into a critique of the Soviet nature transformation agenda and the misguided abuse of power by Soviet bureaucrats. These eco-patriots rooted their arguments for nature protection in terms of its cultural, historical, and aesthetic value, which were inherently infused with national language, without being anti-Soviet.

In different ways, this dissertation contributes to two revisions of Soviet environmental history, which in the past decade have become the new standard. The first is a critique of Soviet exceptionalism through comparison with the non-Soviet world. 15 Paul Josephson compared the hydro-technical development of a “good socialist river” - the Volga - and a “good capitalist river - the Columbia. He found that two very different ideologies produced strikingly similar results. The “national factors - ideology, politics, culture, economic systems,” he wrote, were reflected in the mechanisms behind brute force technologies, rather than the finished products themselves. 16 Although my work is not directly comparative, it does provide a window into the Soviet experience of the ‘1950s syndrome,’ which is a well-established phenomenon in global


environmental history. The ‘1950s Syndrome’ refers to the ecological impact of exponential industrial growth observed around the world in that decade. My project is grounded in the argument that environmental discourse among the cultural intelligentsia at this time was driven by the extensive hydro-engineering of the Dnieper, and in particular by the creation of massive reservoirs that displaced large populations and negatively impacted the surrounding ecosystems. The river was also increasingly lined with factories that released toxic chemicals into its water and the surrounding air. Although the conditions and symptoms of the ‘1950s Syndrome’ are not in themselves novel, I incorporated the memory of WWII on Ukrainian territory into this narrative, which I suggest is particularly important in the Ukrainian context: both because the war physically scarred the Ukrainian landscape in significant ways and because patriotic landscape imagery pervaded wartime culture, such as in Sosiura’s famous poem, “Love Ukraine” (1944).

In recent years, a great deal of excellent scholarship has, in my view, irrefutably challenged the narrative of Soviet Prometheanism. Soviet Prometheanism refers to the ideology, policies, and corresponding practices that sacrifice environmental interests, such as the preservation and conservation of nature and national resources, in the name of human interests. In the 1970s, ground breaking studies by Marshall Goldman and Philip Pryde challenged the widely accepted Soviet-generated image of environmental harmony under Socialism and revealed large-scale ecological destruction. After that, historical assessments of Soviet engagement with the

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18 Prometheanism as an environmental discourse was first defined by John Dryzek, see John Dryzek, The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

environment tended to focus on the tremendous environmental damage wrought by Soviet nature engineering schemes, with good reason. Based on who or what they ultimately blamed for inflicting this environmental harm, these environmental historians may be divided into two groups: those who pointed to the dictatorial political culture in place at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution or those who identified Stalin’s rule - and often his First Five Year Plan - as the single most decisive moment in Soviet Environmental History.

In 1988 Douglas Weiner argued that a surprisingly strong nature conservationist movement was active and effective even in the first decade of Bolshevik rule. However, Weiner identified a decisive shift with the adoption of Stalin’s “First Five-Year Plan” (1928-1932), when the value of nature became tied to economic interests to a greater degree than ever before. After that, he found that the natural scientists who defended nature were more restricted and less effective but nevertheless survived and even achieved some small successes.

Stephen Brain questioned the negative assessment of environmentalism under Stalin, suggesting that despite his other crimes, Stalin was in fact an exceptional environmentalist: “Ultimately he authorized the world’s largest forest preserve, not situated in the hinterlands, but embracing Russia’s most productive and centrally located woodlands.”


24 *A Little Corner of Freedom*.

massive afforestation initiative in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He suggested that this program provides evidence of state sponsored Soviet environmentalism. Brain argued for a revision of the idea that Stalin’s rule represents a significant break, both in the context of the leaders that came before and after him and when placed in a global context. Furthermore, he suggested that the link between Russian identity and the Russian forest, originating in the nineteenth century, contributed to shaping the particular form that Soviet environmentalism took. Generally, the wonderful scholarship on Soviet environmentalism produced in the past decade contributes to this expanding image of the existence of various forms of environmentalism throughout the Soviet period. However, much of this work focuses on the scientific intelligentsia, rather than the cultural intelligentsia as I do.

Scholarship dedicated to the environmentalism of the scientific intelligentsia makes a big deal about the drastic reduction of nature preserve land across the Soviet Union in 1951. Nineteen nature preserves [zapovedniki] lost their protected status in Soviet Ukraine alone and the area of other Ukrainian nature preserves was slashed. However, the cultural intelligentsia seemed to care very little about this event at the time. I suggest that the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia ignored the loss of the nature preserves because the land taken from the preserves was transformed into cultivated agricultural land. My project shows that in the 1950s and 1960s, the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia valued a different type of nature than the scientific

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26 Song of the Forest, 1-3.; on the significance of the russian forest to Russian identity see: Ely, This Meager Nature.


28 For example, Weiner, Models of Nature., A Little Corner of Freedom.

29 For example, the 23,400 hectares of land that was taken from the Askania-Nova preserve in southern Ukraine were immediately transferred to local farms and cultivated, see A Little Corner of Freedom, 130.
intelligentsia who mourned the nature preserves. They understood nature in a broader sense, which encompassed cultivated or pastoral nature as well as pristine or virgin nature. Because of this difference, the environmentalism of the cultural intelligentsia has been largely underestimated, especially before the 1970s.

With a few excellent exceptions, most scholars focus on the scientific intelligentsia’s environmentalism, while merely making reference to the cultural intelligentsia, in most cases specifically to the Russian Village Prose writers. However, scholars who examine Soviet environmental discourse after Stalin do link it in some way to the Russian Village Prose writers, though typically without a sustained analysis of their activity and creative output. The existing consensus suggests that despite what has been called a “failed environmental turn” in the 1950s and 1960s, until the 1970s if not the 1980s, the cultural voices were marginal to the larger scientific discourse on nature protection. In this dissertation I carve out space in the narrative of Soviet environmentalism for what I see as a much broader and earlier environmental discourse in Soviet culture after WWII, and in fact one that was in many ways triggered by the war experience on Ukrainian territory, the post-war industrialization drive, and the third major famine in Ukraine in just the first half of the twentieth century. The environmentalism examined here was based on celebrating the beauty of nature and love for one’s native landscape.


31 In her imminently forthcoming dissertation, “The Cultural Politics of the Nation in the Soviet Union after Stalin,” Erin Hutchinson will provide a much-needed in-depth analysis of their activity by examining the Russian Village Prose writers alongside writers with similar interests from other Soviet republics. In doing so, Hutchinson expands the concept of “village writers” beyond those who narrowly identified as such at the time.

32 For example, see Dawson, Eco-Nationalism: Anti-Nuclear Activism and National Identity in Russia, Lithuania, and Ukraine.; on the failed environmental turn, see Laurent Coumel, "A Failed Environmental Turn? Khrushchev’s Thaw and Nature Protection in Soviet Russia," The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review 40, no. 2013 (2013).
I challenge scholars such as Jane Dawson who have argued that the so-called eco-nationalism that erupted in the 1980s was a mere surrogate for nationalism and thus not really about the protection of nature. In different ways throughout my dissertation, I have shown that the cultural intelligentsia of the 1950s and 1960s articulated a form of environmental thought that was deeply rooted in the Ukrainian national idea. In the first three chapters, this environmentalism is expressed as a celebration of the beauty and fertility of Ukrainian nature and the Ukrainian landscape. In the final two chapters, voices within the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia began to make a direct appeal to protect nature based on these same values.

And finally, this dissertation contributes to literature on the strong link between nature, landscape, and the conception of nation. Specifically, I demonstrate that the Dnieper River was both the core national symbol and the focal point of environmental thought among the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia.

Sources and Approach

This dissertation is largely inspired by Christopher Ely’s work on the cultural construction of the Russian landscape in the nineteenth century: *This Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia* (2002). Ely used depictions of nature in Russian culture to demonstrate how writers and artists reflected and effected the dramatic transformation of ideas

33 Dawson, *Eco-Nationalism: Anti-Nuclear Activism and National Identity in Russia, Lithuania, and Ukraine*.; also Dronin and Francis, "Econationalism in Soviet Literature."


35 Brain makes a similar suggestion, writing that the link between the Russian forest and Russian identity influenced the particular form of environmentalism that emerged in Soviet Russia. Brain, *Song of the Forest*, 1-3.

36 Ely, *This Meager Nature.*
about nature and the Russian national landscape. Rejecting western European ideas of idealized, manicured nature, writers and artists turned instead to what was unique and authentic about their native land as they experienced it: its vast and unbroken spaces, dense and tangled forests, muddy roads and marshes - their meager nature. Therefore, in this dissertation I accept the theoretical framework laid out by Simon Schama in *Landscape and Memory* (1995)\(^{37}\) and accept that nature and national geography are cultural constructs.

My cultural approach to the environmental history of Soviet Ukraine allowed me to write the cultural intelligentsia into the narrative of Soviet environmentalism, which largely highlights the scientific intelligentsia while marginalizing the cultural community. Throughout the dissertation I incorporate analysis of private diaries, public memoirs, official press, meeting transcripts, and the bureaucratic records of Communist Party authorities in Soviet Ukraine with cultural products including poetry, prose, film, and painting. In the third chapter, dedicated to the composition of a new State Anthem, I also use digital text analysis software to pool 64 draft Anthem texts and extract the most frequently used words and word groups from the collective dataset. Analysis of these sources made it possible for me to connect the symbolic representation of the Dnieper river with the developing discussion of nature protection.

The overarching argument at the heart of my dissertation is that the discourse about nature and national geography examined below was fundamentally linked with the construction of the Dnieper Hydropower Cascade immediately after WWII, especially Kakhovka HES and Kremenchuk HES, which both required exceptionally large reservoirs that displaced hundreds of thousands of people and permanently altered the surrounding ecosystems in negative ways.\(^{38}\) Although the post-war surge in large-scale industrial development and resulting adverse effects

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\(^{38}\) Four out of five of the Dnieper’s hydropower dams were constructed after the war, between 1950 and 1975.
on the natural environment represents a global phenomenon, known as ‘the 1950s syndrome,’ I have introduced the memory of WWII and into my analysis.

The memory of WWII is particularly pertinent to environmental discourse in the Ukrainian context for two reasons. Extended occupation and shifting frontlines deeply scarred the Ukrainian landscape. Moreover, patriotic celebrations of the Ukrainian national landscape, such as Sosiura’s “Love Ukraine,” were permitted during the war. Memories of the war, especially the war on Ukrainian territory, were infused with these same patriotic images of nature. War themes dominated Soviet literature in the first post-war decade. Therefore, WWII was no less of an important moment for this narrative than Stalin’s death. In fact, the significance of 1953 is further undermined by the zeal with which Stalin’s successors continued to pursued nature transformation and hydro-engineering projects. The link between agricultural fertility and Ukrainian national idea, which the voices analyzed in this dissertation clearly attest to, also made the Ukrainian context unique. Initial support for the Kakhovka project among the cultural intelligentsia derived from its explicit agricultural aims. The location of the hydropower dam may have been influenced by its propagandistic appeal, which was linked with the Soviet narrative of the Civil War in Ukraine, but the project was embraced in Ukraine because it brought the Dnieper’s water to the dry Ukrainian steppe, supporting the idea of a fertile agricultural paradise in southern Ukraine.

Broadly speaking, this dissertation traces an arc from the 1946 drought across the Ukrainian steppe to the environmental critique of Soviet nature transformation articulated by Oles’ Honchar in his 1968 novel, The Cathedral. The drought in 1946 produced a devastating famine that compounded the devastation of war and inflamed existing anxieties about water in the arid southern steppe. The Dnieper River was intensely engineered in response to the 1946 drought. These efforts focused on controlling the river’s seasonal variation in order to prevent
future water-shortages. By focusing on environmental discourse among the cultural intelligentsia and shifting my timeframe earlier than most studies of Soviet nature transformation, I was able to perceive the evolution of environmentalism in the cultural sphere. Unlike the members of the scientific intelligentsia who reacted with alarm to the drastic reduction of nature preserves in 1951, the cultural intelligentsia celebrated nature that was pastoral rather than pristine. Their soft environmentalism glorified the beauty of native nature, but it was not until the construction of the Kakhovka reservoir and resulting loss of the fertile Dnieper wetlands that Ukrainian writers and artists began to question the Soviet nature transformation agenda. Honchar’s 1968 novel represents a bridge to the direct environmental activism pursued by the Soviet cultural intelligentsia in the decades that followed.

A quick note on the transliteration of Russian and Ukrainian names and places: For place names in Ukraine, I have elected to defer to Google and thus refer to the Dnieper river rather than the Dnipro. In instances, such as the city of Dnipropetrovsk, when the current name, Dnipro, does not match the official name at the time, I defer to the historically accurate name. For people, I have used the American Library of Congress system of romanization for Ukrainian rather than Russian, unless the person in question is Russian or is so widely known to an English-speaking audience by the Russian romanization. Therefore, I have written Gogol rather than Hohol or Hohol’.

**Structure of the Dissertation**

Centered around the Dnieper river, this dissertation examines conceptions of the Ukrainian natural environment and national geography during the first two post-war decades. It begins, in the first two chapters, with voices that enthusiastically welcomed the transformation of nature as

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39 With the exception of my dissertation title, for which I permitted myself some artistic license.
a powerful symbol of modern Ukraine and confirmation of Ukraine’s modernity. The historical actors in these chapters valued productive nature and the new aesthetics of engineered nature. The third chapter functions as a pivot point of the dissertation, exploring the core national symbols employed in the State Anthem in the late 1950s. These symbols were directly linked with the Ukrainian landscape. And finally, the final two chapters trace the gradual emergence of an explicitly environmentalist discourse among the cultural intelligentsia, who championed the aesthetic, rather than purely productive, value of Ukrainian nature.

The first chapter, “Hydropower to the People: Putting Water to Work in Soviet Ukraine,” describes the initial conception of the Kakhovka hydropower project. This was the second dam in the Dnieper hydropower cascade, constructed in 1950-1958. I examine why the Kakhovka dam was built and what the river meant to the men who remade it on paper and on the ground. Following Richard White, I take seriously the working relationship that planners and engineers had with nature - with the Dnieper River specifically. These men, I suggest, thought of nature as part of the Soviet workforce. It was their job to maximize the productivity of the river, to make it into a good socialist worker. For them, the Dnieper was most beautiful when fully engineered and lined with concrete. The discussion of river development after WWII reveals a conflict between using the river’s water for power or for irrigation. Kakhovka HES became one of the widely celebrated “Great Construction Projects of Communism,” advanced by Stalin in the 1950s, because irrigation won out. Despite the ubiquitous hostile rhetoric, this chapter reveals that the Soviet conquest of nature after WWII was rooted in a deep respect for nature and the challenges it presented.

Chapter 2, “Oleksandr Dovzhenko and the Art of Engineering the Dnieper River,” chronicles the filmmaker’s celebration of Ukrainian nature and discovery of Ukrainian national geography in his private diaries and creative works. Dovzhenko was hounded by accusations of
nationalism for showcasing his love for the Ukrainian landscape rather than the Soviet landscape and for allowing nature to overshadow prescribed political messages. The Dnieper River was a powerful symbol of Soviet Ukraine and central to Dovzhenko’s geographic imagination. The Dnieper had an enormously powerful influence on Dovzhenko. It was his creative muse and the source of his happiness. Dovzhenko’s lifework culminated in his *Poem of the Sea*, dedicated to the giant reservoir formed behind the Kakhovka HES dam. While creating the film, Dovzhenko fell in love with that stretch of the Dnieper, where the river meets the steppe. The Kakhovka complex supported Dovzhenko’s vision of Ukraine, rooted in agricultural productivity. He was excited that the Dnieper would be engineered to serve that aim, and that the transformed Dnieper River would then transform the dry southern steppe into a fertile paradise. He welcomed the new modern beauty of engineered nature but hoped to preserve the memory of the old world, Ukrainian national history and culture, in his films. While documenting the birth of a new world, Dovzhenko also carefully documented what was lost. Despite this tension, Dovzhenko remained committed to transforming nature on a monumental scale until the final two years of his life. On the sandy banks of the Dnieper and future shores of the Kakhovka Sea, Dovzhenko began to question the wisdom and utility of transforming the Dnieper. Through his creative works, diaries, and private conversations, Dovzhenko’s lens would continue to shape the way that the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia viewed the Dnieper River, their native nature, and national geography long after Dovzhenko’s death in November 1956.

The first State Anthem(s) of the Soviet Union and its republics were composed shortly after WWII and for the most part survived until the dissolution of the Union in 1991. It was not until 1978 that texts were “improved” slightly to remove Stalin’s name. Chapter 3, “The Anthem of the Thaw: Fertility, Freedom, and the Dnieper River,” examines an Anthem that never became an Anthem. Throughout the late 1950s, the Ukrainian literary elite were quite seriously engaged in
composing an entirely new State Anthem for Soviet Ukraine, not merely a minor revision that erased Stalin. Even though the Anthem of the Thaw never entered the official repertoire and has since been forgotten, the proposed verses describe the authors’ visions of the past, the present, and the future of Ukraine. Images of Ukraine’s natural environment and national geography stand out, as do references to freedom and agricultural fertility. During the Thaw era competition to create an entirely new State Anthem for Soviet Ukraine, the Dnieper River was unquestionably the chosen national symbol. Within a dense array of Soviet slogans, this river stood out as the most common element specific to Ukraine. This speaks both to the importance of geography and the natural world to these poets’ image of Ukraine, but also to the unique position held by the Dnieper River in the imagined geography of their native land.

Chapter 4, “Eco-Patriotism on the Dnieper: For the Love of Beautiful, Native Nature,” examines a group of Ukrainian writers, artists, and scientists who gathered in 1958 to establish a strategy for mobilizing public opinion around their goal of protecting the nature of their native land. This Conference in Kyiv dedicated to “nature and its aesthetic value” came at a time when the widespread development of natural resources to fuel the Soviet economy was rapidly transforming the landscape of Soviet Ukraine. This chapter examines these voices of eco-patriotism, who defended their native nature based on finding value in nature as a source of beauty, creativity, health, and happiness, rather than an economic resource in the traditional sense. They articulated their defense of nature in Soviet terms and in support of Soviet patriotism but incorporated direct reference to Ukrainian national geography and native nature.

These defenders of Ukrainian nature recognized the need to use cultural products - literature and painting - to connect memories of a specific childhood cherry tree and nearby stream with threats to the forests in Western Ukraine and industrial pollution released into the Dnieper River. They needed their audience to move from a personal relationship with nature on a
local scale to a more abstract image that encompassed the entire Soviet Ukrainian republic. Their strategy for mobilizing public opinion around the issue of protecting the nature of their homeland was to foster love by revealing nature’s beauty, a value that is distinct from nature’s economic value. In doing so, they expected that a greater appreciation for nature’s beauty would stimulate patriotism, articulated as Soviet patriotism but framed within the Ukrainian cultural and territorial space. The 1958 conference in Kyiv exposes the first stage of transition from employing patriotic language to employing national(ist) language in defense of nature. In the context of extensive urbanization, conference participants aimed to bring the rural experience of nature to the cities and factories.

The fifth and final chapter, “Defender of the Dnieper: The Evolution of Oles’ Honchar,” traces the transformation of Oles’ Honchar’s environmentalism throughout the Thaw period, focusing on the writer’s evolving discourse on the relationship between Soviet man and nature. In this chapter I suggest that two pivotal events sparked and then, over time, influenced Honchar’s transformation from highly successful party-liner to public activist for nature protection and defender of Ukrainian culture. The first was the death in 1956 of Oleksandr Dovzhenko, the subsequent widespread publication of the filmmaker’s literary works, lectures, and private diaries, and the posthumous release of his final two projects, *Poem of the Sea* (1958) and *The Enchanted Desna* (1964). Honchar’s experience of his native nature, and especially the Dnieper River, was mediated through Dovzhenko’s lens. Ultimately, it is Dovzhenko’s defiant spirit that roused Honchar. The second event that had a great impact on Honchar’s relationship

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40 In her monograph on Honchar, Halych analyses his journalism, speeches, and articles. She dedicates 20 pages to Honchar’s admiration for Dovzhenko and the articles related to the filmmaker. She asserts that she is the first to produce a scholarly analysis of the Dovzhenko’s influence on Honchar. Her section on Dovzhenko in Honchar’s journalism focuses on a comparison between an early Thaw era article and a second from the late 1980s. She uses them to trace an evolution in Honchar’s attitude toward the Soviet state, finding that modest reservations originated in the late 1950s and 1960s but did not become directly critical until after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. However, her analysis does not address Dovzhenko’s influence on Honchar’s environmentalism and his conception of Ukrainian nature and national geography, see V. M. Halych, *Oles’ Honchar: — Zhurnalist, Publitsyst, Redaktor: Evoliutsiiia Tvorchoi Maisternosti* (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 2004), 303-23.
with Ukrainian nature, prior to the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, was the construction of Kakhovka
HES and the ecological problems that emerged in the late 1950s, related to its large reservoir.

Like Dovzhenko, Honchar fell in love with southern Ukraine where the Dnieper meets the
steppe. In the geographic imaginations of both Dovzhenko and Honchar, that stretch of the
Dnieper represented freedom, fertility, and the heart of Ukraine. Between 1956, when
Dovzhenko died, and 1968, when The Cathedral was published, Honchar’s conception of the
natural world and geographic imagination evolved. The beginning of Honchar’s evolution is
visible in Man and Arms (1960). In this novel, Honchar filled page after page with long, lyrical
mediations on Ukrainian nature, the Ukrainian landscape (built and natural), Ukrainian national
geography, and the Dnieper River in particular. Throughout the novel, Honchar contrasted the
natural world with war. He made a powerful argument that war was unnatural. The destruction of
war was not limited to the bodies of soldiers. It also disfigured the Ukrainian landscape. War
interrupted the natural agricultural rhythms of the Ukrainian countryside.

**Background: Making the Dnieper Myth**

Under the influence of romantic nationalism, the geography and mental map of the
Russian Empire and Eastern Europe were reimagined in the nineteenth century. Russia’s unique
native landscape – its “meager nature” - was reinvented as a source of national pride. Writers
and artists made the Volga River into a potent national symbol of Russia’s distinctive national

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42 Ely demonstrates that over the course of the nineteenth century, Russians came to celebrate the lack of a picturesque native landscape – so often criticized by Western European visitors. Russia’s vast, unremarkable, and monotonous terrain was reimagined as a manifestation of Russian exceptionalism. Ely, *This Meager Nature*. 

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geography. But the Dnieper river’s place in this new geography was more problematic. It was at times incorporated into the national geography of Russia’s south-western provinces. In the 1830s, the Imperial geography of writer Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852) highlighted the Dnieper river as part of a picturesque “Little Russian” landscape that was distinct from Russia, but within the empire.

It was in the poetry of Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861) that the Dnieper River – powerful, free, and un-tamable – became a metaphor for the Ukrainian people and the emerging idea of a Ukrainian nation. Shevchenko’s romantic ballad “Bewitched Girl” [Prychynna, 1837] opens with the line: “The wide Dnieper roars and moans.” In it he tells the story of ill-fated young lovers who fall pray to nefarious water nymphs [rusalki] and other pagan forces of light and dark that make up the natural world. But it is the first stanza that Ukrainian school children have memorized for generations, and that first line that continues to be instantly recognizable.

Shevchenko’s poem, “Testament” [Zapovit, 1845] is perhaps the most well-known Ukrainian-language text of all time, having been set to music and translated into more than sixty languages. In his “Testament,” Shevchenko, who spent the majority of his adult life exiled from his native land, asked to be buried in his “beloved Ukraine” on the cliffs overlooking the Dnieper River. He wanted to see and hear the river’s roaring rapids and only ascend into heaven after chains were broken and the river had washed the blood of Ukraine’s enemies into the Black Sea. The river that Shevchenko described does not exist as a single physical place or geographic feature, nor did it in Shevchenko’s lifetime. Instead, the poet compressed the entire length of the Dnieper into a vision of the imagined Ukrainian nation.

Following Shevchenko’s death in 1861, his remains

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44 Ely, This Meager Nature, 91-94.

45 On the cultural construction of geography, see e.g. Schama, Landscape and Memory.; Ely, This Meager Nature.
were relocated from St. Petersburg to a hill overlooking the Dnieper river near Kaniv, in accordance with his “Testament.” The intellectual ferment of the mid-nineteenth century informed Shevchenko’s poetry and - more importantly - its reception.\textsuperscript{46} The Dnieper became a powerful symbol under the influence of Romanticism and in the context of the resulting fervent discussion of the meaning of nation and nationality in a multi-ethnic empire. Shevchenko and his vision of the Dnieper has since been continuously revised and reinvented to fit the times. It remained a powerful symbol while the wars and revolutions of the early twentieth century fashioned nations out of empires.

The Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was incorporated into the USSR as a founding member in 1922 and the Dnieper River quickly became the construction site of communism. In a manifestation of Lenin’s famous slogan: “Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country,” the construction of the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station, dam, and reservoir flooded the infamous Dnieper rapids that formerly stretched for 45 miles between Zaporizhzhia and Dnipropetrovsk.\textsuperscript{47} Throughout the 1920s, the proponents of Dneprostroi, as the construction project was called, vied for resource allocation and state approval. Their successful efforts not only insured that the Dnieper complex would be built instead of many other similar projects proposed across the Soviet Union, but also that Dneprostroi would become the showcase of Stalin’s industrialization drive and First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932).\textsuperscript{48}

Massive publicity accompanied the Dneprostroi construction, both within the Soviet

\textsuperscript{46} On the reception, transformation, and canonization of Shevchenko’s work before and after his death, see, e.g. George G. Grabowicz, "Insight and Blindness in the Reception of Shevchenko: The Case of Kostomarov," \textit{Harvard Ukrainian Studies} 17, no. 3/4 (1993); George S.N. Luskyj, ed. \textit{Shevchenko and the Critics, 1861-1980} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

\textsuperscript{47} On the construction of DniproHES, see Anne Rassweiler, \textit{The Generation of Power: The History of Dneprostroi} (Oxford University Press, 1988).

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 30-58.
Union and abroad. Completed in 1932, the Lenin Dam at DniproHES was the largest in Europe at the time. The dam itself was designed by preeminent Soviet constructivist architects and documented in the photography and photomontage of prominent artists such as Aleksander Rodchenko. Vladimir Mayakovsky, whose suicide in 1930 prevented him from visiting the completed dam, wrote in his poem, “Debt to Ukraine” (Dolg Ukraina, 1926): “Taming the Dnepr with a bridle of wires. They’ll force the Dnepr to flow across turbines and the Dnipro through wire whiskers will flow through the blocks as electricity…” The Soviet conquest of the Dnieper River, taming of its rapids, and harnessing of its valuable energy was announced and celebrated in films, novels, articles, posters, children’s books, and on postage stamps.

Both the Dnieper River and the DniproHES dam were invested with new symbolic power during World War II. The river was the site of intense fighting during various crucial campaigns throughout the war. Following the German invasion and Red Army retreat from Ukraine, Stalin made the strategic decision to destroy the dam in August 1941. This traumatic episode will be analyzed in Chapter 5 of this dissertation in the context of Oles’ Honchar’s autobiographical novel, Man and Arms (1960). The demolished dam with its jagged, gaping hole, became a symbol of national sacrifice during the Great Patriotic War. The unleashed river swept away everything in its path, resulting in thousands of civilian casualties. Moreover, after the flood

49 For examples of the foreign fascination with Dneprostroi see, e.g. Margaret Bourke-White, Eyes on Russia, With a Preface by Maurice Hindus (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1931); Louis Fischer, Machines and Men in Russia, With Photographs by Margaret Bourke-White (New York: Harrison Smith, 1932).

50 Dneprostroi was featured in three separate issues of the propagandistic journal USSR in Construction, which was published monthly (with some exceptions) in Russian, English, French and German from 1930-1940 and again in 1949. See SSSR na stroike [USSR in Construction], no. 4 (1930); no. 10 (1932); no. 1 (1949).

51 This translation was reproduced in Rassweiler, The Generation of Power, 182.

52 For an example of Dneprostroi in popular Soviet literature for children see Samuil Marshak, Voina S Dneprom (Leningrad: Molodaia gvardiia, 1931).

53 Estimates range from a few thousand to tens of thousands, none of which was allowed to reach the Soviet press.
subsided, the Dnieper’s water levels may have dropped by as much as 100 feet, facilitating the German army’s efforts to transport men and equipment across the river. On the eastern front, the Dnieper – from Smolensk (Russia) to the Black Sea loomed large in the military imaginations of both sides. Although in 1943 Hitler told his troops to hold the river at all costs, the Red Army’s “Lower Dnieper Offensive,” or what became known as the “Battle for the Dnieper,” successfully reclaimed the river at immense human cost. The symbolic victory was at least as important as the military one.54

After the war, Soviet leaders returned with increased intensity (and hubris) to their war on nature and the demonstration of Soviet man’s ability to control it. In response to devastating droughts in 1946-1947, Stalin announced what became known as his plan for the “Great Transformation of Nature.”55 The resulting projects involved controlling water and were promoted as “Great Construction Projects of Communism.” These projects focused on irrigation, navigation, flood prevention, drought prevention, and hydroelectric power across the Soviet Union. The Kakhovka hydropower and irrigation complex on the lower Dnieper river was included as one such show-project and was therefore the subject of intense publicity. Created in 1956-1958 to serve the hydroelectric station, the reservoir or “Kakhovka Sea” submerged over 500,000 acres of farmland, villages, and historical Zaporizhian Cossack territory.56 The reservoir water also engulfed a large Scythian archeological site dating from the fifth - third centuries BCE. Throughout the course of the following two decades, a cascade of dams and reservoirs was


56 To put this area into perspective, that’s about 1/5 the size of Massachusetts.
built on the Dnieper, dramatically transforming the contour and character of the river.

In 1944, the celebrated poet Volodymyr Sosiura wrote “Love Ukraine,” a patriotic poem that celebrated Ukraine through imagery of Ukrainian nature. The lyrical poem begins with the line: “Love Ukraine, like the sun, love [Ukraine] like the wind and the grass and the water.” Although most of his landscape imagery is fairly generic, in the sixth verse, Sosiura includes the Dnieper River, which is the only specific geographical feature mentioned in this ode to Ukraine. In fact, the Dnieper River is the only concrete national symbol in the poem, amongst a sea of cherry-blossoms, willows, and nightingales. Intellectuals across the Soviet Union hoped that the end of WWII would bring even greater cultural and personal freedoms. However, the wartime cultural landscape that allowed Sosiura to publish a poem like “Love Ukraine,” which was dedicated to Ukrainian patriotism rather than Soviet patriotism, failed to outlive the war. The cultural war that followed was known as the Zhdanovshchina in reference to Stalin’s lieutenant Andrei Zhdanov, the doctrine’s ideologue. Although this episode is typically dated from the official attack on poetess Anna Akhmatova in August 1946, the ‘first shot’ was fired at Dovzhenko by Stalin himself in January 1944 for *Ukraine in Flames*. In the summer of 1951, Sosiura’s poem, “Love Ukraine,” was republished in the Leningrad journal *Star [Zvezda]*. This time it was met with harsh criticism. A subsequent article in the Party newspaper *Pravda* accused Sosiura of ‘bourgeois nationalism’ for what the critic saw as an ode to “some primordial Ukraine” rather than to Soviet Ukraine.

Stalin’s death in 1953 shifted the cultural landscape once again. In the cultural sphere, the ‘Thaw’ era meant that the boundaries of permissible cultural production and discussion were

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relaxed, though still in place. The perception of greater freedoms encouraged the creative and scientific intelligentsias to rekindle their intellectual flames.\textsuperscript{59}
Chapter 1

Hydropower to the People: Putting Water to Work in Soviet Ukraine

During the First Five-Year Plan and subsequent celebration of its success, the dominant narrative constructed around DniproHES - the Hydropower Station built at Zaporizhia - was one of taming, harnessing, and bridling the Dnieper River, like a wild stallion. This meant taming the raw power of the river and converting the river’s kinetic energy into electricity, the symbol of the early Soviet modernity project. This metaphor is well-suited to reflect this pivotal moment in the transformation and conquest of the Dnieper. The “taming” metaphor looked backwards at nearly two centuries of failed Imperial efforts to make the infamous Dnieper Rapids navigable and at a far longer history of forcing the inhabitants of the Dnieper region to accept outside authority. The DniproHES metaphor also looked to the future - at electrification as the symbol of modernization and the promise of engineering to transform the old into the new. Aleksandr Vinter, the chief engineer of Dneprostroi (Dniprobud), declared in 1932: “The Dnepr is bridled, the Dnepr is conquered, the Dnepr must henceforth serve the people building a new life.”60 Thus began the era of social transformation through nature transformation.

The second dam in the Dnieper Cascade, constructed at Kakhovka between 1950-1956, represents a new phase, with new aims and new metaphors. This chapter describes the initial conception of the Kakhovka project and the mechanisms behind its construction. I examine why the Kakhovka dam was built and what the river meant to the men who remade it on paper and on the ground. What were the questions and debates involved in the decision? More specifically, what does the Kakhovka project tell us about the Soviet perception of nature at that time? The great dams of the American West were built on a solid rock foundation and harnessed rivers’ precipitous plunge down through mountains. Even at Zaporizhzhia, the dam there was built on

60 Pravda, 1 May 1932, quoted in Rassweiler, The Generation of Power, 3.
the same granite foundation that produced the infamous rapids. In comparison, Kakhovka seems like a curious choice of location. The Dnieper is a river of the plains. From its source in western Russia, the river only drops 720 feet across 1,368 miles.\textsuperscript{61} 680 of those miles are in Ukraine, where the river only drops 295 feet from Kiev to the Black Sea. Below Zaporizhzhia, the river flows slowly across vast flood plains, now engulfed by the reservoir. However, it is the sandy earth of the Kakhovka river banks that make the location most surprising.

Anthropologist James C. Scott has famously argued that high modernist development projects like these “great construction projects of communism” were doomed to fail because state planners ignored local knowledge.\textsuperscript{62} But the engineers who worked on river’s sandy bottom were proud of the local knowledge that they brought to the project.\textsuperscript{63} Through their eyes, we can see the engineering successes that Kakhovka HES represents. Following Richard White, I take seriously the working relationship that planners and engineers had with nature - with the Dnieper specifically.\textsuperscript{64} Elsewhere in this dissertation, I pay attention to the voices who defended nature in its natural state, but here I look at those who in White’s words, “knew nature through labor.”\textsuperscript{65} The Dnieper River had been conquered, but it was still not fully controlled. These men, I suggest, thought of nature as part of the Soviet workforce. Nature, like labor, must be productive.\textsuperscript{66} Therefore, nature in its natural state represented a wasted or unused resource. It was

\textsuperscript{61} For comparison: the Colorado River in the American south west, home of the Hoover Dam, falls 10,184 feet over the course of 1450 miles.


\textsuperscript{63} Tina Loo has argued that the expertise of engineers, though state agents as well, should be considered to represent local knowledge, see: Tina Loo, "High Modernism, Conflict, and the Nature of Change in Canada: A Look at Seeing Like a State," \textit{The Canadian Historical Review} 97, no. 1 (2016).


\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 61.

their job to maximize the productivity of the river, to make it into a good socialist worker.

The early discussion of river development after WWII reveals a conflict between using the river’s water for power or for irrigation. Kakhovka HES became one of the widely celebrated “Great Construction Projects of Communism,” advanced by Stalin in the 1950s, because irrigation won out. This represents a shift in priorities of river development from the early Soviet period. The central aim in this period was to control the flow of the river. Planners and engineers watched in horror as unproductive water was wastefully dumped into the Black Sea, especially during the spring when snowmelt significantly increased the flow of water. Then in the summer and early fall when the agricultural demand for water was at its peak, the Dnieper’s flow dwindled. DniproHES was powered by a “run of the river” dam, meaning that power was generated from the natural flow of the river. By the 1950s it was no longer sufficient to let nature run its course. Kakhovka HES, and Khremenchuk HES after that, were both designed with massive reservoirs to control the flow of the river, to correct the variability of nature. In this chapter, I demonstrate that this “Great Construction Project of Communism” reveals a deeply held respect for nature, and water specifically, rather than enmity. For the planners and engineers who raised Kakhovka HES from the Dnieper’s quicksand, this water was a cherished natural treasure. Even if we do not agree with the calculations that determined what should be sacrificed for the desired aim, we must acknowledge the significance of making the calculations. It is those calculations that I examine below.

Broadly speaking, the discussions that surrounded the genesis of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Complex provide insight into how economic decisions were made in the post-war Soviet context. Although construction projects of this scale are generally considered to have come directly from Moscow, this chapter exposes the process of negotiation that shaped the project in this early stage, as seen from Kyiv. The Ukrainian planners and communist party
officials, whose voices tell this story, gathered input from energy and hydro-engineering specialists. With that information in mind, they tried to formulate a plan that best represented both the signals they received from Moscow and the needs they identified “on the ground” in Ukraine. Both water and water power were valuable economic commodities. As by far the largest source of water and hydropower in the Ukrainian Republic, the Great Dnipro was central to the interests and imaginations of Ukrainian and Soviet politicians and planners.

**Nature Transformation and the Great Construction Projects of Communism**

Catastrophic drought across the Soviet Union’s agricultural “bread basket” in 1946 forced planners to see water not just as a renewable - and convertible - resource, but also a finite one. Although there is never a good time for a famine, the resulting famine of 1946-1947 came at a particularly bad time. The Second World War decimated Soviet industry, agriculture, and infrastructure. The Soviet population fared even worse. For the millions starving in Moldavia, Ukraine, and western Russia, international peace conferences meant very little. At that time, Nikita Khrushchev was the First Secretary of the Communist Party in Ukraine. Bringing the Soviet Union’s agricultural sector out of crisis was largely his responsibility. In the meantime, Stalin fed the post-war reconstruction of the Soviet Union by taking grain from Ukraine, both for urban consumption and export. The drought itself was largely blamed on the so-called sukhovei, a dry wind that comes in from the south-east, sweeps across the steppe, and desiccates everything in its path. It was the primary target of what in late 1948 became known as Stalin’s “Plan for the Transformation of Nature.”67 The initial plan envisioned extensive field-protective afforestation (shelter-belts) to defend cropland and riverbanks against soil erosion. It also included

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increased use of crop rotation and the construction of reservoirs to offset future drought.⁶⁸

The next leap forward for Soviet nature transformation came in 1950 when the Soviet Council of Ministers announced their plans for a series of massive hydro-engineering projects across the Soviet Union. On a monumental scale, these “Great Construction Projects of Communism” addressed both electricity and irrigation needs. They aimed to transform nature by controlling one of the Soviet Union’s most valuable resources: water. This chapter examines one of these projects: Kakhovka HES on the lower Dnipro River in Ukraine. After DniproHES, the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Station became the second of six large dams in the Dnieper River Cascade. The entire complex includes the dam, power station, reservoir, and extensive irrigation canals, which transport water to the dry regions in southern Ukraine and - until quite recently - Crimea. Its construction provided the foundation for Soviet infrastructure that would link the vital industrial and agricultural regions of southern Ukraine and Crimea. The massive manmade “Kakhovka Sea” was created control the seasonally variable flow of the Dnieper, but also displaced tens of thousands of people from their homes and drastically altered the surrounding ecosystems. With a surface area of 2,100 square km, the reservoir is more or less the size of Rhode Island. The new urban center of Nova Kakhovka was conjured from the sandy banks of the Dnieper river after its water swallowed up Scythian archeological sites, Cossack landmarks, cherished reed marshes, and the vestiges of traditional village life. The nature transformation projects of Stalin, Khrushchev, and later Brezhnev - whether for agriculture or industry, were all directed at controlling water. I look at the intersection of this monumental Soviet-wide water-engineering campaign with the waters, riverbanks, and wetlands of a specific river. This chapter

⁶⁸ Stalinskii Plan Preobrazovaniia Prirody. Velikie Stroiki Kommunizma: Sbornik Dokumentov. (Moskva: Gospolitizdat, 1952), 3-6.; The Ukrainian Politburo, under Khrushchev’s direction, was pursuing these measures on a smaller scale as much as a year before the all-Union plan became official. See for example: PB no. 142/8 (August 23, 1947); PB no. 147/14z (October 6, 1947); PB no. 167/4z (June 12, 1948)
traces the transformation of the lower Dnipro River after WWII and examines the mechanisms behind the Kakhovka HES construction. Why was this project selected for such immense support and how did it become a centerpiece in the Soviet conquest of nature? Kakhovka’s place as one of the highly celebrated “Great Construction Projects of Communism” was not secured until the moment when it was announced on the pages of Izvestia in September 1950.\(^69\)

**The Planners: Water or Waterpower?**

Three key areas of tension emerge from the Ukrainian Politburo documents discussed below. The first is the balance between two sources of decision-making: Moscow and Kyiv. The discussion that resulted in the construction of Kakhovka HES provides insight into the relationship between Center and Republic in the Soviet Union. More specifically, it exposes the difficulties that Ukrainian officials faced when trying to interpret various priorities in Moscow and translate them into concrete projects. The second point of tension is between industry and agriculture. The interests of these two sectors both make claims for the Dnipro’s water: either for energy or for irrigation. The third theme that emerges is an awareness of the diverse physical geography of Soviet Ukraine and a concern for how best to manage it. The rhetoric of conquering nature is not unique to either the Soviet Union nor even the twentieth century.\(^70\) Nevertheless, these high-modernist values were tremendously important during the construction of the entire Kakhovka Complex. The fourth key issue that is presented below is Crimea. This discussion of Kakhovka took place several years before the peninsula was transferred from the

\(^69\) Ibid., 75.

Russian to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic in 1954. But Crimea appears here as a pivotal element of the argument made for Kakhovka. The shifting balance of these sometimes overlapping and sometimes conflicting interests re-drew the Dnipro River after World War II.

In 1940, Hydropower accounted for 14.2% of Soviet power production. DniproHES was the largest hydropower station in the Soviet Union until the late 1950s when significantly larger stations were built on the Volga River. The generators at DniproHES were destroyed by the retreating Nazi Army in 1943, so restoring the power station’s prewar capacity of 560 MW was a vital concern for both the Ukrainian and Soviet economies. Until 1949, DniproHES remained the focal point of power production in Soviet Ukraine. During the postwar reconstruction of Ukraine’s industrial and agricultural sectors, DneproHES shouldered the increasing electricity burden. In order to address rural electrification, regional committees were instructed to construct hundreds of small hydro and thermal power stations across the republic, but their total planned capacity was less than even one of DniproHES’s nine hydropower units. The first turbine was (re)started in March of 1947. Two more were in operation by the end of that year and in May of 1950, all 9 power units were operational. New higher capacity turbines replaced the ones damaged during the war, bringing the station’s installed capacity up to 650 MW. Even after the other five dams were added to the Dnieper, DniproHES still contributed more power to Ukraine’s energy grid than any other hydro-power station.

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71 Proposals to irrigate Crimea with water from the Dnipro actually appeared a century earlier, also in response to severe drought. But they were not pursued seriously until 1949.


73 See for example: PB No. 36/89 (March 23, 1944), PB No. 92/11 (June 6, 1946), PB No. 147/39z (October 11, 1947) in TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 6

74 Ukrainian Politburo No. 161/13z (March 3, 1948) in TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 6
In the summer of 1949, the Ukrainian Council of Ministers and party Central Committee, received directives from their Soviet counterparts from which to compose a ten-year plan for the construction of new power stations in the Ukrainian SSR. Their resolution from August 15 on the formulation of this ten-year plan for 1951-1960, provided the following aims: to create “a reliable energy base” that can ensure the healthy “development of all sectors of the national economy,” to provide power to industry, agriculture, and the railroad, and also to “best meet the municipal and everyday needs of the population of the republic.” The resolution appointed members to a commission tasked with drafting the ten-year plan on the basis of the Soviet directives, which were reproduced in full. These directives pointed to a backlog or delay in the construction of power stations, “especially hydropower stations.” The pressing need to overcome this “delay” had multiple meanings. Many of the stations built in the 1950s and 60s were the products of initial plans made in the 1930s, but these plans were interrupted by WWII and post-war recovery. Secondly, the post-war drive to rebuild industry and increase mechanization across all economic sectors required an energy sector that could keep up. Moreover, since DniproHES was built, the US produced three major hydropower stations, all three with capacities at least three times that of DniproHES: the Hoover Dam (1936), the Grand Coulee Dam (1942), and the John Day Dam (1949). Dam-building was a crucial element of cold war competition and the Soviet Union wanted to win the dam-wars in the 1950s.


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75 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1348: 28 (# PB 13/2)
76 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1348: 30-38
77 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1348: 30
78 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1348: 31
The rate of construction for “large” hydropower stations was specified as 4-5 years, while 3 years were allotted for “medium” hydropower stations. Stations designated as “major” or “large” had a capacity of more than 10 MW, “medium” or “average” stations were larger than 1 MW, while “small” stations are less than 1 MW. This should also provide a sense of the mega-scale of the stations built on the Dnieper river. Eight large stations on the Dniester, Dnieper, and Transcarpathian rivers were indicated as “most important” to the plan. This included two on the Dnieper, which, at about 300 MW each, were the only two planned stations to exceed 100 MW. To put all of these Mega Watts into terms that are easier to understand: an average urban household likely consumed about 6 MWh (Mega Watt hours) of electricity per year. That means that a power station with a capacity of 6 MW can produce that amount of electricity in an hour. Or a 300 MW station can produce enough electricity in one hour to power 50 households for a year.

With the exception of Khremenchuk, the locations and future capacities of these eight stations were specified, indicating reliance on previous research and discussions. The exact location of what would become Khremenchuk HES was not stated explicitly at this stage, suggesting that it was still under debate. Instead, the hydropower station was described as one that would be located “on the Dnepr River, above DniproGES, with a large reservoir for supplying energy to the Dnieper Region.”

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79 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1348: 37

80 This is based on the average annual consumption of an American residential customer in Hawaii in 2014 (Hawaii has the lowest average, which is why I chose it): https://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.cfm?id=97&t=3

81 This is a major over simplification because power stations, especially hydropower stations, never produce as much as their installed capacity.

82 PB No. 13/2 (August 15, 1949): 4
Dnieper was not the only Ukrainian river that was put to work. Ukrainian planners were also asked to consider constructing an additional ten large-to-medium hydropower stations on the Dniester, Desna, Stir, and Teterev rivers. Along with the other energy-related aims, the “irrigation of the dry regions of Southern Ukraine” was included among the first priorities dictated in the Soviet directives. The Ukrainian resolution left this line out of its first paragraph, where all of the other general aims were elaborated. This omission may have contributed to an initial underestimation of the centrality of irrigation to the energy plan. It should be noted that at this point Crimea had not yet been mentioned as the future recipient of the Dnipro’s water, only “the districts of the lower Dnepr” or the “dry districts of Southern Ukraine.”

Two days before the Politburo meeting on December 24, 1949, the special commission returned with their report and a draft ten-year plan. Their report, which they compiled with the scientific-technical expertise of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, indicated that in 1948 14.4% of the installed power capacity of Soviet Ukraine was hydropower, but hydropower actually produced only 12% of Ukraine’s electricity. By that time, industrial production had recovered to pre-war levels, but power production had only reached 75%. The deficit was especially significant in the western oblasts, but Kharkiv and the Donbass also suffered from significant power shortages. This deficiency may be overcome, they argued, by using the

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83 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1348: 30
84 PB No. 13/2 (August 15, 1949): 1
85 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1348: 30, 34
86 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1361: 56-121
87 It is common for hydropower to be used as an auxiliary power source during peak consumption periods or in case of an unforeseen outage.
88 A Short Geographical Note (for non-Soviet historians): Soviet Ukraine acquired a significant amount of new territory along its former western border as a result of WWII. Also, the “Donbass,” short for Donets River Basin, is a region in the far east of Ukraine (currently a war zone). It is known as a heavy industry and mining region.
“wealth of energy resources” and “significant reserves of hydraulic energy” that rivers possess, especially the Dnepr, Dniester, and Southern Bug Rivers.\textsuperscript{89}

The commission identified 3,100 MW of unutilized hydropower that could potentially be produced by stations on Ukrainian rivers. Of that, the six giant stations envisioned for the Dnipro accounted for 1,985 MW, or 64\% of the total unexploited hydropower potential.\textsuperscript{90} For the ten-year plan, they proposed the construction of two extra-large (over 100 MW), six large (over 10 MW), 57 medium (over 1 MW), and 1060 small hydropower stations. For the most part, these directly reflected the instructions they had received. Of the large and extra-large stations, two are on the Dnieper (600-700 MW total), five are in the far western oblasts (281 MW total), and the eighth proposed large station was near Odessa (48 MW total).\textsuperscript{91} Khremenchuk was now specifically named as the location of “Middle-Dnepro HES,” with a planned capacity of 400 MW.\textsuperscript{92} The Ukrainian commission promised to bring the first of Kremenchuk’s 12 power units online during 1955 and the first of Kakhovka’s six units in 1958.\textsuperscript{93}

The plan included a total of 13.2 billion rubles of capital investment in hydropower, which was over 2 billion more than the corresponding new investment in thermal energy. 71.8\% of this capital investment was expected to come from Moscow and much of it would quite literally end up in the Dnipro River.\textsuperscript{94} The commission predicted that a workforce of 90,000 people would be used to fulfill the ten-year energy plan, including 9,000 technical-engineering workers.\textsuperscript{95} The

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{89} TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1361: 57-58
\bibitem{90} TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1361: 58-59
\bibitem{91} TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1361: 116
\bibitem{92} This would be reduced to 300 in the ten-year plan, but then ultimately increased to 624 MW by the time construction on the station began in 1954.
\bibitem{93} TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 5, d. 1361: 88-89
\bibitem{94} TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 5, d. 1361: 120
\bibitem{95} TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 5, d. 1361: 94
\end{thebibliography}
manpower that transformed the Dnieper was primarily composed of “free” labor, as opposed to Gulag (prison camp) labor. Local labor also contributed heavily to these projects. This represents a significant contrast with the massive-scale hydro-engineering projects on the Volga and elsewhere in the Soviet Union. 96

In their draft plan, the Ukrainian special commission mentioned irrigation only once. It was included as one of the underlying factors of the plan but seems to have been associated with the electrification of agriculture generally. 97 This suggests that the energy commission may have considered their role in irrigation to be purely to provide the necessary electricity. Thus, irrigation was a projected outcome of the plan in their mind but was secondary to increasing Soviet Ukraine’s power resources. Their de-emphasis of irrigation was later revealed to be a miscalculation.

When the Ukrainian Politburo met on December 24, 1949 to discuss the proposals of its special commission, they were not the least bit pleased: “I believe that the commission arrived at their decision on the construction of the Kremenchuk and Kakhovka power stations absolutely incorrectly,” Comrade Korniets began, “Regarding the Kakhovka power station, the issue has been decided, about Kremenchuk the question remains as to whether or not it will be [built]. I am 99% sure that there will be no Kremenchuk station, but the commission is pushing it forward in the first plan. We need to put Kakhovka in the first plan and Kremenchuk in the second.” 98 Comrade Senin was in complete agreement. What concerned them most was that the commission had failed to coordinate their energy plan with a separate irrigation plan that was being developed at the same time. The two, Senin, emphasized, should be fully linked.

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97 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1361: 62
98 For the transcript of this meeting, see TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 6, d. 1319: 31-34
In the summer of 1947, Stalin gave Lazar Kaganovich orders to develop irrigation in the dry regions of Southern Ukraine. At that time Kaganovich was briefly the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine, replacing - and then being replaced by - Khrushchev. Throughout the late 1940s, the Ukrainian politburo was quite occupied with afforestation in response to “Stalin’s Plan for the Transformation of Nature.” Progress on the irrigation problem seems to have been slow, but work continued throughout 1948 and 1949. It was this irrigation plan that the energy commission had failed to take into account.

In this contest between Kremenchuk and Kakhovka, Kremenchuk meant energy, but Kakhovka meant water. Senin argued that Kremenchuk “could not occupy such a place in the planning of the national economy.” Moreover, he pointed out that in terms of simply generating more power, “our” DniproHES could in the future be used at its full capacity. The Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Vlasenko, suggested that they instead advance Kakhovka first and Kremenchuk second, which he claimed would provide a more effective solution to the problem at hand and reflect a better understanding of the priorities. Comrade Mel’nikov, who just one week earlier had replaced Khrushchev as the First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, decided that they would for the most part approve the proposed plan, but would also instruct the Council of Ministers to revise the energy plan with a fuller consideration of the irrigation needs in Southern Ukraine. He was not ready to abandon the Kremenchuk project, even for the next ten

99 See PB no. 139/5 (August 7, 1947) and PB no. 142/7 (August 23, 1947)
100 He also held this post in 1925-1928.
101 See for example: Ct no. 132/77 (November 5, 1948); PB no. 2/4z (February 8, 1949), etc.
102 PB no. 169/13 (June 28, 1948) and PB 8/3z (June 27, 1949)
103 TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 6, d. 1319: 32
104 TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 6, d. 1319: 32
years: “both the Kakhovka and Kremenchuk power stations are necessary for Ukraine.”

The key, according to Mel’nikov, would be in how the projects were presented. They needed to better reflect both the energy and water aims. In particular, he said, the two groups working on irrigation and energy absolutely could not go to the Soviet government with two different interpretations of the objectives: “There should necessarily be a link and a link will be found.”

The unspoken assumption behind their discussion was that although the Soviet directives had included two massive hydroelectric stations on the Dnieper, Stalin would want only one show project. Kremenchuk HES would indeed be constructed as part of the ten-year plan for the construction of power stations in the Ukrainian SSR, though in the second phase of the plan. It was ultimately Kakhovka’s name on the Soviet Council of Ministers decree № 4000, announced in Izvestiia on September 21, 1950. And it was Kakhovka that would be featured on Soviet posters and postage stamps as one of the “Great Construction Projects of Communism.”

During the Politburo discussion of the draft ten-year plan, Mel’nikov also included a comment that reflects meaningfully on his conception of the sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting priorities of water and energy. He described a “white spot” across southern Ukraine, where agriculture was not electrified. In contrast, he said, in the north and the west of Ukraine there is a lot of electricity. But, while an entire oblast in the north or west may provide 20 million poods of bread, a single raion in the south can provide up to 1.5 million poods: “I say this so that we very carefully consider the extent to which to occupy this fertile part [of Ukraine] with power stations.”

In the Soviet press, success in agricultural regions was often measured in terms of

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105 TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 6, d. 1319: 34

106 TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 6, d. 1319: 34

107 GARF, f. r-5446, op. 1, d. 434; Stalinskii Plan Preobrazovaniia Prirody. Velikie Stroiki Kommunizma: Sbornik Dokumentov, 75.

108 TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 6, d. 1319: 34
electrification and mechanization. Despite the persistence of backward agricultural methods in the fertile Ukrainian south, the First Secretary suggested that perhaps success should be measured in bread. Perhaps energy was not the all-powerful solution that Lenin predicted when he proclaimed: “Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country.”

Mil’nikov had good reason for concern. According to the initial plan, 219 thousand hectares (541,161 acres) of land fell within the flood zone, of which just over 20,000 acres around the city of Nikopol would be protected by dams before the rest was submerged under water between 1955-1958. This plan estimated that 75 settlements and 34,000 people would need to be relocated along with everything that falls within the umbrella of a settlement: schools, municipal buildings, cemeteries, parks and other leisure spaces. 26 industrial enterprises needed to be packed up, dismantled and moved, as did many miles of roads, railroad tracks, power and telephone lines. Significantly, 56.8 thousand hectares (140,356 acres) of fertile agricultural land and 63 thousand hectares (155,676 acres) of lightly forested land would also be lost.¹⁰⁹ In her work on the environmental history of the Ukrainian ‘Great Meadow’ [*Velikii Lug*], Anna Olenenko has shown that this initial plan for the Kakhovka reservoir included sacrificing 65% of the Dnieper floodplain [*plavni*]. Moreover, subsequent revisions to the plan expanded the total flood area by about 16% in order to reduce the high costs of protective dams.¹¹⁰ Annual spring floods provided the Dnieper floodplain with nutrient rich silt. Olenenko’s analysis of oral interviews conducted among the resettled population attests to the vital importance of this fertile land to local population. On top of the contribution that agricultural production in this area provided the Ukrainian and Soviet economy, for local residents it was also a source of

¹⁰⁹ These figures are taken from internal reports by the Soviet Ministry of Energy and Electrification held in RGAE and cited in Anna Olenenko, “‘Novoe Nashe More – Novoe Nashe Gore’: Konflik Mezhdou Ukrainskim I Sovetskим V Bor’be Za Konstruirovaniye Landshafa Nizhnego Podneprov’ia” *Ab Imperio* 2019, no. 1 (2019): 127.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 129, 42.
supplemental income during good years and a source of live-saving food during the difficult
eyears of the Holodomor (1932-1933), WWII, and the most recent famine in 1946-1947.111

As Mel’nikov requested, the resulting memo from the Ukrainian Council of Ministers to
the Soviet Gosplan regarding the ten-year plan for the construction of power stations brought
water to the forefront.112 Emphasizing the distinct benefits of each station, Kakhovka for water
and Kremenchuk for electricity, they made a compelling case to include both stations in the first
phase of construction. However, their arguments for Kakhovka were more compelling. The
memo indicated that the necessary research and technical design work for the Kremenchuk
station had already been conducted, which could allow construction to begin almost immediately.
In contrast, for Kakhovka this work still needed to be done, though research was underway to
select the precise dam site.113 The availability of technical plans for Kremenchuk, and not for
Kakhovka, is likely responsible for the original decision to push forward Kremenchuk in the first
stage of the plan and Kakhovka in the second. The most important addition to the revised plan
was the intention to use the Dnipro’s water to irrigate Crimea.

The memo explained that the future dam at Kakhovka would raise the water level of the
Dnipro by 15 meters, allowing gravity to help move water through the irrigation canals. This
water could irrigate over a million hectares of land (2.5 million acres) in the southern reaches of
the Dnipro and up to 200,000 hectares (495,000 acres) in Crimea. Despite gravitational
assistance, irrigation still requires electricity. Kakhovka HES would be connected with the
“Dneproenergy” power grid. Of the planned 250 MW power capacity of the station, about 200
MW could be added to the grid, but only during the fall and winter period when neither water nor

111 Based on an extensive oral history project conducted by the Zaporizhzhian branch of the Ukrainian National
Academy of Sciences for more than a decade beginning in 2000, see ibid., 134-35.
112 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1361: 100-107
113 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1361: 105
energy are being used to support irrigation. Between April and June, the energy needed for irrigation would be supplied in full by Kakhovka HES. But during the primary irrigation season, from July through September, diverting water to the canals instead of through the dam would reduce the power capacity of the station to only 76 MW. During this period, the canal system required an additional 170 MW from the Dneproenergy grid: “Consequently, Kakhovka HES, as primarily an irrigation facility, should be brought into operation in 1956 in order to fully exploit the lands intended for irrigation on the lower reaches of the Dnepr.”

Having established that Kakhovka HES would not at all address the increasingly urgent energy deficit in the Donbass and Dnieper industrial regions, the memo argued that it was necessary to build another station on the Dnieper, above DneproHES, also during the first phase of the ten-year plan. Included was a chart comparing the different possibilities: Dneprodzerzhinsk, Kaniv, Kiev, Kremenchuk, or even a series of small hydropower stations on the upper Dnipro. “By far the most effective, from the perspective of the national economy,” they claimed, was Kremenchuk HES. Among the various justifications provided, the most important was that the dam at Kremenchuk promised to increase the river’s flow rate during the summer months, when it is normally very low. This increase will benefit the water supply to Kakhovka’s irrigation canals, “connecting Southern Ukraine with Crimea.” As a result, the canals can provide water to 700,000 hectares of land in Crimea, rather than only 200,000 hectares without assistance from the Kremenchuk reservoir. Therefore, the final argument for including Kremenchuk HES in the energy plan was made in terms of irrigation instead of energy.

114 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1361: 102
115 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1361: 103
116 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1361: 104
117 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1361: 105
The massive reservoir at Kremenchuk would further divorce the Dnieper River from the seasonal fluctuations of mother nature. And finally, the Kremenchuk reservoir would more than double the projected area of newly irrigated land in Crimea. But at what cost?

The sales pitch that the Ukrainian Council of Ministers sent to the Soviet Gosplan included a significant caveat: “it should be noted that during the construction of the Kremenchuk waterworks, a reservoir will be formed that will flood a productive area of agricultural land, 115,000 hectares in total [284,171 acres of agricultural land], including: 20,000 ha. of cropland; 54,000 ha. of hayfields; 23,000 ha. of pastures for livestock; 18,000 ha. of farmsteads, orchards, and vegetable gardens and also 32,000 ha. of forests and shrubbery. 45,000 households with a total population of 159,000 people will fall under the water.” However, they added, “it seems possible to significantly reduce [the damage] by resettling the rural population from the flood zone to the [future] irrigated areas in the southern oblasts of the Ukr SSR, to benefit the most rapid cultivation.”

Sensing that Kremenchuk HES was slipping away from them, as Comrade Korniets claimed above, this “last-ditch” effort to link the station with irrigation in Crimea - or an increased area of irrigated land in general - may have secured its future. At the very least, the insertion of this argument suggests that Ukrainian planners and politicians thought that irrigating Crimea would be a particularly enticing benefit. The fact that Kremenchuk was not constructed until the second stage of the ten-year plan, after Kakhovka, supports my assertion that water and irrigation drove decision making. Kremenchuk’s role in irrigation depended on the existence of Kakhovka. Kremenchuk’s primary function of providing power to the Donbas and Dnieper

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118 I wish I had a similar statement about Kakhovka but am still looking and piecing this together. My sense so far is that the numbers for Kakhovka are smaller than for Kremenchuk, but still much larger than divulged in the press.

119 TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1361: 105
industrial centers, did not. Apparently, energy needs were not as urgent at this time as water needs, or at least not as persuasive. Of course, all of these plans and promises also depended on the construction of irrigation canals of virtually unprecedented scale.\textsuperscript{120} Post-war economic recovery in Crimea did not keep pace with neighboring regions. Needless to say, Stalin’s decision to “exchange” the Crimean Tatar population, deported \textit{en masse} in 1944, with Russian settlers who lacked the necessary local agricultural knowledge did not help. Crimean agriculture was failing. After witnessing the dire situation during a visit in 1953, Khrushchev immediately began negotiating the transfer of Crimea from Russian to Ukrainian jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{121} The contest for the Dnipro’s water described above – between water and energy – played out years before the peninsula officially changed hands, but it was this water (and waterpower) that Khrushchev had in mind.

\textbf{The Engineers: Seeing the River through the Eyes of Hydro-Engineers}

Based on the river’s physical geography, the Dnieper River is divided into three sections: the upper Dnieper from its source in western Russia to the city of Kiev, including the Pripiet, Sozh, Berezina, and Desna tributaries; the middle Dnieper from Kiev to the DniproHES dam in Zaporozhye; and the lower Dnieper from the DniproHES dam to its mouth on the Black Sea. For the purposes of hydro-energy research and development, the Dnieper River was divided into only two sections: “upper” located above Kiev, and “lower” below.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{120} The North Crimean Canal stretches for 250 miles from the Kakhovka reservoir to the city of Kerch on the farthest point of the Crimean Peninsula. It is supported by extensive additional branches throughout southern Ukraine and northern Crimea. Construction began in stages - from north to southeast - soon after the Kakhovka reservoir was filled in 1958. The Komsomol contributed substantially to the labor force responsible for the building the canal, which was completed in 1971. More recently, following the Russian annexation of Crimea in early 2014, water supply to the peninsula was turned off by Ukrainian authorities. As a result, Crimea’s agricultural harvest failed in 2014. Rice production was most heavily impacted.


\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Tekhnicheskii proekt. Fiziko-Geograficheskie usloviia}, 1952 in TsDNTA f. r-3, kom. 1-4, op. 1, d. 3, l. 16
Detailed scientific studies of the Lower Dnieper date from 1877. Research from this period was driven by shipping interests and focused on measuring fluctuations in water level.\textsuperscript{123} The infamous Dnieper Rapids were the primary impediment to navigation. Stretching for 70 km from Dnepropetrovsk (Ekaterinoslav) to Zaporozhye, the rapids were pacified in 1932 with the construction of the Lenin Dam and Dnieper Hydroelectric Station at Zaporozhye. In 1949, very little new research was being conducted. The Kakhovka project’s conception relied on hydrological data collected between 1926 and 1932, when hydrological research surged in connection with the construction of DniproHES. After 1933, scientific study of the Dnieper was severely reduced and by 1950 included only one Hydrometric Station (Razumovskya Station) on the Lower Dnieper and five gauging posts where water level was recorded. In the early years of the Kakhovka construction, scientists struggled to fill the gaps.\textsuperscript{124}

When the Ukrainian Council of Ministers sent their memo to the Soviet Gosplan about their ten-year plan for the construction of power stations in the Ukrainian SSR, they indicated that the necessary research and technical design work for the Kremenchuk station had already been conducted, which could allow construction to begin almost immediately. In contrast, for Kakhovka this work still needed to be done, though they said research was underway to select the precise dam site.\textsuperscript{125} The availability of technical plans for Kremenchuk, and not for Kakhovka, is likely responsible for the original decision to push forward Kremenchuk in the first stage of the plan and Kakhovka in the second.

This section examines the memoirs of two Soviet hydro-technical engineers who were

\textsuperscript{123} Tekhnicheskii proekt. Prilozhenie. Kniga 3. Otchiot o gidrometricheskikh rabotakh na Dnepre za 1950-1952 gg. 1952 in TsDNTA f. r-3, kom. 1-4, op. 1, d. 24, l. 10

\textsuperscript{124} Tekhnicheskii proekt. Prilozhenie. Kniga 3. Otchiot o gidrometricheskikh rabotakh na Dnepre za 1950-1952 gg. 1952 in TsDNTA f. r-3, kom. 1-4, op. 1, d. 24, l. 10

\textsuperscript{125} TsDAGO, f.1, op. 6, d. 1361: 105
responsible for the Kakhovka project in different capacities. They each tell the story of its construction. Both memoirs combine personal, professional, and institutional history, one of UkrGidroEnergoProekt and the other of DneproStroi. Both men dedicated a significant part of their professional lives to transforming the Dnieper river, including subsequent large-scale hydro-engineering projects. I am interested in how they tell their stories and what they found important. How did they perceive the river itself and their relationship to it? Most generally, these memoirs provide insight into the development of the Soviet energy infrastructure and the management of water resources as described by engineers on the ground at the Kakhovka construction site. The river described in these memoirs was not only a Soviet river, but one that was an integral part of the Soviet cultural, economic, and political geography. For these men, it was an important source of professional advancement. The Dnieper River represented a vital natural resource that would be needlessly wasted without their engineering expertise. It was a both a source of pride and recipient of their respect.

Dmitrii Andreevich Kuznetsov served as the director of UkrGidroEnergoProekt, a research and design firm specializing in hydro-engineering, from 1947-1965. It was under his leadership that much the Dnieper Hydroelectric Cascade was constructed, including the dams at Kakhovka, Dneprodzerzhinsk, Kremenchug, Kiev, and Kaniv. Kuznetsov’s pedigree is representative of the men who engineered rivers across the Soviet Union after WWII. He was born in Omsk in 1898 and then trained at the Polytechnic Institute in Leningrad. After graduation in 1929 he joined the engineering team that was responsible for irrigating the Vakhsh River Valley in the newly incorporated Tajik SSR. This gave him plenty of experience with the

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126 The institute underwent many name changes and other shifts. It was founded in 1927 as the Bureau of Water Research from departments originally part of the Dneprostroy construction firm. Eventually in 1962, it became the Ukrainian department of the Всесоюзный Проектно-Изыскательский и Научно-Исследовательский Институт “Гидропроект” имени С.Я. Жук (UkrGidroProekt), based in Kharkiv. http://www.nbuv.gov.ua/old_jrn/natural/Gu/2012_1/02-01-12.pdf
challenges posed by large-scale irrigation schemes. In 1934, the young Kuznetsov reported to the Vakhshstroii Shockworker that: “… by means of unskilled and destructive usage of water, by means of a singular striving toward the development of only the irrigation system, without the construction of a network of drainage canals and collectors, and moreover an indifferent attitude toward the questions of the drainage of waterlogged land, it is possible that, in a short period of time, the Vakhsh Valley will be transformed into ‘Death Valley’…” Even early in his career, Kuznetsov articulated a clear sense of the wrong and right way to use water. Kuznetsov rose up the ranks, becoming the chief engineer of the Vakhsh irrigation project. He would later be highly celebrated for his extensive contribution to engineering the Dnieper and developing hydropower and irrigation on the river. Kuznetsov was given the honorary title of “Hero of Socialist Labor” and twice awarded the “Order of Lenin.”

Kuznetsov wrote his memoir, *From the Vakhsh to the Dnepr*, shortly after his retirement from *UkrGidroEnergoProekt* in 1965.

It was published in 1972 as part of a series of memoirs written by war veterans. Of the two memoirs discussed here, Kuznetsov’s writing style is much more lyrical. He expresses a romantic and emotional connection with the river. At the same time, he describes the river in its natural state as extremely wasteful. Furthermore, throughout the memoir, Kuznetsov emphasizes the uniqueness of each large-scale hydropower project, both on the Dnieper and across the Soviet Union. The diverse engineering challenges faced at each site and their creative solutions come across in his text as a major source of pride. This image of distinctiveness in the sphere of hydro-engineering “show projects” counters the perception that

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127 Quoted in Maya Peterson, "Technologies of Rule: Empire, Water, and the Modernization of Central Asia, 1867-1941" (Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University, 2011), 483. Although Peterson identifies the writer only as “an engineer named Kuznetsov,” with no other information, likely because nothing further was provided in the article. The date and context suggest that the article was written by Dmitry Andreevich.

128 Dmitrii A. Kuznetsov, *Ot Vakhsha Do Dnepra*, Zapiski Veterana (Kharkov: Prapor, 1972). At that time the institute was called UkrGidroProekt.
Soviet planners applied the same models—whether for dams or for irrigation systems—to very different landscapes across the Soviet republics. The ability of engineers to adapt their designs mediated the effects of such simplification.

Kuznetsov introduced most of his central themes in his opening remarks. Here he urged readers to take the time to travel along the full length of the Dnieper river in Ukraine. Passing through six “artificial seas,” he wrote, “all along the way you will be greeted by white-feathered gulls and the sails of fishermen. You will come through wide locks, which will raise and release you and the ship, like on the steps of a huge water staircase. You will see six unique hydropower stations, with dams that tightly block the Dnieper. And you will see how extensively the iron structures of high-voltage transmission lines with heavy garlands of insulators and conducting wires hanging down—have advanced into the steppe. Look closely at all of this and bow down to the intellect, will, and energy of people and their feats of labor.”129 For Kuznetsov, the river is at its most beautiful in this engineered state, bound by concrete and shaped by human intervention.

“What’s wrong with the Dnieper in its natural state?” Kuznetsov asked. He quoted Gogol’s famous description of the river from *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka*: “it is splendid during calm weather and only a rare bird can manage to reach the middle (of this wide river)” and also Shevchenko’s even more famous verse: “The wide Dnieper roars and moans.” It is not a coincidence that both of Kuznetsov’s nineteenth century literary points of reference emphasize the river’s breadth. The Kakhovka reservoir significantly expanded this feature of the river, but it was not always viewed in a positive light. Foreign visitors to the Russian Empire in the 17th-19th centuries consistently criticized the empire’s geography for its unbroken vastness, including its wide rivers that meandered across the flat landscape.130 In the nineteenth century, writers such

129 Ibid., 3.

130 Ely provides the example of Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, a French historian of Imperial Russia and geographical determinist who wrote in the 19th century that “[t]he very size of the rivers impairs their beauty…”,” quoted in Ely,
as Gogol and Shevchenko reinvented their native landscape as a source of national pride, rather
than backwardness.131 After introducing this romanticized vision of the river - laden with cultural
significance - Kuznetsov pushed it aside. “Yes, it is a mighty, deep river. But let us look at it
through the eyes of a hydraulic engineer.”132

On many occasions, Kuznetsov passionately professes the paramount significance of
water generally. “Water - it is life. It is both a worker and the life-giving source of our strength
and health.”133 Here Kuznetsov makes the analogy between the river and a good Soviet worker
explicit. For him, this is the Dnieper’s role and duty to Soviet society. He dedicates an entire
chapter to this theme, titled: “Water Should be Cherished.”134 The demand for water increases
every year, he points out. Kuznetsov seems to suggest that it is best for the “natural” river to
exist only in literature and the cultural imagination. As one of the “great Russian rivers”
[russkikh], the Dnieper is an exceptional source of water, for irrigation and hydropower. Before
the Kakhovka Hydropower Complex was constructed, “All of this huge mass of water was
released into the sea, without reaping those benefits that it could have reaped.”135

This acute fear of wasting the river’s valuable resource comes across very strongly in the
memoir. With the Kakhovka project, controlling the flow of the river was the most important
aim, more important than providing electricity.136 This represents a major shift from the
construction of DniproHES, the symbol of Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan. Controlling nature is

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This Meager Nature, 17.

131 See ibid.

132 Kuznetsov, Ot Vakhsha Do Dnepra, 28. Gogol’s collection was written in 1829-32 and published in 1832. Taras
Shevchenko’s verse comes from his poem, “The Bewitched Woman” [Prychnyna], 1837.

133 Ibid., 6.

134 Ibid., 76-98.

135 Ibid., 28.

136 Ibid., 50.
certainly not new in the post-war period, but it becomes a primary, rather than secondary aim. Until a station with another massive reservoir was built in 1954-1960 at Kremenchuk, above Zaporizhia, DniproHES generated power that was almost entirely dependent on the natural flow of the river, making it unreliable. It was the regulation of this variability that drove hydro-engineering on the Dnieper in the post-war period. Significantly, Kuznetsov refers to the DniproHES as the “first-born” of “our” hydropower engineering sector. Thus, in his geographical imagination, the river and its transformation were part of his Soviet, if not Russian, patrimony. This conception was likely strengthened by the professional trajectory of hydro-engineers like Kuznetsov, which involved moving from project to project across the entire Soviet Union. However, Kuznetsov did in fact spend an extraordinary amount of time working on the Dnieper River specifically. He seems to have developed a special personal affinity for the river and his work there while at the same time seeing this work as fully integrated into a larger Soviet enterprise.

As Kuznetsov frequently repeated throughout his memoir, from the point of view of a hydro-engineer no two hydropower stations were the same and there were no standard models. In a significant way, this lack of commonality distinguishes hydropower stations from other types of power plants, which are much less influenced by their geographical setting. In this sense, he wrote, hydropower stations “may be compared with original works of art, which are always unique.” In the case of Kakhovka GES, sand was the source of this singularity and the headaches of hydro-engineers. The dam and station had to be built on sand and often on wet sand (quicksand). In these difficult circumstances, Kuznetsov suggested that “there were few who

137 Ibid., 69.

138 Ibid., 72-73.
believed that such a mighty river could be blocked.”\textsuperscript{139} But indeed it was. As Kuznetsov describes his experience designing each station on the Dnepr, he describes the unique obstacles faced at each site and the innovative solutions that hydro-engineers devised to overcome them. Further problems arose during the planning phase for Kakhovka’s massive reservoir. Original plans involved protecting the cherished Konskii Wetlands from inundation, but because these protective measures added 150 million rubles to the project budget, the wetlands were lost underwater.\textsuperscript{140}

Petr Stepanovich Neporozhnii was a generation younger than Kuznetsov but his early pedigree followed a similar pattern. His memoirs of these years were likely written sometime shortly after his retirement in 1985. The material discussed here was published in 1999 with diaries of his professional life.\textsuperscript{141} The diary entries do not begin until later in his career, so the text pertaining to Kakhovka is written as a memoir rather than a diary. Neporozhnii was born in 1910 to a peasant family in Yahotyn, Kyiv oblast. Like Kuznetsov he was trained as a hydro-technical engineer and gained professional experience in Central Asia. Even before this highly specialized training, young Petr’s appetite for hydro-engineering was whet on the DniproHES construction site: “At that time, many people were eager to participate in the construction of this giant of Soviet hydro-engineering. I was lucky enough, while still a student, to have worked on Dneprostroi as a simple builder.”\textsuperscript{142}

Compared with the nearly two decades that Kuznetsov dedicated to transforming the river, Neporozhnii spent much less of his career engineering the Dnieper. But those few years

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 38.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 46-47.


\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 19.
had a dramatic effect on his professional trajectory. Neporozhnii was appointed the Chief Engineer of the Dneprostroi hydro-engineering construction company in 1950, then under the direction of Sergei N. Andrianov. Having recently completed the post-war reconstruction of DniproHES, by late 1950 the firm was entirely engaged with the Kakhovka construction. The relationship he developed with Nikita Khrushchev while constructing Kakhovka HES would lead to a two-decade tenure as the Soviet Minister of Energy. Acknowledged as the mastermind of Soviet energy development, Neporozhnii was a four-time recipient of the Order of Lenin and winner of the Lenin Prize, among many other accolades.

Although Neporozhnii’s memoirs describing these years (1950-1954) are entirely dedicated to the construction at Kakhovka, the river itself occupies a different place than it did in Kuznetsov’s memoirs. Like Kuznetsov, Neporozhnii confirmed that the overarching aim at that time was to regulate and regularize the flow of the Dnieper, over energy production or navigation. Aside from the future Minister’s purely narrative (less lyrical) writing style, the contrast with Kuznetsov - who placed the river at the heart of his memoir - is striking. Kuznetsov’s broader, “big picture” view is absent. Instead, Neporozhnii only saw the river from the bottom of the construction pit. His view is narrower, less abstract and less romantic.

Neporozhnii did spend a significantly shorter amount of time on the river’s banks, but the two hydro-engineers also played different roles on the worksite. While Kuznetsov had to adapt his designs to geographical peculiarities that the physical landscape presented, Neporozhnii was much more concerned with the logistics of construction. Kuznetsov went on to construct other dams along the length of the river in Soviet Ukraine, while Neporozhnii’s experience was limited to the Kakhovka project.

When Neporozhnii arrived at the work site, excavation was already underway. He immediately introduced a series of changes that were met with skepticism by Andrianov.
According to Neporozhnii, he quickly convinced Andrianov and the two worked well together from then on.\textsuperscript{143} His early mentors had advised him to spend as much time as possible directly at the worksite. Taking this advice to heart, the Chief Engineer moved detailed drafting work into the construction pit. This, he claimed, eliminated accusations of unwarranted delays. He held most of his meetings there as well.\textsuperscript{144}

Neporozhnii’s account of the Kakhovka construction focused on the problems he faced and subsequently resolved. The construction took place in an era dominated by what he called the “cult of concrete.” The engineer overcame an insufficient supply of gravel and stones (used to make concrete out of cement) and shortage of wood for framework with an approach he described with military terminology: “offensive actions on all fronts.”\textsuperscript{145} The lack of a master plan for the construction, which should reflect the specific schedule dictated by the party and government, was handled in a similar proactive fashion.

Although Neporozhnii reported that work generally went well, he considered it important to note the negative side of such fast-paced construction. The giant regulating reservoir - the Kakhovka Sea - was a particular cause for concern. He noted that the creation of regulating reservoirs - those on the Dnieper and on the Volga - involved excessive flooding of land. Although he does not make this distinction himself, in contrast to hydro-engineering projects in other parts of the world, such as the American west, the Soviets build dams on a lot of relatively flat rivers, significantly increasing the necessary reservoir surface area. As a result, he explained, the Kakhovka Sea and other similar manmade reservoirs produced a large area of very shallow water. These shallows bred blue-green algae that killed many species of native fish. Furthermore,

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 20.

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 20-21.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 20.
he added, relative to the area of land lost, the volume of water in these shallow areas did not add significantly to the reservoir’s total capacity.\footnote{Ibid., 21.}

It is likely that this criticism reflects hindsight rather than foresight, since the engineer left the worksite in 1954 to begin his political rise before the reservoir was filled. Toward the end of that year, Khrushchev personally visited the construction site. On several occasions, according to Neporozhnii’s account, the Soviet leader asked for his opinion on construction issues of regional and national significance. The following day Neporozhnii was summoned to Kiev where Khrushchev revealed that he had appointed the engineer as the new Deputy Chief of the Ukrainian Council of Ministers. Neporozhnii protested, he claimed, on grounds that there was still work to be done on the Kakhovka site and after that he would be needed on the construction sites of the other stations planned for the Dnepr cascade of dams. Nevertheless, the engineer’s days in the Kakhovka construction pit came to an end. Within the Ukrainian Council of Ministers, he was put in charge of the construction of power stations, broadly speaking. Over the course of the First Secretary’s frequent trips to Kiev, the two developed a close personal relationship.\footnote{Ibid., 21-22.}

It was both surprising and disappointing to me that the engineer - Neporozhnii - whose childhood geographical imagination would have included the Dnieper did not express any cultural or social associations with the river in his memoirs dedicated to his radical physical transformation of the river. It was also surprising that he chose to lament the ecological effects without specifically mentioning the enormous population that was also affected. In contrast, the cultural and social significance of the river was important to Kuznetsov. Nevertheless, he associated the Dnieper with the broader Soviet landscape. Both men were committed to
regulating and controlling the river’s flow and trusted that hydro-engineering could provide solutions to all problems, except budgetary ones. In the end, the wide and mighty river proved to be an important source of their professional successes.

**Irrigated Land = National Wealth**

The December 1963 issue of Kommunist Ukrainy included a fiery article, titled “Irrigated Land - National Wealth.” This article provides a very specific narrative of the conception of Kakhovka HES, summarized below:

As the First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party since 1938, Nikita Khrushchev had acquired detailed local knowledge of the complexities involved in promoting agriculture in Ukraine. After the republic was engulfed by a catastrophic drought in 1946, he threw his energies into the development of farmland irrigation in the southern regions. His proposal included the Kakhovka reservoir and hydroelectric station, which would use the flow of the Dnepr River to rescue 600 thousand hectares (about 1.5 million acres) of dry land in the Kherson, Zaporozhye and Crimean oblasts. It is therefore, Khrushchev whose personal initiative brought the gigantic Kakhovka complex into existence to serve the Ukrainian Republic. The project, however, would first have to survive Stalin’s internecine political games in Moscow. With the full support of the Ukrainian Politburo, Khrushchev’s Kakhovka proposal was put into the hands of Stalin and then Malenkov and Beria, both newly minted members of the Soviet Politburo at that time. Declaring that he represented Stalin’s point of view, Malenkov blocked the Ukrainian proposal at the next Soviet Council of Ministers meeting. To support this decision, as if Stalin’s approval was not enough, Malenkov claimed that the country, ostensibly, would never agree to the immense capital investments that the Kakhovka proposal required. Thus, the project that would save Ukraine was destroyed by Stalin, Malenkov, and Beria.
However, less than a year later, this time presented as if by Stalin’s initiative, the Kakhovka hydroelectric and irrigation project was announced. This new plan, written in Moscow, required several times greater capital investment compared to the earlier Ukrainian proposal. The technical plan of the canal system was flawed at its core, making it impossible to regulate the flow of the Dnepr and control run-off. Despite the much larger price tag, the construction of Kremenchug GES was left out of the new plan entirely, severely damaging the future of energy development in the Ukrainian South. Moreover, in the context of other giant irrigation projects - the Main Turkmen Canal and various worksites on the Volga - that were initiated at that same time, available funds were bound to fall short of the necessary budget. Generally, this approach to solving complex problems with ‘one fell swoop’ is characteristic of Stalin, who is himself divorced from the local realities of life.148

With a lack of subtly characteristic of this type of Soviet source, which tends not to let its readers forget its political context, the author argued that in the post-war period through 1953, the development of irrigation in Ukraine suffered “serious damage” and “gross errors” due to the climate of Stalin’s cult of personality.149 In 1953 a new stage in this development began, which was characterized by the “correction of mistakes.”150 A quick review of what Khrushchev, Stalin, Beria, and Malenkov were doing in December 1963 - when the article was published - will find that Khrushchev is ruling the Soviet Union, Stalin is of course dead, as is Beria, though of less-natural causes. Malenkov has been expelled from the party and exiled to Kazakhstan, where - as fate would have it - he became the manager of a hydroelectric station. It seems that in “The Kakhovka Affair,” Khrushchev got the last laugh.151 Although the heroes and villains of

149 Ibid., 9.
150 Ibid., 10.
151 Sidney Ploss used there term “The Kakhovka Affair” to describe the political sparring over Kakhovka HES in
“Irrigated Land - National Wealth” reflect the political landscape of 1963 it does provide some important insights. First and foremost, the Dnieper River was an important political arena. Its transformation was shaped by negotiations between Ukraine and Soviet leadership in Moscow. During his time in Ukraine, Khrushchev did become a passionate agriculturist. He travelled throughout the republic speaking with soil scientists and farmers in an effort to understand and improve agricultural practices. The article shows us that the transformation of the Dnipro was perceived to be driven as much by political rivalries as by economic needs, and even less by empirical knowledge. Stalin’s strategy of using infighting among his ‘lieutenants’ to defend his position at the top is well documented. In agricultural policy, Khrushchev’s “empiricism” may be contrasted with Malenkov and Beria’s “doctrinaire” view from afar.¹⁵²

In becoming a Soviet showpiece, the Kakhovka project and its inception story also became political tools that were coopted to reflect current political circumstances. Published in 1963 as ecological problems with the reservoir became more and more visible, “Irrigated Land – National Wealth” reminded Soviet readers, and especially Soviet Ukrainian readers, that at heart the Kakhovka project meant irrigating the Ukrainian heartland. The article suggested that the positive outcomes were thanks to Khrushchev while Stalin and his inner circle should be blamed for the negative outcomes. Moreover, the article suggested that a special link existed between the Ukrainian nation and land transformed by the water of their national river.

Conclusions

This examination of the Soviet conception of nature reassesses the Soviet “war on nature”

¹⁵² Until early 1949, the Soviet Gosplan was headed by Nikolai Voznesensky, a fellow “empiricist” whose agricultural policies generally aligned with Khrushchev’s own views. Stalin removed Voznesensky from Gosplan’s leadership in March and removed Khrushchev from Ukraine by December, recalling him to Moscow.
and introduces another side to this persistent metaphor, prompting a revised understanding of Soviet policies toward nature in general. Not only was the natural environment considered to be a worthy and esteemed adversary, but it was also viewed as a valuable ally. Water was highly respected both for its economic and cultural significance. Therefore, the narrative of a Soviet battle against nature should be seen instead as a battle against unproductive nature. The planners and the engineers involved in developing the Dnieper River articulated an overarching goal of making water productive and putting it to work. Their conception of nature in its natural state as wasteful came not, I argue, from a conflict between the state’s broad view from above and local knowledge on the ground. Instead, it was fostered by their working relationship with nature, with the Dnieper River. The engineers in particular provided a certain type of local knowledge and adapted centrally prescribed projects to reflect local conditions onsite.

The Kakhovka Complex was made possible by the intersection of water and energy needs. The discussion of its conception demonstrates that irrigation, rather than power production, became the most productive use of the Dnieper’s natural resources at this time. Although Kakhovka HES and its gigantic “sea” were presented as products of energy development in Ukraine, it was irrigation that drove the project forward. Electricity was a brilliant symbol of civilizational transformation, but it was water as an agricultural resource rather than waterpower that drove decision making in this period. The story of Kakhovka’s conception suggests a revision of the Soviet emphasis on industry over agriculture. Transforming the Dnieper river into a modern engineered waterway required planners and politicians to negotiate a balance between the two. Although urgent claims for the Dnieper’s water were made on behalf of both sectors, ultimately preference was given to the interests of agriculture. Specifically, the opportunity to use water to irrigate agricultural land was more important than using it to provide power to the surrounding industrial regions. Benefits to Crimean agriculture were introduced into the project
and were clearly considered to add significant value. Finally, the reluctance of Ukrainian authorities to “occupy” fertile agricultural land with power stations, suggests that irrigation and energy production were not equally valued. Perhaps this reveals a shift in the high-modernist values of the era when viewed from the Soviet borderlands.

There proved to be another reason that made the sands of Kakhovka an attractive choice of location for the huge dam and hydropower station. This river city was the site of a decisive battle in 1920 between the Red Army and Wrangel’s White Army troops during the Civil War. The battle entered the Soviet popular imagination in 1935 when Mikhail Svetlov’s, “Song of Kakhovka” was used prominently in the film, Three Comrades. After WWII, the ‘Great Patriotic War’ dominated literary and cultural production for at least a decade and the Civil War also made a major thematic comeback. The symbolic link between the military victory at Kakhovka and the battle against nature waged on the Hydropower construction site surely contributed to the project’s appeal. In the early – mid 1950s, writers and artists reinforced this association in their works, such as Oles’ Honchar’s Civil War dilogy, Tavria (1952) and Perekop (1957). Both the Civil War in Ukraine and the Soviet conquest of nature after World War II were not only about defeating an enemy, but also about transforming an enemy into an ally.
Addressing the writers assembled at Maxim Gorky’s home on 26 October 1932, Stalin raised his glass to these “engineers of the soul,” as he famously called the producers of Soviet culture. Over the subsequent two years, Gorky would establish the vague - but perilous - boundaries of ‘Socialist Realism.’ As the designation “engineers of the soul” implies, Soviet leadership was acutely aware of the transformative power of cultural products. For that reason, cultural production was - in many ways - more closely regulated than the planned economy. In conjunction with the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932) and its major achievements, Soviet writers composed something of an extensive ‘hydro-engineering library’ designed to glorify the era’s show projects, including the Dnieper Hydropower Station (DniproHES) and the White Sea-Baltic Canal (Belomor). Later overshadowed by the gigantic scale of Stalin’s post-war nature transformation ambitions, much of Stalin’s revolution from above was aimed at engineering water and waterways, prompting the saying, “Soviet rivers they do flow / Wherever the Bolsheviks want them to go.” As the chief architect of Socialist Realism, Gorky was also the library’s chief librarian. Key early items in Gorky’s ‘library’ include Fyodor Gladkov’s densely technical Energy (1932) about the construction of DniproHES, Konstantin Paustovsky’s Kara Boga (1932), and the collectively authored Belomor (1934), which was organized and edited by Gorky. Describing canal construction in heroic terms, Belomor became a model for writers to emulate across the Soviet Union.

Long before construction of a new hydropower complex began at Kakhovka on the Dnieper river, a large state-sponsored propaganda campaign was launched, aimed at legitimizing

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153 Westerman used the phrase, “waterworks library,” see Westerman, Engineers of the Soul: The Grandiose Propaganda of Stalin’s Russia, 126-29.

154 Quoted in ibid., 127.
the project. On the very same day that the Soviet Council of Ministers announced the future project on the pages of Izvestiia, the Ukrainian Writers’ Union held a meeting in Kyiv to discuss their plans to glorify this enormous feat of hydro-engineering.\footnote{TsDAMLM, f. 590 (Writers’ Union), op. 1, d. 119, st. 1-49.} With that, Gorky’s hydro-engineering library swelled. Published in 1951 and edited by A. Kotliar, \textit{On the Kakhovka Bridgehead [Na Kakhovskom Platsdarme]} reproduced the template left by Gorky’s Belomor while also linking the project to the heroic Red Army victory on that spot during the Civil War.\footnote{The edited volume is cited and discussed by Olenenko, but she does not mention the link with the Civil War and the symbolism of the Civil War metaphor, see Olenenko, "‘Novoe Nashe More – Novoe Nashe Gore’: Konflıkt Mezhdu Ukrainskim I Sovetskim V Bor’be Za Konstruirovenie Landshafsya Nizhney Podneprov’ya " 145.} In fact, the significance of the Civil War metaphor was raised at the Writers’ Union planning meeting on 21 September 1950.\footnote{TsDAMLM, f. 590 (Writers’ Union), op. 1, d. 119, st. 22.}

Oleksandr Dovzhenko was a true believer in the Soviet Experiment at a time when being a true believer was not enough to escape persecution. Despite suffering throughout his entire adult life under Stalinist cultural politics, Dovzhenko’s diaries attest to a sincere belief in Stalin’s good intentions.\footnote{Dovzhenko penned private diary entries from 1941-1956, sometimes sporadically. Heavily redacted and selected versions began to be published in the Soviet Union soon after the filmmaker’s death in 1956. Whenever possible I have chosen to quote Carynnyk’s English translation based on the texts available in the 1950s and 1960s. Because these are incomplete, I have been careful to also consult the complete versions published recently in Russian and Ukrainian. Therefore, I will quote from that edition, with my own translation, when important text is missing from Carynnyk’s collection.} In his diaries and private conversations (often recorded by state security agents), Dovzhenko expressed reservations about how Bolshevism was implemented by functionaries “on the ground,” but he remained enthusiastic about the Communist future until his death of a heart attack on 26 November 1956. Dovzhenko was recognized at home and abroad as one of the brightest lights of early Soviet cinema, together with Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Dziga Vertov. In this chapter, I describe how the Dnieper River became a
powerful symbol of Soviet Ukraine for Dovzhenko and central to his perception of Ukrainian national geography. Although Dovzhenko was born on the banks of a different Ukrainian river and lived outside of Ukraine most of his adult life, he recognized the unifying power of the Dnieper. Above all else, Dovzhenko was driven to build a Ukrainian national culture, distinct from Russian culture but firmly within the larger Soviet project. He considered the nature and geography of his native land to be an integral component of this project. His profound love for Ukrainian nature is abundantly evident in both his creative work and private diaries. Despite critical acclaim for his films and Stalin’s attentive patronage, Dovzhenko was incessantly hounded by accusations of nationalism. His celebration of Ukrainian nature was frequently cited, among other ideological mistakes. The vast majority of his creative work was set in Ukraine, on Ukrainian soil. One could say that he set ideologically correct themes against the background of the Ukrainian landscape. However, even from the background, the Ukrainian landscape shown more brightly than the prescribed Socialist Realist themes. This was the crux of Dovzhenko’s problems with the Soviet authorities and cultural apparatus.

Dovzhenko contributed two films to Gorky’s ‘hydro-engineering library.” *Ivan* (1932) followed the transformation of the film’s titular character as he transformed the Dnieper river on the DniproHES construction site. 20 years later, Dovzhenko began research for a film to celebrate the ‘Great Construction Project of Communism’ underway on the lower stretches of the Dnieper. Sensing that this film would be his last major project, Dovzhenko hoped it would be the crowning achievement of his career: “This must be a titanic film. Everything holy within me, all my experience and talent, my thoughts, my wishes, and even my dreams — all for the film.”

Both films also represent the experience of millions of Ukrainians who left their rural life behind

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for a new urban, industrial life. In particular, three things drew Dovzhenko to the construction site at Kakhovka in southern Ukraine. The first was the creation of a manmade inland sea of unprecedented proportions. Although the Kakhovka HES dam would also produce hydropower, it was the massive reservoir and planned irrigation canals that excited Dovzhenko. The resulting picture, *Poem of the Sea* (1958), was filmed by his wife and cinematic partner, Yulia Solntseva, following Dovzhenko’s sudden death. The “sea” in Dovzhenko’s title refers to the vast reservoir, which was commonly known as the Kakhovka Sea because of its immense surface area, held back by the hydropower dam. Dovzhenko did not live to see the full ecological impact of the reservoir and thus his writing was infused with a sense of hope for the future of Ukraine. Both of Dovzhenko’s two final projects, *The Enchanted Desna* and *Poem of the Sea*, have been credited with inspiring the school of Russian village writers in the 1960s. Like the writers associated with this group, such as Valentin Rasputin, Dovzhenko celebrated modernization while mourning the loss of traditional culture. Many of Dovzhenko’s works celebrate the cycles and rhythms of the natural world. He wrote about filling the reservoir in almost biblical terms, somewhere between the seasonal floods and the deluge described in the Book of Genesis. For Dovzhenko this great Dnieper flood would pave the way for renewal on a grand scale. In this case, the river waters would not ever subside, but would instead provide the catalyst to remake Soviet Ukraine. Dovzhenko was captivated by the scale of nature transformation involved in this project.

Dovzhenko was also drawn to the Kakhovka HES construction project because it involved building a new, model Soviet city and urban landscape on the banks of the Dnieper.

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161 Alternatively translated as “Poem of an Inland Sea”.

River. The filmmaker was not content to be ‘merely’ an “engineer of the soul.” In his Autobiography from 1939, Dovzhenko wrote: “I have always believed that a person cannot be an artist without a passionate love of nature. This applies to other professions too, especially today when we need to rebuild almost everything, including all the cities, when for the first time the sciences, particularly architecture and engineering, have the opportunity to be in harmonious union with nature for the benefit of man.” Dovzhenko had a lot of ideas for the built and natural environments along the new contours of the river, even presenting some of them to Sergei Andrianov. Andrianov was the head of Dneprostroi, the hydropower construction company founded in 1927 to build a cascade of dams along the Dnieper river, beginning with DniproHES and including the complex at Kakhovka. Dovzhenko claimed Andrianov responded positively to his proposals for the “artistic design” of the dam, canals, and various buildings.

The following day, Dovzhenko noted in his diary: “Must advise Andrianov to redesign the roof on the recreation building. The roof should be flat, with trees in tubs and a dance floor. Then this will be a favorite spot for young people to admire the scenery — the Dnieper, Cossack Island, the dam, and the reservoir.” Despite Dovzhenko’s desire to directly apply his love of Ukrainian nature to engineering the world around him, he was left frustrated that his ideas were not taken more seriously. Lamenting his continued failure to get his proposals approved, Dovzhenko wrote: “I rebuild the world in my imagination.” This theme pervades his diaries but is most prevalent during his time in Nova Kakhovka, the city founded in 1952 in conjunction with the Kakhovka HES project.

The third aspect of the Kakhovka construction that attracted Dovzhenko was its emphasis

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164 Ibid., 183. (diary entry: 8 September 1952)
165 Ibid., 183-84. (diary entry: 9 September 1952)
166 Ibid., 177. (diary entry: 13 July 1952)
on irrigation. As described in the Introduction to this dissertation, Dovzhenko called attention to this particular benefit in his film scenario for Poem of the Sea. The filmmaker frequently expressed his own views through the positive characters in his movies. In this case he spoke through the character of General Fedorchenko who responds to local skepticism about the scope of the Kakhovka project saying, “Yes, but our sea is not a matter of energy in the usual sense. It is primarily about irrigation, that is, the life and well-being of our South.” More broadly, Dovzhenko’s vision of Ukraine was grounded (pun intended) in the fertility and productivity of its rich soil. Therefore, in Dovzhenko’s mind, the entire project took on an intrinsically national character. Dovzhenko’s biographers all note his ubiquitous celebration of Ukrainian earth. However, the significance of water and rivers in Dovzhenko’s imagined geography of Ukraine has been vastly underestimated. In the summer of 1954, towards the end of an extended tenure on the banks of the lower Dnieper and while completing the scenario for Poem of the Sea, Dovzhenko wrote: “The year before last it occurred to me to make several art films at the same time over a five-year period. I would film Ukraine along its rivers. One film would show the Dnieper, another the Psyol, Vorskla, Cheremosh, and Buh. I would depict the life of the river: the river in summer, autumn, winter, and spring; river of working days and holidays; river of children and old men; river of girls; river of labor; river of fishermen; river of history; river of heroic deeds; river of songs. Each river has its own songs, and they must all be heard.”

**Dovzhenko’s Geographic Imagination**

Dovzhenko first visited the construction site at Kakhovka in November of 1951. In early September 1952 he took up residence there and stayed on and off for two years until he

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permanently moved back to Moscow in December 1954. Dovzhenko returned to Kakhovka for a month in mid-1955 to celebrate the dedication of the hydropower station. With the exception of WWII, his extended residence in Kakhovka was his first in Ukraine since his exile to Moscow in November 1932. Like Taras Shevchenko before him, Dovzhenko was tortured by intense longing for his native land. His persistent attempts to officially relocate were never successful. By setting his films in Ukraine he was permitted to travel throughout the republic. Dovzhenko’s diaries are comprised of 25 distinct notebooks of varying lengths, which overlap chronologically but range from 1941-1956. Nearly half of this material is dedicated to his time in Kakhovka/Nova Kakhovka and the creative endeavors he pursued there. Woven together with his research for *Poem of the Sea* are notes for a national/folk epic novel set on the Dnieper River and other unrealized projects. During this time, he also completed the final draft of *The Enchanted Desna*, which is considered to be Dovzhenko’s most directly autobiographical work. There are, however, elements of autobiography in all of his works, especially those set in Ukraine.

This southern stretch of the Dnieper river had an immense impact on Dovzhenko. His diaries reveal a complex imagined geography of Ukraine, which combines his personal geography with his national geography. The Dnieper unites each of these places. Not long after settling in Kakhovka, Dovzhenko woke from a dream about the Ubid, the river of his childhood, and recalled his mother’s earlier prophesy that a river would be very important in his life but not until near the end of it.\(^\text{169}\) The Ubid was the first of Dozhenko’s rivers. The Ubid flows into the Desna, which then flows into the Dnieper, joining it from the north east just above Kyiv. In the Ubid and Desna rivers, Dovzhenko saw only the past, but in the Dnieper River he saw the past, present, and future of his homeland. By all accounts, Dovzhenko’s childhood was a very difficult one. Born in 1894 to a poor peasant family and descended from Ukrainian Cossacks, Dovzhenko

\(^{169}\) Ibid., 216. (diary entry: 21 October 1952)
worked the land from an early age. The Dovzhenkos’ land allotment was meager and unproductive. The early deaths of twelve siblings scarred Dovzhenko, who wrote many years later: “Now, whenever I think of my childhood and of my [childhood] home, in my mind I see crying and funerals.”170 Once Dovzhenko left the village of Viuyshche in the Chernihiv Province, he would never return. Therefore, the landscape of his childhood was frozen in time. His memory of it was blurred, softened, romanticized: “We had a fairytale-like meadow by the Desna River. To the end of my days it will stay in my memory as the most beautiful spot on earth. … I have not seen that meadow for twenty-five years now. I know it has changed, for I have changed. I don’t need to look at it anymore; now that meadow lives on in my work.”171

More so than his native village, Kyiv and later Kakhovka/Nova Kakhovka served as the two nodes of his geographical imagination. Together with the Dnieper, these were the two landscapes he transformed, rebuilt, and replanted in his mind. In this sense, all of Ukraine was joined by the Dnieper River. In the spring of 1948, Dovzhenko surveyed his beloved Kyiv and the destruction caused by WWII, musing about the beauty of the Dnieper as seen from the city. He wrote extensive notes on his vision for Kyiv’s reconstruction, imagining himself not as a film director but as a city planner or landscape architect.172 He planned to submit proposals for his ideas, including turning the city squares and streets into orchards and flooding the Jewish Market (now the Besarabsky Market) to form a manmade lake. Dovzhenko passionately wanted to be remembered for his contributions to rebuilding Kyiv in harmony with nature: “Vineyards on the sandy soil around Kiev with water piped in. The city of Kiev is an orchard. Kiev is a poet. Kiev is an epic. Kiev is history. Kiev is art. Kiev is a poem. Kiev is the most modern city in

170 Ibid., 3. (Autobiography: 1939)
171 Ibid., 3-4. (Autobiography: 1939)
172 Ibid., 159. (diary entry: 1 May 1948)
It is perhaps fitting, therefore, that when the Ukrainian Academy of Fine Arts and Ukrainian Institute of Geography were both founded in Kyiv in 1917, Dovzhenko found himself at a crossroads, drawn to both possible futures.174

Dovzhenko’s diaries combine the genres of personal diary and artist’s notebook. They include images and observations and conversations that Dovzhenko wanted to incorporate into his creative work together with descriptions of his daily activities and inner thoughts. His notes for future films and novels often were not associated with a specific project, but instead simply collected. His official autobiography from 1939 is essentially a creative work, crafted to refashion his past to match the present. It blends fact with fiction. Dovzhenko wrote what was expected and what he had to write at the time. However, many aspects of his autobiography ring very true when read alongside his diaries and creative work. The overarching significance of Ukrainian nature for Dovzhenko is one of those threads. Dovzhenko points to two aspects of his past that stuck with him and that most shaped his creative vision. The first was the theme of parting, which he associated with his mother who lost twelve out of fourteen children. The second was his “love of nature and a true appreciation of its beauty.”175 The Ukrainian natural world remained Dovzhenko’s creative muse and the single source of happiness in his life.

Konstantin Paustovsky: A Brief Comparison

Tracing the career of the Soviet writer Konstantin Paustovsky (1892-1968), Frank Westerman explores the relationship between engineers of nature and “engineers of the soul” in

173 Ibid., 159-60. (diary entry: 1 May 1948)
174 Ibid., 8. (Autobiography: 1939)
175 Ibid., 3. (Autobiography: 1939)
the Soviet Union, or as he put it, the fiziki and lyriki.\textsuperscript{176} The fiziki, he explains, “are the engineers and architects, the hydrologists and electrical engineers; those, in other words, whose shape physical reality to a socialist mould. The liriki (lyricists) are the filmmakers and composers, the sculptors and painters; artists, in other words, with writers at their forefront, whose task is to attend to the simultaneous metamorphosis of man and society.”\textsuperscript{177} For decades the Party led culture of Socialist Realism championed the giant construction projects that transformed Soviet nature and society. “Imagine Maxim Gorky’s bitterness,” Westerman mused, “had he known that the liriki would one day rise up against the fiziki.”\textsuperscript{178} Encouraged by the liriki to dream up ever bigger hydro-engineering schemes and convinced that anything was possible, by the 1950s the Ministry of Water Management (\textit{MinVodKhoz}) was the second most powerful ministry in the Soviet Union behind only the Ministry of Defense.\textsuperscript{179} In the 1970s the liriki increasingly lost faith in the fiziki and finally turned against them.\textsuperscript{180}

Through the eyes of Dovzhenko, this chapter and to a certain degree the ones that follow, examine what happened before the liriki fully abandoned the fiziki. Westerman points to the Russian Village Prose writers, like Valentin Rasputin (1937-2015) in his \textit{Farewell to Matyora} (1972), who were able to defend nature in the name of the Russian national patrimony and, in doing so, “brought down the water managers and hydro-engineers.”\textsuperscript{181} Rasputin not only worked at a different time than Dovzhenko, but also within a different cultural geography. After Stalin’s

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\textsuperscript{176} Westerman, \textit{Engineers of the Soul: The Grandiose Propaganda of Stalin’s Russia}.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 273.
\textsuperscript{179} Based on a 2001 conversation that Westerman had with Professor Alexander Velikanov of the Institute of Hydraulic Affairs in Moscow: ibid., 282-83.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 291-94.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 294.
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death and the end of *zhdanovchina*, the celebration of nature in cultural products was no longer condemned for being ‘apolitical.’ Nature conservation was an acceptable expression of Soviet patriotism and even Russian nationalism, but Dovzhenko’s passion for Ukrainian nature was not. However, the nature-oriented values that “brought down” the *fiziki* were rooted in a much broader segment of society than the “village writers.” *Liriki* across social, generational, and geographic divisions wrestled with the tension between hopeful optimism for a better future made possible by Soviet science and their deep appreciation for nature in its pristine, un-engineered state.

Paustovsky serves as a useful comparison with Dovzhenko because their similarities accentuate their differences. Both men were descended from Zaporizhian Cossacks and their childhood experience of Ukrainian nature produced a lifelong love of nature. Paustovsky was born in Moscow but grew up both in Kiev and at his family’s country estate south of Kiev on an island of the Ros River, a tributary that joins the Dnieper above Kremenchug. By the time Paustovsky visited the area in the summer of 1954, the river was broken up by dams and the island and farm had disappeared underwater. But his fascination with hydro-engineering began much earlier in life. In his memoirs, Paustovsky traces this fascination to an evening walk with his father on Vladimir Hill in Kyiv, overlooking the Dnieper. A young boy at the time, he was given the opportunity to view the planet Mars through a telescope. His father explained that all of the rivers and oceans on Mars had dried up leaving only desert. When he got home, his older brother then told him that his own planet was already halfway to the same fate. At that

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revelation, Paustovsky’s fear of the desert “assumed obsessive proportions.” A few months later, a peaceful day of fishing with his grandfather was cut suddenly short when the dreaded sukhovei swept over the fields and they were sent running for cover. “There it is, the desert wind,” his grandfather said angrily, “the wind from Bukhara.” Paustovsky watched in horror as the lush green world around him shriveled and died. The harvest was lost. “The desert is spreading towards Ukraine,” his father said sadly.

Like Dovzhenko, Paustovsky’s love for nature and fascination with hydro-engineering grew out of childhood experiences in the Ukrainian countryside, but his geographic imagination encompassed the entire Soviet Union. Perhaps Paustovsky is the twentieth century ‘Gogol’ to Dovzhenko’s ‘Shevchenko.’ He wrote about the far reaches of Soviet territory and fell in love with the nature of central Russia. In contrast, Dovzhenko could not sever his emotional ties to Ukraine. In his work, Dovzhenko celebrated Ukrainian nature and geography, rather than Soviet nature and geography. He did this because he loved his native land and because he wanted to use his art to explore what “Ukraine” meant in the Soviet context. Dovzhenko’s commitment to expressing his love for Ukraine in his work meant that he was crushed over and over by the Stalinist cultural apparatus. He was closely monitored by Soviet security agencies and assigned the code name Zaporozhets, or Zaporozhian Cossack. Dovzhenko watched his colleagues disappear into far off prison camps, a death sentence, or suicide. He lived with near constant fear, anxiety, depression, and heart pains, which would ultimately claim his life. With each subsequent project Dovzhenko tried to transform himself and adapt professionally, but he was always one or two steps behind the ever-changing cultural politics of the Stalin era. The lengthy production

184 Quoted in ibid., 84-85.

185 Retold and quoted in quoted in ibid., 86. I removed “the” before “Ukraine” in Sam Garrett’s translation of Westerman’s quote from Paustovsky.
time involved in film-making was partially to blame as Dovzhenko often found the earth had shifted under his feet between screen-writing and release.

**Dovzhenko’s Ukrainian Trilogy, 1894-1930**

In his biography of Dovzhenko, George Liber wrote: “Defining himself through his Ukrainian peasant roots, he attempted to negotiate a compromise between his Ukrainian and Soviet identities.”¹⁸⁶ I would suggest a modest revision to that statement: Dovzhenko viewed himself and his role in Soviet Ukrainian culture to be much larger. His ambition was not simply to define himself in that way, but to define Soviet Ukraine.

Before Dovzhenko could dedicate his creative life to glorifying Ukrainian nature and celebrating the unbreakable connection between rural life and the natural world, he had to escape his peasant roots. He did that through the only avenue that was available to someone of his status in the Russian Empire: education. Dovzhenko’s father even sold a piece of the family’s already meager allotment of land in order to pay for his son’s tuition at the Teachers’ Institute in Hlukhiv.¹⁸⁷ The surviving record of Dovzhenko’s life during the revolution and civil war contains many intentional holes, due in part to his allegiance with anti-Bolshevik Ukrainian nationalist groups. These years haunted him for the rest of his life, permanently branding him and compelling him to compensate by energetically endorsing the party line.¹⁸⁸ During the cultural renaissance in Ukraine, Dovzhenko became a founding member of VAPLITE (The Free Academy of Proletarian Literature) in 1925-1926. This literary organization was dedicated to

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¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 41.
fostering a “fully developed national culture” and establishing a new urban culture in Ukraine.\textsuperscript{189} Inspired by the storytelling talents of his grandfather, Dovzhenko turned to filmmaking so that his stories could reach the largest possible audience. In particular, he wanted to adopt a cultural medium that not only had the power to reach the rural population in Ukraine, but also to bridge the distance between rural and urban.\textsuperscript{190}

With his first three films, Dovzhenko unsteadily and incrementally developed the basic skills of filmmaking. His next three films earned him international recognition and established his lasting legacy for innovation in cinema, although none of them were universally praised at home in the Soviet Union. As Liber put it, “He situated his first three [films] in the Soviet environment; he planted his next three in Ukrainian soil.”\textsuperscript{191} Dovzhenko showcased the fertility of Ukrainian land with beautiful images of lush crops and productive fields. This would become one of the defining features of his work. Dovzhenko’s ‘Ukrainian Trilogy’ — \textit{Zvenyhora} (1928), \textit{Arsenal} (1929), and \textit{Earth} (1930) — are visually, stylistically, and narratively complex in ways that distinguish these three from any of his previous or subsequent films. For \textit{Zvenyhora} Dovzhenko harnessed four hundred years of Ukrainian history and folklore, bridging the chronological divide between the Cossack era and the present. It was praised by critics, but was inaccessible to the public.\textsuperscript{192} Moreover, Dovzhenko described a national history and culture that was distinct from Russia. For \textit{Arsenal}, Dovzhenko turned to events of the Civil War in Ukraine, depicting the efforts of pro-Bolshevik workers to defend the ‘Arsenal’ munitions factory against nationalists. Commissioned by the party and conceived in connection with tenth-anniversary

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 85.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 93-94. and Dovzhenko, \textit{Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings.}, 14. (1939 Autobiography)
celebrations of the Bolshevik Revolution, this was Dovzhenko’s first directly political film. It was generally well received in Moscow, including by Stalin, but the Ukrainian intelligentsia considered it to be a betrayal.193

At both the republic and central levels, Soviet cultural politics shifted under Dovzhenko’s feet between the release of Arsenal in 1929 and Earth in 1930. During the 1920s, the Ukrainian republic enjoyed a cultural renaissance. Artists across all media displayed unprecedented diversity of form, style, and theme. Even before the introduction of Socialist Realism, in the last few years of the decade increasing pressure was placed on filmmakers to devote themselves fully to party propaganda. Stalin began to adjust Soviet nationality policy, taking particular aim at Ukrainianisation.194 Most problematic for the fate of Dovzhenko’s Earth was the first wave of agricultural collectivization. In order to force peasants to relinquish both their land and their grain, Stalin re-introduced class warfare in the form of “de-kulakisation.” The height of the “de-kulakisation” drive in late 1929 - early 1930 corresponded with the completion of Dovzhenko’s work on the film: “I conceived Earth as a film that would herald the beginning of a new life in the villages. But collectivization and liquidation of the small landowner class - events of tremendous political significance that occurred when the film had been completed and was ready to be released - made my statement weak and ineffectual.”195 In other words, Dovzhenko produced Earth during the initial period of ‘voluntary’ collectivization, but it was released in the midst of an aggressive campaign in the press. The film’s plot and ideological message perfectly


matched the official narrative, condemning the “evil kulaks”.\textsuperscript{196} If it had appeared a few years earlier, \textit{Earth} would likely have been an enormous success. By the time it reached the public, filmmakers were expected to make much stronger political statements about the ongoing war against “enemies of the people” in the countryside.

The problem with \textit{Earth} as it was viewed in 1930 was that Dovzhenko’s clear political message endorsing collectivization was overshadowed by his visually stunning depiction of nature. The harmony of Soviet man and nature was at the heart of the film, which showcased the importance of nature’s cyclical rhythms. \textit{Earth} premiered in Moscow on 20 March 1930: “Many enjoyed the lyrical film, but others criticized it for celebrating the primacy of nature over politics.”\textsuperscript{197} Much to Dovzhenko’s dismay, denunciations of the film began appearing in the official press shortly after that.\textsuperscript{198}

\textbf{DniproHES and Dovzhenko’s \textit{Ivan} (1932): 1931-1940}

Although the criticism he received for \textit{Earth} weighed heavily on his mind, Dovzhenko learned a valuable lesson. He understood that his position as an unreliable but tolerated ‘fellow traveler’ was precarious and he could no longer make the type of films he had previously.\textsuperscript{199} Determined to feature workers rather than peasants in his next film and instructed to depict current life in the Ukrainian republic, the highly celebrated DniproHES construction project provided Dovzhenko with the perfect muse: “Dovzhenko sought to glorify the project by examining its social, political and psychological impact on the workers who had only recently

\textsuperscript{196} Liber, \textit{Alexander Dovzhenko: A Life in Soviet Film}, 108-09.

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 109.

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 111-12.

migrated from the countryside. He wove his narrative around a single Dneprostroi worker, the eponymous Ivan, and traced the evolution of his working-class consciousness and his transformation into a new Soviet man.”\(^{200}\) As one of the most widely publicized construction projects of the First Five-Year Plan, Dneprostroi provided Dovzhenko with subject matter of both all-Union and Ukrainian significance. This was also the filmmaker’s first attempt to shoot film with sound, which was still a relatively new development in cinema at that time. Although he complained about “very bad equipment which the sound technicians had not mastered yet,” he made the most out of this new technology.\(^{201}\)

For nearly six minutes the first frames of Ivan depict only the Dnieper River.\(^{202}\) [See Figure 1] The river fills the entire frame. Only a narrow sliver of the distant bank is visible. Reflecting Dovzhenko’s appreciation for the influence of nature’s seasonality on Ukrainian life, he begins with the Dnieper in early spring. The ice on the river has just started to break up and glides slowly by the camera. With time, the ice slowly disappears until all that is left is the sky perfectly reflected in the river’s surface. Water flows progressively faster and faster. The sandy river banks of southern Ukraine come into view in the background. After more than five minutes, the music shifts from calm to loud and dramatic. With that, the scene also changes. Dovzhenko leaves behind the calm, powerful stillness of the mirror-like river. Instead, the river roars and crashes past the camera, depicting the infamous Dnieper rapids that were inundated behind the DniproHES dam. The viewer suddenly understands that this prolonged celebration of the Dnieper depicts it before the dam changed everything. In these first few minutes, Dovzhenko paid tribute to the past and national history that the river symbolizes. To make this point even

\(^{200}\) Alexander Dovzhenko: A Life in Soviet Film, 124.

\(^{201}\) Dovzhenko, Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings., 17. (1939 Autobiography)

\(^{202}\) Timing based on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyZ1xhqBg8s (accessed June 2019)
clearer, over five and half minutes into *Ivan*, a wooden longboat appears on the rapids. Waves crash over it as the men aboard strain to navigate the rapids. Their commander wears a traditional Ukrainian embroidered *vyshyvanka*. Creatively, these are the strongest six minutes of the film.

The director Sergei Eisenstein, himself celebrated for his innovative use of montage, lauded Dovzhenko for so effectively combining images of the river with music and the sounds of water and ice. As Liber wrote: “Although he left the theme of soil, which had defined his creative vision, he did not abandon his love of nature. Instead, he integrated this concern into his celebration of a brand-new industrial world under construction at the rapids of the Dnieper River, which had protected the Ukrainian Cossacks for four centuries.” But with the Dnieper scene, Dovzhenko also committed a cardinal sin in Stalinist culture, one that nearly killed him. The sin that plagued Dovzhenko throughout his career was ambiguity. Gorky began his volume on the Belomor canal with the following quote: “By changing nature, man changes himself.” Although *Ivan* preceded *Belomor* by two years, in many ways Dovzhenko’s narrative conformed perfectly to the model Gorky envisioned, yet still failed. Dovzhenko illustrated the positive transformation of Ivan on the DniproHES worksite, from peasant to ideologically conscious worker. Ivan was indeed changed through his efforts to change nature. Dovzhenko showcased the wild natural power of the Dnieper but not the completed dam, an omission for which he was heavily criticized. In the context of a deluge of materials celebrating the conquest, harnessing, and taming of nature at DniproHES, Dovzhenko’s message fell short. The river was the star of the film, not Ivan.

Once again Dovzhenko fell victim to elusive rules that changed faster than he could keep up. *Ivan* premiered in November 1932 just over six months after creative unions replaced

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independent groups. “Socialist Realism” was adopted as the official artistic language of the Soviet Union, though even after it was discussed at the first congress of the Soviet Writers’ Union in August 1934 its parameters were vague and constantly evolving. Dovzhenko created the character of Ivan in the image of the “masses.” Ivan was designed to be broadly relatable, an ‘everyman.’ That was a mistake. By late 1932, critics demanded a ‘positive hero,’ one that never hesitated, never erred, never doubted. Furthermore, Dovzhenko was heavily criticized for depicting the chaos of the construction site.205 Alongside all of the specific mistakes that critics cited in Ivan ran the hazy shadow of Ukrainian nationalism, an indictment that Dovzhenko could not shake off.

In his 1939 Autobiography Dovzhenko interrupted his account of work on Ivan and the attacks he sustained following its release with a protracted elaboration of the city planning ideas he had for Kyiv at that time.206 In order to discuss the emotional turmoil he experienced as a result of Ivan’s failure, Dovzhenko blamed his anguish and anxiety on the Brest-Litovsky Highway in particular. He claimed that this stretch of road between his apartment and the film studio “made [his] life intolerable.”207 This was the first major episode when the filmmaker fashioned himself as a city planner and engineer of his own environment, a pursuit that “reached its peak during the filming of Ivan.”208 Dovzhenko may have chosen this preoccupation at that particular time for two reasons. Writing in 1939 that the highway had been the “focal point of [his] mental disorder” for ten years, may refer to the various waves of persecutions, arrests, and executions that dominated the decade. Dovzhenko survived but lived in constant fear. Therefore, perhaps the highway was both a safe target for blame and a metaphor for the political

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205 Ibid., 133.
207 Ibid. (1939 Autobiography)
208 Ibid. (1939 Autobiography)
environment that tortured him. This was an environment that Dovzhenko thought he had the power to transform, but instead he was constantly thwarted. Secondly, perhaps Dovzhenko’s obsession with transforming the highway in harmony with nature was stimulated by the Dnieper River Cascade construction which began with DniproHES. In that case, it is not a coincidence that the two points in Dovzhenko’s life when he was most determined to transform his physical environment on a grand scale correspond to periods of time when he was closely watching the hydro-engineering projects on the Dnieper at Zaporizhzhya and Kakhovka. Frustrated that his work did not receive the praise he felt it deserved, Dovzhenko wanted to participate in this transformation in a more direct way than through his films.

Following the denunciations of Ivan, Dovzhenko was shunned by the colleagues and authorities in Ukraine. It was a dangerous time to be criticized publicly. Dovzhenko feared for his life and had good reason to do so. Watching as friends and colleagues were arrested, he left his homeland and settled in Moscow in January 1933. This sacrifice and his subsequent direct appeal to Stalin for help likely saved his career and his life. Dovzhenko’s next two films were both highly successful. The filmmaker redeemed himself with Aerograd (1935) and perfected the craft of Socialist Realism with Shchors (1939). Although he was awarded the Order of Lenin in 1935 for Aerograd and the Stalin Prize - first class - in 1941 for Shchors, neither project brought Dovzhenko peace of mind or security. In fact, these successes came at great emotional cost.

Commissioned by Stalin himself and set during the civil war, Shchors was meant to be a

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209 Liber suggests a similar metaphor, one that represented the constraints on his creative voice, see: Liber, Alexander Dovzhenko: A Life in Soviet Film, 123.

210 Ibid., 134.

211 Ibid., 146.
Ukrainian version of the Russian *Chapaev* (1934). Led by Mykola Shchors, the film depicts Ukrainian resistance to Germany, Poland, and Petliura’s nationalist army. Based on historical events and actors, Dovzhenko set out to film a straightforward, albeit highly revisionist, account of Bolshevik victory in Ukraine. However, once again the ‘rules’ changed dramatically throughout the course of production. In particular, the Soviet interpretation of these historical events changed constantly in the context of the purges. Shchors’s surviving deputy was arrested and executed in 1938. A hero in Dovzhenko’s original telling, this deputy was charged by Soviet authorities for killing Shchors… forcing Dovzhenko to re-write and re-film. In this tense political climate, even the wrong choice of actor could be considered a fatal mistake. Struggling with fear, anxiety, depression, panic attacks, and emotional instability, Dovzhenko contemplated suicide in 1938.

During Dovzhenko’s years in Moscow before the outbreak of war, he met with Stalin many times. This direct access to the leader came with privileges and “encouraged him to participate in the Stalinist apparatus.” Stalin completely charmed Dovzhenko, quickly becoming the most valuable patron any artist could have. Dovzhenko was both grateful to Stalin and deeply afraid of him. Some combination of these factors allowed Dovzhenko to convince himself that the troubling events he saw unfold around him, especially in Ukraine, were evidence of limits to Stalin’s power rather than an expression of that power. Dovzhenko was allowed to join the Soviet Writers’ Union in 1939 and he was named the Artistic Director of the Kiev Film Studio in 1940. In March 1941, Dovzhenko was awarded the Stalin Prize - First Class in

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212 Ibid., 155.
213 Ibid., 158-62.
214 Ibid., 168.
215 Ibid., 168-71.
recognition of *Shchors*.\(^{216}\)

Figure 1: Film stills of the Dnieper River from Oleksandr Dovzhenko’s *Ivan* (1932)

\(^{216}\) Ibid., 165.
Beyond the trauma of war on a larger scale than ever imagined, the war years were pivotal for Dovzhenko’s creative work and his geographic imagination. WWII heightened and honed Dovzhenko’s connection to his national geography and the nature of his native land. This was a time of introspection for Dovzhenko. He formally began to keep journals in 1941 and his entries during the war contain the roots of many later works. They are filled with notes for the highly personal projects to which he dedicated the last years of his life. These include his autobiographical screenplay, *The Enchanted Desna*, a screenplay called *Descendants of the Zaporozhian Cossacks* that follows life in a Ukrainian village across many generations, and *Golden Gates* an epic novel about Ukrainian history. During the war, Dovzhenko served as a war correspondent, wrote short stories, and produced documentary films about the war effort. It was also during WWII that Stalin turned against him.

The initial war effort included broadening of the Russian-centered ‘national bolshevism’ to include non-Russian nationalities. This temporary shift not only gave Dovzhenko the freedom to celebrate his love for Ukraine but encouraged him to express that love openly. His war documentaries showcased the beauty of the Ukrainian landscape alongside widespread suffering brought on by war and were quite well received. However, just as Dovzhenko became more and more confident in his voice, the rules shifted again. In 1943, Dovzhenko drafted a screenplay for *Ukraine in Flames*. He drew on earlier wartime short stories and notes from his war experience. In one such story, completed in late 1942, Dovzhenko’s hero addresses his troops and asks them rhetorically: “What are we fighting for? What are we dying for?”

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Ukrainian officer’s response was: “Ukraine.” Dovzhenko’s greatest ‘mistake’ in Ukraine in Flames was representing the devastation of war in Ukraine as unique: Ukrainians and the Ukrainian territory suffered more than any other Soviet nationality and republic.

Dovzhenko’s national narrative of WWII clashed violently with the accepted Soviet narrative, which did not distinguish between the suffering of any group of Soviet peoples. In his diaries he described showing someone a draft of an article he wrote by the same name, “Ukraine in Flames.” His reader was identified only as “X.” The unnamed reader criticized a section in which Dovzhenko described the Ukrainian people weeping. He told Dovzhenko that this was “unrealistic” and “not true,” because there was no widespread weeping: “No one cried, you understand?” Dovzhenko remained silent but wrote privately: “‘You’re lying,’ I thought to myself. ‘Lying, you blind party hack. Ukraine wept. You looked at her through your glasses and through the closed windows of your car and didn’t see a thing because you didn’t want to see. She wept, oh how she wept! No other country wept as she did.’”

In August 1943, Dovzhenko read Ukraine in Flames to Nikita Khrushchev. According to Dovzhenko, they discussed the scenario at length and Khrushchev encouraged him to published it in both Russian and Ukrainian: “‘Let them read it. Let them realize that it’s not so simple.’” Khrushchev’s comment suggests the two men recognized that Ukraine in Flames did not conform to the “simple” Soviet narrative of WWII, but that as late as August 1942 they thought multiple narratives could exist publicly. When Stalin denounced Dovzhenko on 30 January 1944

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219 “Victory” quoted in ibid., 193.

220 Even Soviet Jews were not permitted to distinguish their war experience from other Soviet citizens. See Weiner, Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution.

221 This was a common practice in Dovzhenko’s diaries. Alternatively, he often identified certain people only by their initials.

222 Dovzhenko, Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings., 59. (Diary entry 14 April 1942)

223 Ibid., 90. (Diary entry: 28 August 1943)
for *Ukraine in Flames*, Khrushchev remained silent.\textsuperscript{224} After returning to Moscow in late November 1943, Dovzhenko learned that Stalin was displeased and had forbidden *Ukraine in Flames*. Dovzhenko was devastated: “I don’t know yet what to do. My heart is heavy and anguished. Not because more than a year of work has been wasted and not because all my enemies will rejoice and all the petty functionaries will disdain me, but because I know *Ukraine in Flames* is true.”\textsuperscript{225} It was during the war that the values of “truth” and “honesty” really took shape in Dovzhenko’s mind.\textsuperscript{226}

As a result, Dovzhenko was charged with nationalism. Before Stalin’s indictment of Dovzhenko in late January 1944, the Soviet press, party officials, and cultural figures squirmed. They avoided making any personal judgement on *Ukraine in Flames*. Overnight this changed. Dovzhenko was attacked at the Soviet and Republic levels. In Ukraine, even Pavlo Tychyna and Mykola Bazhan condemned him.\textsuperscript{227} Many years later during the Thaw, the line between those who criticized Dovzhenko in 1944 and those who remained silent would not be forgotten in Ukraine. However, Dovzhenko never fully recovered, neither professionally nor emotionally. He was universally shunned and stripped of his privileges, official appointments, salary, and access to circles of power. In his diary he struggled with Stalin’s betrayal and even to understand the nature of his crime. In an entry from June 1945, Dovzhenko wrote: “I am a patriot of the Soviet Union and a communist, and although I am hardly perfect, in many ways I am far better than most of my persecutors.”\textsuperscript{228} After the extreme trauma of WWII, Dovzhenko could not accept that


\textsuperscript{225} Dovzhenko, *Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings.*, 94. (Diary entry: 26 November 1943)

\textsuperscript{226} See also: ibid., 95. (Diary entry: 28 November 1943) and Liber, *Alexander Dovzhenko: A Life in Soviet Film*, 213.


\textsuperscript{228} Dovzhenko, *Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings.*, 110. (Diary entry: 5 June 1945
he would need to sever ties with Ukraine in order to be a Soviet patriot. He did not see any conflict between love for one and loyalty to the other.

Within the safety of his diary, Dovzhenko pleaded with Stalin: “My dear Comrade Stalin, even if you were God, I would not take your word that I am a nationalist who must be slandered and imprisoned. If there is no hatred in principle, and no scorn, and no ill feelings toward a single nation on earth, how can love for one’s own nation be nationalism? Is it nationalism to refuse to connive with stupid functionaries and cold-blooded speculators? Is it nationalism when an artist cannot hold back his tears because his nation is suffering? Why have you deprived me of joy? Why have you crushed me under your boot?”229 Dovzhenko suffered from physical and emotional exhaustion. This effected his health, especially his heart which gave him problems throughout his life.230 Dovzhenko took his persecution very personally, equating it to a casualty of war: “Forty million Soviet citizens, my brothers and sisters, have perished. My eighty-year-old father died from hunger in Kiev, and I myself, severely wounded by my own people, am barely alive.”231

Dovzhenko used his notebooks to record his truth about WWII in his homeland. The Dnieper River was at the center of fighting along the eastern front and emerged in Dovzhenko’s diaries from the war years as an increasingly significant feature of his geographic imagination. In Soviet newspapers, the destruction of the strategically significant DniproHES dam was blamed on German forces but has since been revealed to have been carried out by the Red Army at Stalin’s command. Although this is not an entirely new revelation in the redacted passages of Dovzhenko’s diary, his immediate reflections on the incident do speak to how well-known Soviet

229 Ibid., 113-14. (Diary entry: 17 July 1945)


231 Dovzhenko, Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings, 119. (Diary entry: 3 September 1945)
involvement was at the time and to Dovzhenko’s interpretation: “The tragic pathos of retreat and sacrifice. Livestock, bread, destruction. A philosophy of destruction. The suicide of industrial giants. DniproHES. An explosion. The director’s request not to tear it down. Stalin’s answer by telephone.” Dovzhenko’s notes confirm that he recognized Stalin’s role in blowing up the dam, and with it the pride of Soviet Ukraine, and that the decision was not straightforward and uncontested. However, he seems content to place the incident within the narrative of necessary wartime sacrifice.

Dovzhenko collected stories and images from the front, as he did in his diaries throughout the remainder of his life. These were stored material for later projects, literary and cinematic. In 1941 her wrote: “Near Zaporizhya the Germans sent naked women to the Dnieper for water so that our side wouldn’t shoot. (This stunning scene can be shown).” Dovzhenko had always highly valued harmony with nature’s rhythms. The war violently disrupted this harmony and temporarily severed the connection between the Ukrainian people and nature: “I saw the sun shine for the first time in three months today. I didn’t see the snow melt. I didn’t see the spring floods on the Dnieper or the Desna [river].” Many of Dovzhenko’s observations about the devastation of war involved descriptions of unplowed and uncultivated fields, crops rotting on the ground alongside bodies. He mourned the agricultural life of his homeland, suspended by war. He recorded conversations he overhead among Soviet troops: “They talked about how the dead men mowed and reaped, how much grain they grew in their lives.”

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232 The final sentence was redacted from versions published before the collapse of the Soviet Union: Shchodennyykovi Zapysy, 1939-1956 (Kharkiv: Folio, 2013), 49. (Diary entry from 1941)

233 Dovzhenko’s entries in 1941 often provided no more specific date than the year, see: Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings., 27. (Diary entry: 1941)

234 Ibid., 74. (Diary entry: 19 May 1942)

235 For example, see: ibid., 85. (Diary entry from 25 May 1943)

236 Ibid., 78. (Diary entry: 20 May 1942)
Dovzhenko thought about the imminence of his own death with increasing frequency. Although WWII was surely a stimulating factor, these thoughts were probably more directly a result of his fall from grace in 1943-1944 and the resulting instability of his personal circumstances. His ailing heart further stimulated these thoughts: “Today I walked around the city and barely made it home. I don’t have the strength to walk. Everything hurts. My arms and legs hurt, my head hurts and my heart hurts. Day and night, the pain never ceases. I think I will soon die. That’s a shame. I was born, I was created to live to ninety or so. I will die soon, because all strength has left me. It wasn’t solely lost to my work. No. I was not defeated by work or drunkenness or women. I was beaten down by the grief of the people [naroda]. I was crushed by human hatred and cruelty. It killed my joy.”

Following the model of Shevchenko’s familiar “Testament” [Zapovit, 1845], Dovzhenko inscribed his own version into his diary: “I will die in Moscow, and thus without seeing Ukraine. Before I die I will ask the great Stalin to arrange for my heart to be removed from my chest, prior to cremation, and buried in my native soil in Kiev, somewhere overlooking the Dnieper, on a hill.” He repeats this request at least four times throughout his diaries. It is significant that Dovzhenko choose Kiev and the Dnieper river, not the Desna or the Ubid rivers, in the same way that Shevchenko asked to be buried overlooking the Dnieper. In an earlier version of this request from May 1942, he points to the same location but calls attention to the nearby Caves Monastery and that from this vantage point he could look out across the Dnieper at his native Chernihiv oblast. Dovzhenko could see all of Ukraine from that spot; its past, present, and future.

During this time, Dovzhenko also composed a number of short stories about the war. One

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237 Shchodennykovi Zapysy, 1939-1956, 378. (Diary entry from 5 November 1945)

238 Ibid. (Diary entry from 5 November 1945)

239 Dovzhenko, Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings., 68. (Diary entry: 5 May 1942)
such war story, *The Night before Battle* (1944) took place on the banks of the Desna river.\(^{240}\) Commander Kolodub needed to rally his troops for battle so tells them the story of what fueled his own courage, will, and strength to fight bravely and never give up. The story centered on a peasant named Platon: "‘It was on the Desna River,’ began the famous captain, smiling at his memories. ‘Yes… To put it in a nutshell, an ordinary Ukrainian fisherman, a simple old man in no way different from thousands of others in our Ukraine, turned my whole soul inside out.’"\(^{241}\) Kolodub talked about the special role that rivers play in the drama of war. Quite often, intense combat took place on their banks. He said that the ferrymen who transport troops across were like “good river spirits” and Platon was one such ‘river spirit’.\(^{242}\) Kolodub was retreating back across the Desna when he met Platon. As the old man rowed the soldiers across the river he sharply criticized them for running from the approaching Nazi *Wehrmacht*, telling them, "‘as for me, not only Hitler, but the devil himself couldn’t drive me away from the Dnieper or the Desna.’"\(^{243}\) Talking to Kolodub and the young soldiers about standing firm in the face of fear, Platon says, "‘There are all sorts of souls, my boy. Some are deep and swift, like the Dnieper, others are like the Desna here, and there is a third sort, that is like a puddle, and sometimes not even a puddle but just a wet spot, like what’s left by a bull, if you’ll excuse my saying so.’"\(^{244}\) In Platon’s metaphor, the Dnieper River was the soul of a true hero.

Dovzhenko was extremely effected emotionally by the incorporation of western Ukraine and the Carpathian Mountains into Soviet Ukraine: “Today, Saturday 30 June 1945, a great event

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\(^{241}\) Ibid., 393.

\(^{242}\) Ibid.

\(^{243}\) Ibid., 398.

\(^{244}\) Ibid.
in the life of my people took place. For the first time in a thousand years, in all of its unhappy history, it has been united as one family.”

Writing in his diary from his home in Moscow, Dovzhenko felt the pain of exile from his homeland more deeply than ever before: “Remember me the martyr and orphan in a foreign land.”

Dovzhenko’s physical exile was fused with his political and professional exile. This time, rather than asking for his heart to be buried in his homeland, he begged to be embraced again by his own people. Even when his name is tarnished “for unknown reasons” by “evil people”, he pleaded with his imagined nation: “do not spurn me, let me die in my own land, which gave me bread and a heart, love and customs, and the joy of creativity, and labor, and [also] great sorrow and suffering.”

The intensity of Dovzhenko’s longing to be physically within the borders of Ukraine speaks to his fundamentally territorial - and geographical - understanding of the Ukrainian nation.

Dovzhenko described this momentous day, which in his own words was a lifelong dream come true. But rather than elation, he felt only profound loneliness. He sat by his window in Moscow, alone, and watched the rain outside. His heart hurt. No one there marked this event in any way. He received no phone calls or visitors. “I am alone outside the borders of Ukraine, of my land, for the love of which they almost cut off my head…”

With the great effort of someone who had fallen into deep depression, he mustered the energy to fly to Ukraine in his imagination. Dovzhenko described this imagined flight in great detail. In his mind he flew low over all of Ukraine: the Chernihov region of his childhood, Kiev and its religious sites, the Dnieper, Dniester, Lviv, and the Carpathian Mountains.

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245 Dovzhenko, Shchodennykovi Zapysy, 1939-1956, 342. (Diary entry from 30 June 1945)
246 Ibid. (Diary entry from 30 June 1945)
247 Ibid. (Diary entry from 30 June 1945)
248 Ibid., 343. (Diary entry from 30 June 1945)
249 Ibid. (Diary entry from 30 June 1945)
The attack on Dovzhenko in 1943-1944 was a bellwether of the coming conservative shift in Soviet cultural policy after WWII. The so-called zhdanovshchina, named after its chief architect, largely restored pre-war policies, which were relaxed from 1941-1945. Beginning in 1946, Soviet authorities curtailed all deviations from Socialist Realism. This cultural war included attacks against ‘formalism’, apolitical art, ‘bourgeois’ nationalism, and the capitalist ‘west’ lead by America. The fierce ‘anti-cosmopolitan’ campaign in 1948-1949 promoted xenophobia and anti-Semitism in the name of Russian nationalism. The film that Dovzhenko made during this period turned out to be the last he would see to completion. In 1944 he began work on both theatrical and cinematic biographies of the horticulturist Ivan Michurin (1855-1935), titled Life and Bloom and Michurin respectively. Although there was no direct link between Michurin and Lysenko’s pseudoscience, Michurin was celebrated as Lysenko’s predecessor. Michurin had successfully ‘sped up’ evolutionary biology by cross-breeding species of plants so that crops could be grown in diverse environments. At the height of Lysenko’s attacks against genetic theory and escalating claims of Soviet leaders to be able to bend nature to their will, Michurin was an excellent choice for Dovzhenko, who could mobilize his own interests in nature and agricultural production while shifting his focus away from Ukraine.

Dovzhenko set out to do for Russian nature what he had done for Ukrainian nature: “In the film about Michurin I wanted to take on this task and show the poetry of the seasons and times of day in central Russia. I wanted to find something beautiful and lyrical in that nature, something that would make the heart rejoice. This can be done only if it comes from the truth, from a direct perception of nature.”

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while writing *Michurin* in early 1944: “I am working on the literary scenario of *Michurin* with great pleasure. I started work on it before the war, and recently returned to it as if retreating into my own cozy home. And this isn’t tied up with my “nationalism” at all. After all, this is a Russian topic, about the Russian people [*narod*], however I don’t think they will prohibit me from writing about it well, while at the same time passionately loving my own people [*narod*]. My goodness [*moi svet*], why is love for one’s own people [*narod*] called nationalism? Why is it a crime? What kind of monsters came up with this violation of human life? To hell with them! I am writing about a warrior-martyr who fought for a noble idea, one that is dear to my heart: bettering our Soviet people with gardens. Michurin.”

However, Dovzhenko’s good spirits were soon dashed as he sustained attack after attack for *Ukraine in Flames* and its ‘bourgeois nationalism.’ Dovzhenko was forced to write and rewrite, film and re-film *Michurin* over the course of more than five years. In late 1945 he suffered a small heart attack immediately following a difficult meeting with censors.253 Soon after, Dovzhenko wrote in his diary: “I have begun to pray to God. For thirty-seven years I did not pray to God, almost never thought of Him. I rejected Him. I myself was God, a man-god. Now I pray to Him.”254 The central criticism that Dovzhenko received for his drafts of *Life in Bloom / Michurin* was that he did not sufficiently represent Michurin in the capacity as a “great transformer of nature.”255 Catastrophic drought and subsequent famine swept across the Soviet fertile black earth region in 1946-1947. In late 1948 Stalin announced what became known as his

252 *Shchodennykovi Zapysy, 1939-1956*, 320. (Diary entry from 19 January 1944)


“Plan for the Transformation of Nature.” The film was released in connection with this publicity campaign. Based on Dovzhenko’s diaries from these years, he appears oblivious to the role that his film (and play) were meant to play. Dovzhenko was interested in Michurin “the man” - a man who shared many of Dovzhenko’s passions for cultivating nature. In his biography of Michurin, Dovzhenko was meant to adopt the aggressive rhetoric of the time: Soviet man’s power to bend nature to his will.

Dovzhenko and Solntseva were awarded the Stalin Prize - Second Class for *Michurin*. Even more importantly, the film improved Dovzhenko’s status. However, Dovzhenko hardly recognized the film that was released in late 1948. He struggled with the disappointment of watching his creative dreams crushed by highly restricted cultural policies. His diaries are filled with those dreams: “I have choked my plans and dreams about the plays, my native land, the Dnieper, the warm climate, the gentle banks of my rivers, and the never-ending holiday of the countryside. I must reject and deny what I created, hate what filled me with excitement and was created from many subtle components. I must write a hybrid work: an old poem about creativity and a new story about plant selection [in reference to *Michurin*].”

*The Enchanted Desna, 1942-1955*

The experience of war on his native land prompted Dovzhenko to take stock of his own life. Contemplating his reasons for becoming a filmmaker, Dovzhenko asked himself if it was literature, painting, or folksongs that inspired him: “Or was it the enchanted Desna?” In 1942,

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257 Dovzhenko, *Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings.*, 158. (Diary entry from 5 April 1948)
258 Ibid., 156. (Diary entry from 23 March 1948)
he began writing the story of his life, focusing on his childhood, family, and rural roots. Two natural environments dominated his memories: his mother’s lush, bountiful garden and the cultivated fields that his family farmed on the banks of the Desna river. Blending fact and fantasy, Dovzhenko worked on drafts of *The Enchanted Desna* from 1942 until 1955. It was published in print form in March of 1956. *The Enchanted Desna* is Dovzhenko’s ode both to the nature of his own past and nature of the Ukrainian past: “We lived, to a certain extent, in harmony with nature. In winter we froze, in summer we rosted in the sun, in autumn we kneaded the mud with our feet, while in spring we were inundated by the flood. He who has not experienced all this does not know what joy and real living is. Spring came to us from the Desna River. In those days nobody knew anything about taming nature, and the water flowed wherever and however it chose.”

The harmonious human relationship with nature that Dovzhenko described in his autobiographical story bore no resemblance to the dominant Soviet narrative of taming, conquering, harnessing, and transforming nature.

Dovzhenko did not return to his childhood home, even when visiting other parts of Ukraine. Therefore, *The Enchanted Desna* is less about a place than it is about a memory of a place: “Yesterday I laughed and cried as I wrote my childhood memories alone in a tiny room — the house, my grandfather, the hay meadow. My God, how many beautiful and precious things there were in my life that will never come back! How much beauty by the Desna, in the meadows, and everywhere my mind’s eye looks.” Dovzhenko dedicated his life to finding beauty in the modern Soviet world, where utility and productivity were valued instead: “If one has to choose between truth and beauty, I choose beauty.”

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261 *Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings.*, 53. (Diary entry from 5 April 1942)
262 Ibid., 106. (Diary entry from 30 April 1944)
harmony, Dovzhenko mourned the disappearance of a relationship to nature that was mediated though pagan folklore: “No river is now the way you once were, my Desna. There are no secrets in rivers any more, no peace. Everything is plain now. There is neither God nor devil, and for some reason I feel sorry that there are no pixies or water sprites in the rivers anymore.”

His grandfather, who inspired characters in many of Dovzhenko’s creative works, was a symbol of this pagan conception of the natural world. It was his grandfather, an exceptionally talented storyteller, who captivated the young Dovzhenko with folktales, legends, myths, and local lore. Dovzhenko’s image of his grandfather reflected these stores: “He was the good spirit of meadow and pond. He could pick more mushrooms and berries than any of us, and he knew how to talk with the horses.”

**Songs of Hydro-Engineering: 1951-1956**

Dovzhenko dedicated the final five years of his life to *Poem of the Sea*, which he described as “a picture about the magnificent constructions along the Dnieper and in the Ukrainian steppes,” though he did not live to film it himself. *Poem of the Sea* became his final cinematic project, his swan song. Dovzhenko died suddenly of a heart attack in late November 1956, but his health declined steadily in those years. Nevertheless, the considerable time that Dovzhenko spent at the construction site in Nova Kakhovka was the happiest time of his entire life. In many ways, *Poem of the Sea* is as autobiographical as *The Enchanted Desna*. Dovzhenko spoke though more of his characters in this film than in any other. He used them to explore his

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263 *The Enchanted Desna*, 36.

264 *Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings.*, 48. (Diary entry from 2 April 1942)

265 Ibid., 216. (Diary entry from 21 October 1952)
seemingly conflicting attitude towards hydro-engineering the Dnieper river. He celebrated the beauty of Ukrainian nature that was sacrificed to bring the Dnieper’s water to the arid Steppe and he expressed hope in the new beauty that would soon replace it. Dovzhenko also incorporated many of the materials he had intended for his unrealized novel, The Golden Gate, a folk/national epic of life on the Dnieper. While Dovzhenko was deeply immersed in his work on Poem of the Sea, he described his state of mind in a way that is highly relatable to graduate students approaching the end of the dissertation writing process: “I write and write through the sleepless nights. Past and present pass before my eyes. Battles and tempestuous struggles rage in my mind. Blood, pain, tears, laughter, and sometimes mockery float to the surface from memory’s abyss and sail away in the flood of great events like foam on springtime rapids.”266 Dovzhenko employed the metaphor of rivers in springtime to describe cleansing and renewal. It was through this metaphor that he viewed the creation of a manmade inland sea, dedicated to irrigating agricultural land in Southern Ukraine.

After visiting the dam construction site at Kakhovka in November 1951, Dovzhenko returned in September 1952. For the next two years he lived in the newly established city of Nova Kakhovka, just downstream from historical Kakhovka and the dam site. These years were his most active in terms of contributions to his diaries. He filled page after page with conversations he overheard, inspiring landscapes, and notes for his future film. Dovzhenko was intensely excited by the construction site, its young workers, and their nature transformation goals. The conversations that he had with the local population and workers who came to the construction site show that the narrative was entirely about securing water for irrigation rather than producing electricity: “Semen P. does not think of himself as a worker. Said that he was a farmer and would be a farmer until his dying day. He came to the construction project

266 Ibid., 231. (Diary entry from 4 March 1953)
temporarily, to help with the irrigation of the steppes. That’s what he said to the officials of his collective farm. ‘I’m going so that when we benefit from the watering of the steppes we can say, ‘We did our bit too.’’ Dovzhneko remarked to himself, “he’s no longer a farmer, and his sons will not go back to farming. When this dam is finished, they’ll go off to other [construction] projects until the Dnieper and the whole earth are transformed.”

During the first year of his stay in Kakhovka, Dovzhenko recorded widespread enthusiasm for the project and specifically for its irrigation aims. While driving to the floodplain one day, he spoke with a dump truck driver who told him, “I’d give anything just to see our construction finished, our beautiful land enriched by the water, and our people living in prosperity, and to remember then that there’s a bit of my hands and labor here too.” Workers were very proud to take part in what they saw as a grand irrigation plan. Dovzhenko was excited by the scale of change. He was excited that nature could be engineered to bring order out of chaos. As someone who so highly valued life in harmony with nature, he was excited to witness nature in its new modern form, befitting a new, modern, soviet society: “In three years everything will be changed here, and we too will change. Then we will really be able to say that it’s a rare bird that reaches the middle of the current. In a few more years the Volga and the Dnieper will cease to be rivers. The era of their anarchic being is drawing to an end. Ennobled and purified of wild growth and fortuiities, transformed by our creative effort, nature will appear in a new beauty. For the creative effort!”

Dovzhenko overheard a conversation among soldiers that equated Soviet success in

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267 Ibid., 193-94. (Diary entry from 14 September 1952)
268 Ibid., 194. (Diary entry from 14 September 1952)
269 Ibid., 208. (Diary entry from 10 October 1952)
270 Dovzhenko’s reference to a “rare bird” crossing the Dnieper is itself a reference to a famous Gogol line, celebrating the breadth of the river. Ibid., 217. (Diary entry from 23 October 1952)
WWII with Stalin’s all-encompassing nature transformation plans: — “Tell me, will the rivers run backwards?

— Even the rivers will run where we tell them.
— But what is the point of it? Why must we do everything backwards? Is that wise?
— What we’re doing is just as immortal as our victory at Stalingrad.”\(^\text{271}\)

In the diary entry, Dovzhenko added: “This is man’s ancient dream. Drought and storms will be no more. The climate will improve. And we shall enter immortality, beautiful as the work of our hands. The thirty billion trees that we will plant [as part of Stalin’s Plan for the Transformation of Nature]: that is the historical answer that communism is making to anarchic capitalism, the ravisher of the earth.”\(^\text{272}\) This theme was repeated across many portraits of workers in Kakhovka. Dmytro B. was a former “tank man” who took part in major battles in Stalingrad, Kursk, and elsewhere. When he arrived at the construction site he was told: “You’re a tankman? Excellent. We’ll put you on the scraper. There’s a new front here for you.”\(^\text{273}\) According to Dovzhenko the former tank operator quickly mastered the scraper and “now his machine cuts into the Kakhivka sand.”\(^\text{274}\) Indeed, there was a lot of sand to dig. While teams of archeologists ran around trying to get to ancient burial sites before the scrapers did, remains of Soviet Ukraine’s more recent history surfaced as well. The corpse of a Red Army soldier was found under Kakhovka’s sand, likely buried by a WWII shell explosion.\(^\text{275}\)

Dovzhenko was delighted by the cacophony of sounds he found on the construction site

\(^{271}\) Ibid., 181. (Diary entry from 16 August 1952) 
\(^{272}\) Ibid. (Diary entry from 16 August 1952) 
\(^{273}\) Ibid., 194. (Diary entry from 14 September 1952) 
\(^{274}\) Ibid. (Diary entry from 14 September 1952) 
\(^{275}\) Ibid., 196-97. (Diary entry from 18 September 1952)
and frequently remarked about this in his diaries: “Sitting by the future dam. The enormous plain that stretches out before me is being filled up by suction dredgers. A symphony of sounds envelopes me: motors roar, hammers pound, saws whine, power boats din, high-voltage lines whistle in the wind, the leaves of walnuts and mulberries rustle. Just now a flock of birds is chirping as it settles on the rooftops.”

Dovzhenko described a “symphony” in which sounds of the natural and industrial worlds merge in harmony. The filmmaker’s admiration for the men and women transforming the Dnieper at Kakhovka extended to the modern machines they operated. He included poetic descriptions of them in his diaries, such as this ode to suction dredgers: “The most powerful machine of the age — the suction dredger — has a very unoriginal and unimposing appearance. With the aid of this machine we will transform the earth. What used to be a dream or fairytale can become the reality of the present. That’s what the suction dredger is. Nothing showy, yet it’s more than a machine: it’s an entire poetic image.”

Dovzhenko had been in Nova Kakhovka for six months when Stalin died on 5 March 1953. There is no mentioned of Stalin’s death in the versions of his diaries that were published in the Soviet Union from the 1960s on. However, complete versions that have been published more recently reveal that Dovzhenko was quite distressed, writing: “Our native land has been orphaned.”

More than anything, Dovzhenko was distressed by an uncertain future. The death of his patron and tormentor set Dovzhenko emotionally adrift for many days after hearing the news: “He will no longer be my defender, who several times saved my life from ruin because of evil and cruel enemies, that noticed me, celebrated me, morally elevated me. What awaits me now, I do not know. My strength is failing, my heart is tired.”

276 Ibid., 204. (Diary entry from 23 September 1952)
277 Ibid., 190. (Diary entry from 13 September 1952)
278 Dovzhenko, Shchodennykovi Zapysy, 1939-1956, 703-04. (Diary entry from 8 March 1953)
279 Ibid., 704. (Diary entry from 8 March 1953)
reinvigorated Dovzhenko and inspired him to return to work on *Poem of the Sea* with renewed energy: “I will put my entire soul into it, all of my strength/powers that remain.”

**Blueprints of Nova Kakhovka: 1951-1956**

Dovzhenko immediately fell in love with southern Ukraine. He was happier there in the young town of Nova Kakhovka on the banks of the Dnieper than any other place or any other time in his life. Dovzhenko’s happiness there came from two overlapping or nesting geographies. On one hand he was overjoyed to finally return home to Ukraine, on the other hand he was particularly enchanted by that specific place within Ukraine. This was where the Dnieper meets the Steppe, and where they both intersect with a millennium of Ukrainian history and culture. Less than two weeks into his tenure in Kakhovka, Dovzhenko wrote: “Today I am so pleased with my thoughts that I can even say: how happy I am that life is being recreated with such richness and profundity in my heart and that it is here, on a real job with wind and sand, under a hot sun in the midst of an unfinished city, that the synthesis of my future book comes to me with the Dnieper current.”

Dovzhenko’s connection with Kakhovka intensified: “I feel as if I had been born here and since childhood have loved this river bank, these spaces, this gentle sky, and this town of young people.”

Throughout his time in Nova Kakhovka, Dovzhenko repeats over and over that he never wants to leave: “There is something magical in the soft warm air, such a gentle and light spirit. My first thought on this early morning: how good it is here among the simple working people, among the sand and vineyard on the banks of the wide, deep Dnieper. I don’t want to leave. If I could, I would work here on my native river until the end of my days,

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280 Ibid. (Diary entry from 8 March 1953)

281 *Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings*, 191. (Diary entry from 14 September 1952)

282 Ibid., 218. (Diary entry from 24 October 1952)
together with the people, I would build dams, heal the Dnieper, dig canals, behind the wheel of powerful and smart machines, that were provided by my state.”

Dovzhenko maintained a close relationship with Andrianov, meeting frequently with the chief of Dneprostroi. By Dovzhenko’s account, the two men enjoyed a great deal of mutual respect. However, it seems that Andrianov did not indulge Dovzhenko’s dreams of designing the new city and Kakhovka HES complex himself. In one early conversation, Andrianov mused: “How wonderful it is to build a city, new and bright… Nothing but sand and steppe here before, and now a city.” A few years later, Andrianov was heavily criticized for wasting raw materials and resources on building the city of Nova Kakhovka. Other hydro-engineering construction sites across the Soviet Union relied on simple barracks for workers. In Nova Kakhovka, Andrianov built stone apartment buildings and paved the streets with asphalt. He included elaborate parks, greenery, and cultural buildings. Despite the criticism from Moscow, Andrianov told Dovzhenko in October 1954 that he would not have done anything differently. He explained that support had come from within the Ukrainian Republic, from the Ukrainian state and party hierarchy. This gave Nova Kakhovka a native character.

Andrianov did not heed Dovzhenko’s earlier suggestion for the roof of the grand recreation building, which in Dovzhenko’s view must be designed in harmony with the Dnieper River and surrounding natural environment: “To place a baroque roof adapted from Kiev’s St. Sophia over the classically ordered three-story recreation building in New Kakhivka requires a great deal of impudence and degeneracy. And where? By the Dnieper, where everything seems to be saying: build the recreation building with a flat roof. Plant two hundred trees in wooden tubs

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284 Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings., 185. (Diary entry from 11 September 1952)

285 Ibid., 248. (Diary entry from 26 October 1954)
on the roof, make a winter garden, a restaurant, a dance floor. Let the young people enjoy themselves in the evenings and look at the labor of their hands from the height. This could be the best spot in the whole city. But no, a sorrowful, monastic roof will crown the building by the Dnieper. Oh the architectural stupidity, oh the poverty of mind!”286 Dovzhenko’s architectural dreams for Nova Kakhovka celebrated nature and national history. He proposed many monuments along the Dnieper that would juxtapose Ukraine’s past and future. Towards the end of construction, Dovzhenko took his design ideas to Petr Neporozhni, then the chief engineer of Dneprostroi. According to Dovzhenko, Neporozhni approved his proposal to decorate the hydropower dam and locks with sculptures of Zaporizhian Cossack canoes: “Now, if the sculptors show good taste, we’ll have one monument to our warlike ancestors. Nothing has been done in three hundred years! As if they had never existed…”287 He also appeared optimistic that his landscape designs for the shore of the reservoir would be realized.288

During Dovzhenko’s time in Kakhovka, his sense of national geography solidified. Not only was he happier there on the banks of the Dnieper than ever before, but his geographic imagination reoriented. Kakhovka and the Dnieper River were at the heart of this reorientation. While in Kakhovka in October 1952 he wrote: “I am at peace. How happy I am to be at home.”289 After so many years in forced exile, Dovzhenko was grateful to be in Ukraine, anywhere in Ukraine, and reunited with his homeland. He thought a great deal about his childhood home, and to a lesser extent about his earlier life in Kyiv, but neither retained the significance that Kakhovka did: “Having fallen asleep with the thought that I am in the very

286 Ibid., 212. (Diary entry from 12 October 1952)
287 Ibid., 252. (Diary entry from 7 November 1954)
288 Ibid. (Diary entry from 7 November 1954)
289 Ibid., 210. (Diary entry from 11 October 1952)
heart of my country. I awoke with the same thought in mind.”

He wrote that in Kakhovka he was able to wander through the past, present, and future of Ukraine. In particular, Dovzhenko was drawn to the Dnieper and the wide-open spaces in southern Ukraine, the intersection between the river and the Steppe. He attributed great transformative powers to Kakhovka and its environs: “One can purify and elevate one’s soul in contemplation of these vast spaces. How could one fail to be born a titan of the spirit, a poet of war, a defender of the native land, when such a noble spirit of courage manifests itself in these majestic spaces. I bow to you, my native land.”

Dovzhenko celebrated his sixtieth birthday in Nova Kakhovka. The occasion prompted him to articulate his new national geography with the Dnieper river and Nova Kakhovka at its center:

I am sixty years old today. Yesterday I was uneasy the entire day, overwhelmed by complicated thoughts: my stormy life is coming to an end. Now I am sitting at a window in Kakhovka. A quiet, beautiful morning. In front of me, quite close, are the blue waters of the Dnieper, beyond them white Cossack Island, and Cossack Village on the other side, and not a single cloud in the autumn sky. I am pleased that my birthday comes when I am in [the new socialist city of] New Kakhivka, surrounded by young people, beside the dam that will create a new sea and a new life. Today is Sunday. Everyone is resting, and there’s even less steamer traffic on the river. I love New Kakhovka. I love the Dnieper, this great river of my people [narodu], the pure air, the clear sky, the broad landscapes, and the majestic peace. I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else except on this beautiful native shore. Nowhere else have I felt so much love for my fellow man. Kakhivka, where my father worked as a farmhand in the last century, has become my heart’s fatherland, the home of my most precious feelings.

In Dovzhenko’s geographic imagination, the significance of this place, with the river and the open steppe, extended far beyond his own heart and life experiences. This native landscape was a

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290 Ibid. (Diary entry from 11 October 1952)
291 Ibid., 230. (Diary entry from 25 November 1952)
292 Ibid., 211. (Diary entry from 12 October 1952)
293 Ibid., 241. (Diary entry from 12 September 1954); “new socialist city of” inserted from original Ukrainian text, see Shchodennykovi Zapysy, 1939-1956, 713.
fundamental element of how he defined the Ukrainian nation. Referring to this landscape, he wrote: “I have always appreciated national [natsional’nu] form and content, especially today.”294

Poems of the Sea: 1951-1956

Dovzhenko developed his informal philosophy of nature throughout his artistic career, reaching its most coherent conclusion in the years he dedicated to Poem of the Sea.295 Although he never articulated his worldview in those words, each of his creative projects featured characters who remade, tamed, transformed, reformed, or reordered their environments, from simple farmers to botanists and hydro-engineers.296 In each case, nature and nature transformer are linked, Soviet man is himself changed through engineering nature. Dovzhenko even imagined himself as such a transformer, actively cultivating that persona. More so than ever before, he paid close attention to what was scarified and lost forever in the name of engineering nature and harnessing the full potential of Ukraine’s natural resources. The price of nature transformation in southern Ukraine, through Dovzhenko’s eyes, may be divided into three categories: traditional rural life, which he represented with the peasant hut and small private garden; natural beauty and wild nature, as seen in the Great Meadow [Velykyi Luh] and Dnieper wetlands [plavni]; and national history, both personal and heroic. Along with the new socialist society that would rise from the sandy banks of the southern Dnieper, Dovzhenko developed the idea of a corresponding new aesthetics and new natural world that would replace the old. This new beauty of Soviet nature was based on order rather than chaos, a “second nature.”297 In the

294 Shchodennykovi Zapysy, 1939-1956, 713. (Diary entry from 12 September 1954)
295 Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings., xlvi. (Introduction by Marco Carynnyk)
296 Ibid. (Introduction by Marco Carynnyk)
297 “second nature” quoted in ibid. (Introduction by Marco Carynnyk)
winter of 1954, Dovzhenko linked seasonal river swelling to the impending flood of the Kakhovka reservoir basin, writing: “This will be an unusual spring.”

Dovzhenko was a convinced nature transformer throughout his life, but in his last few years he experienced more doubt than ever before. His *Poem of the Sea*, therefore, has elements of both panegyric and lament. The extended time that Dovzhenko spent in Nova Kakhovka allowed him to see this magnificent feat of hydro-engineering from the ground. He watched and listened as this new modern world was forced on the inhabitants of southern Ukraine. He spoke with many who were forced to leave their homes and their personal, local, and national history behind. Although the larger ecological impact was not revealed until years after his death, even in 1955 Dovzhenko was able to get early glimpses of larger problems. For the first time he began to question the reasoning behind such gigantic hydro-engineering projects. In June 1955 he decided to end the film with a scene about a farmer who refuses to move out of the reservoir basin and man-made flood. This was the image that Dovzhenko chose to leave his audience with. When Dovzhenko returned to Kakhovka in May 1955 for the dedication of the hydropower station, he was overwhelmed by weakness and pain in his heart. He dreamed of making *Poem of the Sea* his greatest masterpiece, but he also sensed that he did not have much time or strength left. He wrote that he was twenty years too late: “To make a great film here one needs a warrior’s [zaporozhian] heart and the wings I used to have.”

Dovzhenko recorded many observations of the impacted population as they bid farewell to their homes, for use in *Poem of the Sea*:

How to leave behind one’s cottage: One can leave it behind cheerfully, walking away

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298 Ibid., 254. (Diary entry from 26 December 1954)

299 Ibid., 260. (Diary entry from 1 June 1955)

300 This scene was included in Solntseva’s production but not as the final scene.

with little emotion. One can spit on its tiny windows and shabby thatched roof, turn with a brisk smile to the newsreel reporters, and stride off to a prosperous and happy life. One can pretend not to believe that cottage, chimney, pear tree, mulberry tree, and walnut [tree] will be submerged by water and sit and crack jokes until the flood comes. Or one can cry as one leaves behind the old cottage. The elderly woman can quietly kiss the window sills, doors, walls, and stove where she spent half a century preparing food and mumble through her tears, ‘O my cottage, my beloved home, I am leaving you. You will go down to the bottom of the sea. Water will cover you forever, and I shall go to the high mountain and from there look at the waves above you until my dying day. Thank you for giving us, and our parents, and our grandparents warmth and shelter. I am leaving behind their graves too, my little cottage. That is what my new destiny has decreed for me. Farewell.  

It was very important to Dovzhenko to hear directly from the villagers themselves. He was fascinated by the diversity of responses and wanted to represent them all in his film. The real diversity was in the many ways that people mourned their loss. Deep sadness, however expressed, was the most prevalent response.

However, Dovzhenko was sure that a distant audience would never believe that the population there did not freely and happily abandon their meager ancestral homes, that viewers would accuse him of making it all up: “Critics will say: the author has obviously invented the conflict. There is no such conflict. Our masses have long since outgrown these petty questions of private property. Where has he seen these problems? Where has he seen mothers kissing doorposts with tearful lamentation instead of joyfully moving from their cramped, mud-walled huts into spacious new homes? This doesn’t happen!”  

Never questioning the inevitability of this loss, Dovzhenko proposed ways of documenting rural village life before it went under water. For example, he suggested that authorities commission a series of large landscape paintings of the Great Meadow and the villages in the reservoir basin: “The people in the villages that will be

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302 Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings., 197. (Diary entry from 18 September 1952)

303 For example, see ibid., 260. (Diary entry from 2 June 1955)

304 Ibid., 242. (Diary entry from 1 October 1954)
built along the shores ought to know what their forefathers’ dwellings looked like.”

Dovzhenko enjoyed exploring the lower Dnieper. One of his favorite places was Cossack Island, located just below the Kakhovka dam. The low-lying island was (and is) part of the cherished Dnieper wetlands and reed marshes [plavni]. He relished in the lush, untamed nature on the island. Once the Kakhovka reservoir swallowed up the Great Meadow, this wild, disorderly nature on Cossack Island would represent the last of the old, un-engineered river and its wetlands. Dovzhenko’s notebooks show his conflicted attitude towards this loss. He acknowledged and accepted the great sacrifice necessary not only to bring about a new modern Ukrainian society, but also for the Ukrainian natural landscape to harmonize with the new cultural, political, and economic landscape.

Dovzhenko filled pages and pages of his notebooks with descriptions of the untamed beauty of the Great Meadow, much of which would be drowned by the Kakhovka sea: “How immense the spaces here are. The Dnieper will lose something of its beauty between Kakhovka and Zaporizhya. The Great Meadow, that vast, reedy marsh where our forefathers, the Zaporozhian Cossacks, gathered, will go under water. A new beauty, brought forth by our efforts to transform nature, will bloom on the shores of the future reservoir in thirty years or so. Forests and orchards will surround it, and there will be roads and paths, trim and brightly lit, to make people happy.” Dovzhenko valued beauty above all else, not devoid of utility, but intrinsically

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305 Ibid., 202. (Diary entry from 21 September 1952)

306 This was also one of my favorite places when I visited Nova Kakhovka in 2014. I stayed directly across the river from the island, so shared the view of it that Dovzhenko described many times. I was able to kayak around it, and like Dovzhenko, enjoyed exploring its untamed nature. Today the island represents one of the last vestiges of the ancient Dnieper wetlands [plavni]. Locals referred to the river below the dam at Kakhovka as the last of the “old Dnipro.”

307 For example: Dovzhenko, Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings., 205. (Diary entry from 23 September 1952)

308 Ibid., 198. (Diary entry from 17 September 1952)
bound to it. He considered the loss of beauty to be an enormous sacrifice, so in its place devised the idea of a “new beauty” to describe the new manifestation of Ukrainian nature that is created when nature is transformed to serve Soviet society. While traveling by steamship up the Dnieper river from Kakhovka to Kyiv in October of 1952, Dovzhenko wrote: “In two years all these trees will have been cut down. The water meadows [flood plain] will stand bare, and then in another year they will go under water. The clean sand banks and the unsurpassed cliffs will be no more. The Dnieper itself will disappear from view, and this harmony, this poetry that has been formed over thousands of years, will change. The poetry of an inland sea will replace the riverine aesthetics here where the lines are being written. The broad expanses of a sea allure men. A new beauty will come in place of the old. The new shores will be decked in new green forests, no longer fortuitous, but planned and planted by man.”

Dovzhenko was happy and proud to live in the age of nature transformation, with Soviet success at the vanguard. He was particularly proud to contribute to this “great cause” in his own way.

Another element of loss that Dovzhenko explored throughout his notebooks was lost national and personal history along the Dnieper river. This lost history encompassed three scales. One dated back to the ancient world and the Scythian burial sites that fell within the flood zone. Another scale embraced the millennia of Ukrainian history that took place on the Dnieper river and riverbanks, represented by Cossack exploits. And finally, Dovzhenko paid tribute to the personal history of families who made their life there for generations, a way of life that survived violent collectivization, famine, and two world wars. He wanted to portray the magnitude and weight of this event in his film in a way that properly honored the sacrifice: “Spring. Flood waters rising. The Great Meadow goes under. Houses have been abandoned. Streets are flooded.

309 Ibid., 224-25. (Diary entry from 31 October 1952)

310 Ibid., 225. (Diary entry from 31 October 1952)
Agitated people say good-bye to a thousand years of their life. Their entire visible world is going under. A tremendous drama, a national epic. The mills their great-grandfathers built are going under. The willows where boys and girls used to embrace and kiss are going under. This is where they composed their songs and celebrated their holidays. This is where their heroic history was made.”

The local population had significant reservations about the entire project, long before the ecological problems began to appear. In October 1952, Dovzhenko traveled to Nikopol, a riverside city on the western bank of the Dnieper below Zaporizhia and above Kakhovka. He spoke with inhabitants of collective farms that were located within the flood zone: “An enchanting embankment [near Nikopol]. There’s nothing as beautiful anywhere else along the Dnieper. It will all go under water, and Nikopol will protect itself from being flooded with a high dam, and thus will stand lower than the reservoir. The neighboring village of Pavlivka (six hundred houses) will go entirely under water.”

Dovzhenko met with the chairman of the Nikopol city council who said to him, “No, we’ll never have such beauty again. What’s the reservoir? Just a lot of water. Where’s the beauty in that?” He wrote in his diary that everyone in Pavlivka was opposed to the dam: “They don’t believe in it and don’t want what they don’t believe in.” One villager said, “I don’t understand the sense in such a large amount of water.” Dovzhenko listened to the villagers and thought about the tears and distress that the flood would bring, “After all, there is something catastrophic in all this, no matter how great the future creation. These places will forever go under water, this beauty, and in particular, the

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311 Ibid., 212-13. (Diary entry from 15 October 1952)
312 Ibid., 209. (Diary entry from 10 October 1952)
313 Ibid. (Diary entry from 10 October 1952)
314 Shchodennykovi Zapysy, 1939-1956, 600. (Diary entry from 10 October 1954)
315 Ibid. (Diary entry from 10 October 1954)
Dovzhenko envisioned this struggle between the old and new, culminating in the flood, to be the central theme of his film, Poem of the Sea: “How many memories will go under water. How many songs, great-grandfathers’ graves, towns, meadows, fishing spots, and beauty of the old nature.” He also wrote down imaginary future conversations that he would have with critics who would inevitably deny that this drama - this tension, struggle, sacrifice - unfolded on the banks of the Dnieper as the water filled the reservoir basin.

Two years later, Dovzhenko’s diaries reveal a clear shift in his thinking. The overwhelming happiness that he experienced in Nova Kakhovka disappeared and was replaced by inner conflict. For the first time he began to seriously question the hydro-engineering projects that transformed the Dnieper river after WWII: “Something disturbed me to no end today. I received confirmation of an old suspicion. Back in Moscow during the summer and then here in Kakhivka, and also while sailing down the Dnieper, I kept wondering: is all this right? Very well, I understand the need for the Kakhivka power station and reservoir, and I love them. This construction is worth all the sacrifices — destruction of villages and flooding of the water meadows. Why? Because it makes possible the life-giving southern canal, which will irrigate our steppes and bring them prosperity. The project is absolutely progressive. But what about the other dams, especially the one at Kremenchuk, which will flood 45,000 homes in the heart of Ukraine? Is it really necessary? What do we need it for?” Dovzhenko continued to hold on to his belief in the Kakhovka project, to which he had already dedicated two years of creative work. But he drew a line there. From the very beginning of the Kakhovka construction, Soviet

316 Ibid. (Diary entry from 10 October 1954)
317 Ibid., 601. (Diary entry from 10 October 1954)
318 Ibid., 600-02. (Diary entry from 10 October 1954)
319 Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings., 246-47. (Diary entry from 26 October 1954)
authorities had sold the project to millions of Soviet Ukrainians on the basis of using the
Dnieper’s water to irrigate the Steppe. This was an explicitly agricultural goal and one that was
more easily understood by the local population. Power production was viewed in a very different
light: “Won’t the price for their kilowatts be too high?” Dovzhenko asked in his diaries and then
continued: “Maybe we can do with small dams to maintain normal navigation and supply a little
power. After all, mankind is on the brink of a new energy age. Control of thermonuclear energy
will make us the rulers of the entire solar system. Why these complicated, archaic, insanely
expensive power stations on our beautiful rivers? Why this flooding of towns and villages?”

The estimate that Dovzhenko cited of 45,000 impacted families was based on official plans and
was a very low estimate of the number of families who were forced to relocate as a result of the
reservoir above Kremenchuk. He claimed to have discussed his concerns with Andrianov without
receiving a satisfactory response. In Dovzhenko’s view, Andrianov was too caught up in the
details of hydro-engineering to see the bigger picture.

Dovzhenko returned to Nova Kakhovka in May 1955 to take part in the dedication of the
hydropower plant. Festivities were delayed because of rain, but after all, the Steppe needed the
rainwater. The celebration of this enormous feat of Soviet hydro-engineering was meant to
distract from the mounting fear that it had all been an enormous mistake: “Just as I suspected,
there is something mysterious here in Kakhivka, something that worries the engineers. Rumors
have been going around for a long time that there is ‘another Dnieper’ somewhere
underground.” In fact a man-made reservoir of those proportions had raised the underground
water table, causing water to leach out. As a result, the reservoir took much longer to fill than

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320 Ibid., 247. (Diary entry from 26 October 1954)
321 Ibid. (Diary entry from 26 October 1954)
322 Ibid., 257. (Diary entry from 22 May 1955)
planned and the salinity of the surrounding earth increased. “In short,” Dovzhenko wrote, “the dam probably ought to have been built not here but in Hornostayivka. Consultants talked about this, wrote reports, etc.”323 In a section of Dovzhenko’s notebooks that was not published during the Soviet period, he revealed why Kakhovka was chosen as the dam location even against the advice of specialists: “Then why did the government settle on the Kakhovka variant specifically? What motives guided the minds of superiors? More than anything else, they were influenced not by science and technology, but, oddly enough, by ‘ideology.’”324 Dovzhenko goes on to explain that the Soviet leadership needed the dam and power station to be named “Kakhovka” because of the town’s association with an important civil war battle against Wrangel’s White Army troops. He reflected on all that had been sacrificed for this project - the villages that were uprooted, the forests of trees that were cut down - and wrote: “God forbid, it was all for nothing.”325

**Odes to the Dnieper River: 1951-1956**

Dovzhenko filled pages and pages of his notebooks with descriptions of the Dnieper. He wrote about its beauty and how happy it made him to sit on its banks. Beyond this physical, location-based meaning, Dovzhenko also articulated a number of symbolic or metaphorical meanings. For Dovzhenko, the Dnieper was a Ukrainian river, a national river. It was a symbol of Ukraine, a symbol of the Ukrainian people, and a symbol of Ukrainian history. The Dnieper served as a metaphor for Dovzhenko’s own life. Its water possessed curative and cleansing powers. It was the source of agricultural fertility. The Dnieper River also embodied the natural harmony that Dovzhenko valued so highly.

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323 Ibid. (Diary entry from 22 May 1955)
324 Shchodennykovi Zapysy, 1939-1956, 766. (Diary entry from 22 May 1955)
325 Ibid., 767. (Diary entry from 22 May 1955)
Dovzhenko’s personal connection to Kakhovka began long before he arrived at the construction site. At different points in his diaries, he repeats the story of his father who as a teenager in 1887 traveled along the Desna river and down the Dnieper to Kakhovka, navigating the treacherous rapids above Zaporizhia in order to obtain work on the Falz-Fein estate. It was a particular source of pride for Dovzhenko that his father and other young men like him had braved the rapids, not to reach Constantinople, but to access the domestic labor market in Kakhovka.\textsuperscript{326} In reference to the story, Dovzhenko wrote: “When he sailed from above Chernihiv to Kakhovka to find work as a hired hand, my father did not know what his nationality was, just as none of his chums and fellow workers knew until the revolution. For him Russian people, however, were quite apart. They would float rafts down the Desna from Orlov province. ‘Those are Russians,’ he would say. ‘Then who are we?’ we small children would ask. ‘Who are we?’ father would repeat, not knowing what answer to make but vaguely sensing a thick blindfold over his eyes. ‘We’re peasants… Farmers we are, simple people. Peasants in other words, and that’s all there is to it.’”\textsuperscript{327} While his father knew only that he was not Russian, Dovzhenko was keenly aware of his Ukrainian nationality.

The river of his nation was also a metaphor for Dovzhenko’s own life and personal journey, connecting his childhood to the last years of his life, physically and metaphorically. Quoting Shevchenko’s infamous line, “The wide Dnieper roars and moans,” as he frequently did throughout his notebooks, Dovzhenko refers to the flow of time in connection with the flow of the river: “I am the oldest man on the shore of my people’s great river. My head is covered with white flowers, and for some reason I feel sad and my heart aches. Something has [floated] here

\textsuperscript{326} Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings., 152. (Diary entry from 16 November 1947); The Falz-Fein family belong to a German settlement in the area, and later founded the Askania-Nova Nature Preserve about 38 miles south east from Kakhovka.

\textsuperscript{327} Ibid., 198-99. (Diary entry from 19 September 1952)
from a great distance, from the Desna itself, the precious river of my childhood where I once
walked barefoot and drank the soft water. That was so long, long ago. Cold night, autumn wind.
Bearing with it the Desna waters, the Dnieper flows into the darkness.”328 Here Dovzhenko
alludes to the inevitable and imminent end of his life.

In Poem of the Sea, the character of Ivan Kravchyna was one of many that Dovzhenko
spoke through. Kravchyna’s village would be flooded by the reservoir, but he - like Dovzhenko -
accepted the sacrifice.329 Incorporating Shevchenko’s poem, Dovzhenko wrote a dialogue
between Kravchyna and the Dnieper River:

When the talk had abated and K-ov, gazing at the broad stripe of silver that is the
Dnieper, begins to sing ‘The mighty Dnieper roars and groans,” Kravchyna interrupts in
his low base voice. ‘The devil take your roaring and groaning. Enough roaring, I say!
Now friend, you’ll sing a quiet tune, as Party discipline demands. Roaring and groaning
and carrying houses off and pouring our wealth into the sea, and then being sickly the rest
of the year. The devil knows what you are, but certainly not a river when even a calf can
ford you.’

‘But that was a poem.’

‘Ah! That’s not the kind of poetry I’d write about [the Dnieper]. Just you wait until we
herd it into the reservoir. That’s when we’ll have poetry.’

‘O uncle, you’re so…’

‘I’m so what? I am just like the age. Now you’re going to give me water according to
plan, enough roaring and groaning. We too have been groaning on your banks,’
Kravchyna addresses the Dnieper.

I [the narrator] cannot take my eyes off him. For a moment it seems to me that they
[Kravchyna and the river] are bosom pals and that Kravchyna’s wrinkles reflect
everything that has happened on the Dnieper’s banks in the last thousand years.

‘Shevchenko… Shevchenko had his sorrow. We have ours. What could he have done
back then? Just groan too… Enough. Let’s sing, ‘Nightingales, nightingales, don’t wake
the soldiers.’

K-ov begins the song. Kravchyna looks at the broad, solemn Dnieper, the great river of
his life. His high, smooth forehead, like Lenin’s, looks beautiful in the starlight. There is
something ancient, something common to all mankind in him at this moment. He is

328 Ibid., 206. (Diary entry from 5 October 1952)
329 Ibid., 203-04. (Diary entry from 21 September 1952)
thinking of his sons, whose bodies were born away with the current after battle. Dovzhenko’s response to Shevchenko. Dovzhenko imagined that his Poem of the Sea was a modern version of Shevchenko’s poetry, reflecting the new modern age. In this scene, Dovzhenko referred to the two primary aims of the Kakhovka hydro-engineering project, which are to put the Dnieper to work - rather than allowing it to wastefully spill into the Black Sea - and to control the river’s seasonal variation, making it possible to provide water to farmers “according to plan.”

At the same time, Dovzhenko reinforced the idea that the fate of the Ukrainian people is bound to the river and vice versa. Even in the short period of time since Shevchenko wrote about the Dnieper, the Ukrainian people suffered tremendously and overcame great obstacles on the banks of the Dnieper. This long history is reflected in the wrinkles on Kravchyna’s face. Dovzhenko reinforced this connection throughout his diaries, writing to himself: “Describe the river early in the morning, when willow trees, geese, boats, and a cottage or a white sandbar here and there begin to appear in the rosy fog. How soft and clear the water is. How people live along its banks, bathing in it and composing songs about it. Fortunate is he who drinks its water and never in his life has to yearn for it. When I think about ancient times, from the Scythians to the Zaporozhian Cossacks, when I reflect on the history of my people, it seems to me that the Dnieper and the people were equally young and similar then. Now the Dnieper has aged, but the people have grown up and entered their maturity.”

Dovzhenko of course refers to his own exile from Ukraine and his own painful longing for the Dnieper’s water: “How wonderful it is to live beside these great waters! One can dream of seas and oceans, but one can never love them as

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330 Ibid., 191-92. (Diary entry from 14 September 1952); italicized text inserted based on original Ukrainian text: Shchodennykovi Zapysy, 1939-1956, 766.

331 Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings., 195. (Diary entry from 14 September 1952)
much as this mighty river that flows ceaselessly between native shores.” When Dovzhenko described the Dnieper as powerful and mighty, he was referring also to the Ukrainian people, even describing the river in human terms. When flying over the river in 1952, Dovzhenko noted: “The Dnieper and its ancient tributaries flow like blood into the arteries of the land. I have never seen such beauty.”

Traveling back and forth between Moscow and Kakhovka gave Dovzhenko many opportunities to view the Dnieper River from the air and from the deck of a steamship: “Islands sail past interspersed with fishermen, boats, and flocks of ducks. No one can say when the Dnieper is most beautiful. It is always splendid like my father at work. The autumn clouds in the sky have no tinge of sadness to them. Everything around me, this unity of sky, earth, and water, composes a harmony of color, line, and rhythm.” In this example, Dovzhenko alluded to the productivity of the river, a virtue that will be significantly enhanced by the extensive hydro-engineering underway. In particular, he emphasized the benefits of putting the Dnieper to work in service of agriculture on the Ukrainian Steppe. Dovzhenko described a monumental scene he planned for the film: “Through the drought-ridden steppes, along huge canals the Dnieper waters begin to flow.”

A few weeks later while en route to Moscow, he wrote: “Flying over the Dnieper and the boundless steppes. I cannot hold back the tears of joy. Ukraine, Dnieper, you are my joy! How beautiful and sublime you are, my country! How much wealth and human beauty there is here! Native land, I am happy to be flying over you, feasting my eyes on the distant horizons, the Dnieper current, and the white villages along the banks. The droning of the engines sounds to me like music, like the mighty power of our people. I seem to be flying over the entire

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332 Ibid. (Diary entry from 14 September 1952)
333 Ibid., 226. (Diary entry from 2 November 1952)
334 Ibid., 224. (Diary entry from 31 October 1952)
335 Ibid., 213. (Diary entry from 15 October 1952)
planet, our beautiful mother. Below me the Dnieper flows endlessly between green fields."336 By highlighting the beauty and bounty of his native land and the lush fields that feed on the Dnieper’s water, he celebrates the river’s contribution to the fertility of Ukrainian soil. Dovzhenko rediscovered Christianity after the war, albeit in a form particular to his own worldview. He incorporated this sacred vision of the Dnieper into his existing spiritual associations, at one-point writing: “Ducks fly over the water; boats, forests, and distant white villages sail past. God Himself hovers over the Dnieper.”337

The Dnieper river had an enormously powerful influence on Dovzhenko. While creating a film about the transformation of the Dnieper, Dovzhenko’s notebooks also reveal the many ways that he himself was transformed by the river. Less than two months after arriving in Nova Kakhovka, Dovzhenko looked out over the “still and inexpressibly beautiful” river and wrote: “…I cannot create or even go on living away from here…”338 Sitting down to write his final masterpiece and struggling to find appropriately momentous words to tell his story, he imagined that his inspiration was conveyed by the Dnieper’s current: “Come to me with the waters of the approaching new world, my precious words.”339 Endowing the Dnieper with the power to heal - body and mind - Dovzhenko credited the river for his renewed spirits:

God, how much beauty there is in the world! Brother Dnieper, dear father, how much joy and precious feelings your native waters have brought my heart! How much human beauty has been manifested to me on your banks! What priceless gifts you have bestowed upon me! How much gentleness in the wind above you and the blue sky that looks down on your water in eternal admiration! How much life and touching poetry in the transparent streets that yearn to mingle with you! And the sun, the gentle generous sun that I have worshipped all my life. Beloved river, splendid river of my nation, accept my love and endless gratitude for being born on your banks, drinking your pure water, and being reborn in spirit beside you. You have made me good. You have imbued me with a

336 Ibid., 225. (Diary entry from 2 November 1952)
337 Ibid. (Diary entry from 31 October 1952)
338 Ibid., 223. (Diary entry from 30 October 1952)
339 Ibid., 213. (Diary entry from 15 October 1952)
Dovzhenko writes that he was reborn as a result of drinking the Dnieper’s water, but even more significantly, he writes that he was born on the Dnieper’s banks. This, of course, is not a statement of geographical fact, but a clear articulation of his national geography. Dovzhenko was born on the Dnieper’s riverbanks because all Ukrainians were born on the Dnieper. The Dnieper not only “renewed his soul,” but as he wrote a few weeks later, it represented the soul of all Ukrainians: “The pure waters of my nation’s great river! It was the Dnieper’s curative moisture that bathed me, its eternally feminine Ukrainian caresses and the unstained purity of its rich colors that enveloped me. The warm, soft water renewed my soul, purified it of grief and sorrow, and restored its appreciation of beauty. And I became good and joyous, as my mother had intended me to be. The river filled my heart with love, peace, and happiness. Now I shall always bless its banks, the gentle splashing of waves, the blue sky reflected in it, and the maternal warmth. River, river, soul of my people, what a priceless gift you have brought me! I turn to you in my memories, offering in sacrifice my most precious thoughts. My holy, unforgettable, eternal one! Call me to yourself, receive me on your banks, where my people labor, where I hear singing.”

**Conclusions**

In some ways Dovzhenko fulfilled his greatest dreams on the banks of the Dnieper river in southern Ukraine. That was not where he died, but it was where he spent much of his time during the last years of his life. Dovzhenko made Mosfilm wait and wait for his final screenplay. According to Dmitrii Pisarevskii, the editor-in-chief of the journal, Soviet Screen, it was well

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340 Ibid., 221. (Diary entry from 29 October 1952)
341 Ibid., 229. (Diary entry from 14 November 1952)
worth the wait.\textsuperscript{342} The filmmaker always infused his works with his own world view and the people who influenced his life, but \textit{Poem of the Sea} was special. Before his sudden death in November 1956, just days before filming, Dovzhenko planned to play the role of his autobiographical narrator himself.\textsuperscript{343} Instead, his wife Yulia Solnsteva directed the film according to Dovzhenko’s scenario and instructions. Solntseva would earn international acclaim a few years later, becoming the first female director to win Best Director honors at the Cannes Film Festival for \textit{Tale of the Flaming Years} (1960), based on Dovzhenko’s notes and unrealized scenario.\textsuperscript{344} \textit{Poem of the Sea} was released in the Soviet Union in early November 1958 and Dovzhenko was awarded the Lenin Prize posthumously. For the first time in his career, the landscape of Soviet cultural politics became more favorable to his vision in the time between conceiving of the film, writing the screenplay, and the film’s release. Pisarevskii called the film a blend between “lyrical poetry, song, and a folk epic.”\textsuperscript{345} It was lauded at home and abroad, though audience members said that the flashbacks to Ukraine’s Cossack past made the film a bit “complicated.” As Dovzhenko predicted in his diaries, some viewers found the grief expressed by his characters over their forced relocation to be “improbable.”\textsuperscript{346}

\textit{Poem of the Sea} was considered to be a highly successful work of Socialist Realism,\textsuperscript{347} but by pushing the boundaries of customary narrative and style, it is also representative of early Thaw culture. Dovzhenko’s screenplay for \textit{The Enchanted Desna} was published in 1956-1957

\begin{footnotes}
\item[343] Ibid., 27.
\item[344] Despite Solnsteva’s directorial role, \textit{Poem of the Sea} was considered to be entirely Dovzhenko’s film, see ibid., 19.; 56 years later, in 2017, Sofia Coppola was just the second woman to receive this honor.
\item[345] Ibid., 29.
\item[346] Ibid., 29-32.
\item[347] Ibid., 29.
\end{footnotes}
both in book form and serialized by the journal *Dnipro*. These works served as inspiration for the Russian Village Writers and for the *shestydesiatnyky*. In Soviet Ukraine the generation of the 1960s pushed the boundaries of Socialist Realism in their youth and fought for Ukrainian Independence in adulthood.\(^{348}\)

Dovzhenko tried to synthesize the old and new, traditional and modern, in building a Ukrainian national culture within the Soviet context. He considered the national landscape to be an integral part of this. The Dnieper river was the center of Dovzhenko’s conception of Ukraine’s national geography. In particular, he assigned great significance to the stretch of the river that meets the wide-open steppe in southern Ukraine. He highly valued the beauty of Ukrainian nature but developed a philosophy of nature that valued nature with a purpose. He associated untamed nature with Ukrainian history and the cultural heritage of his people, but also believed that a new modern, engineered Ukrainian nature should reflect the new modern society of Soviet Ukraine. Despite persistent persecution for nationalism, Dovzhenko refused to acknowledge a tension between national and soviet interests, between his love for Ukraine and loyalty to the larger Soviet project. He aspired to transform his environment in harmony with nature and was himself transformed by the Dnieper River in the last five years of his life.

The Anthem of the Thaw: Fertility, Freedom, and the Dnieper River

It is no surprise that the process of de-Stalinization following Khrushchev’s ‘secret’ speech, “On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences,” at the 20th Party Congress in February 1956 resulted in the removal of Stalin’s name from the State Anthem of Soviet Ukraine and, of course, from the Soviet Anthem as well. The real surprise lies in the fact that a revision of the text did not occur for over two decades, not until 1978. In the meantime, Soviet Anthems were simply performed without lyrics. What would a “Thaw” anthem have looked like? And why was one never created? These questions are not merely counterfactual. In the spring of 1957, the Ukrainian literary elite were indeed earnestly engaged in composing a new State Anthem for Soviet Ukraine. This was not just a revision that erased Stalin, but an entirely new project for a new poetic text and new musical score. This anthem of the Thaw never entered the official repertoire and has since been forgotten. Nevertheless, the proposed verses describe the authors’ visions of the past, the present, and the future of Ukraine. Images of Ukraine’s natural environment and national geography stand out. In particular, a significant number of these poets chose to include the Dnieper river in the texts they submitted for consideration. My analysis of 64 draft Anthem texts confirms the river’s status not only as a core national symbol but as the core national symbol.

For the most part, the Dnieper was employed in the proposed Anthem texts in one of two ways: The river served as a metaphor for the Ukrainian people - the narod. In this sense poets anthropomorphized the Dnieper, endowing it with characteristics such as strength. They also chose it as the primary symbol of Ukrainian’s national geography, making a single geographical feature represent the entire Ukrainian territory. Even though the river did not appear in every individual text, no other symbol was used to represent the Ukrainian nation - its people and its territory - more universally than the Dnieper river. The Dnieper appeared as the beneficiary and
locus of Soviet modernization, showcasing the large-scale hydroengineering projects underway at that time. In addition, the river provided the setting for major episodes in Ukraine’s national history.

The themes of freedom and the fertility of Ukrainian soil also permeate the proposed texts. In different ways, these three themes — the Dnieper river, freedom, and fertility — are each associated with Ukrainian nature and geography. The Anthem drafts are filled with metaphorical and literal images of the Ukrainian landscape as a cultivated field and fertile garden, which blossoms perpetually. Although less directly, the theme of freedom is also closely linked with Ukraine’s nature, national geography, and even the Dnieper. In Ukrainian culture, the river - like the Steppe - is often described as boundless. Both are frequently depicted as places where a sense of freedom is experienced and where Ukrainians have historically fought for their personal and national liberty.³⁴⁹ The author of “Great Fate,” one of the draft texts that was consistently praised as one of the best, connected the Dnieper river with freedom in this way. Describing the red and blue flag of Soviet Ukraine, the author wrote: “On your [Ukraine’s] banner burns the crimson blood of freedom fighters [bortsiv za voliu], and azure of the boundless Dnipro.”³⁵⁰

The story of the failure to produce an anthem during the Thaw suggests that the changes brought on by the cultural Thaw may have actually hindered the project more than helped.³⁵¹ The decade following Stalin’s death in 1953 can be seen as a time of great potential. Boundaries were expanded and pushed and tested. After almost two decades of cultural atrophy, the change in

³⁴⁹ For example, see my discussion in Chapter 5 of Honchar’s novel, The Cathedral (1968).

³⁵⁰ TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, d. 285, st. 31; TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 351, st. 107-108; TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4703, st. 42 (“Great Fate”).

leadership at the top heralded a cultural revival, characterized by innovation and the (re)introduction of new forms and new themes. For the poets who took part in writing the new Anthem, this was a particularly special time. Lyrical poetry had vanished during Stalin’s lifetime, but reappeared in the late 1950s and early 1960s, often authored by a new, younger, generation of poets. Katerina Clark has argued that the full magnitude of the cultural Thaw rarely reached the published page and was instead most visible in public discourse. In other words, the excitement in the air and on the street was more powerful than the content of any one piece of literature that was published in this period. Although strict Party control over Soviet culture remained in place, it was the widespread perception of radically new opportunities that defined the era. However, for Soviet culture this period can just as accurately be defined by the anxiety, uncertainty, and confusion it produced. This chaotic disorientation is manifest in the republic wide competition to compose the poetic text for the anthem.

Throughout the winding and protracted course of the competition, potential anthems were written, examined, critiqued, discussed, and revised by a large portion of the Ukrainian literary elite. Collectively, these texts attest to the composition of core national symbols at that time: the Dnieper river, freedom, and the fertility of Ukraine’s rich earth. Moreover, their authors had to balance the incorporation of these national symbols with a list of prescribed “Soviet” elements, such as Lenin, the October revolution, and the Communist Party. They did so at a time of great confusion over what the new rules of the new age looked like. The discussion surrounding the Anthem competition exposes the difficult process of navigating ever-changing boundaries of what is permissible in Soviet culture, especially in the context of a work as symbolically charged


353 Clark, The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual, 211.
as a ‘national’ anthem. The Anthem project was an attempt to shift the balance between soviet metaphors and national metaphors. Participants tried to incorporate “safe” national themes and symbols into the State Anthem of Soviet Ukraine, especially the Dnieper River. The Thaw may have been a rare time in the history of Pre-Independence Ukraine when that possibility existed. Nevertheless, the project failed to re-write the anthem of Soviet Ukraine. It likely failed for innumerable reasons, many of which presumably had their roots in Moscow and the upper rungs of Soviet power. However, it also failed for reasons that were contained within and revealed by the Anthem competition itself. These reasons include disagreements over who should write the anthem, how it should be written, and what specifically should be included. More than anything else, the Ukrainian intelligentsia could not agree on how to achieve the desired blend between an anthem of Ukraine and an ode to Soviet power.

The Post-War Anthem

The first Soviet anthem debuted on New Year’s Eve in 1943, officially replacing the “Internationale.” Each of the Soviet republics were then invited to produce their own anthems. In late February 1944, writers in Ukraine began compiling a list of fundamental national symbols that should be included in the anthem and established a republic-wide competition for its verses. In April of that year, a commission convened to examine the 27 submitted texts and narrow down the top contenders. In the category of cultural and historical actors, support for including reference to Shevchenko was unanimous; Khmelnytsky was a close second. The Dnieper river also appeared in most texts. Besides the river’s symbolic significance for Ukraine, the painful

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354 This section is based on Serhy Yekelchyk’s article about the 1949 Soviet Ukrainian anthem. However, unless otherwise noted, all analysis is my own: Serhy Yekelchyk, "When Stalin's Nations Sang: Writing the Soviet Ukrainian Anthem (1944-1949)," Nationalities Papers 31, no. 3 (2003).

355 Ibid., 313.
memory of the “Battle for the Dnieper” in 1943 was still quite fresh. Oleksandr Korniichuk, a socialist realist playwright and member of the communist party elite, argued that the Dnieper must be included in the anthem because “all our historical events took place on its banks.”

Significantly, a second major geographic symbol entered the scene at this time. The (re)unified territory of western Ukraine contained a geographic feature virtually unknown to Ukraine: real mountains. The Red Army did not cross the Carpathian range until September - October 1944 and would continue to battle insurgents in the area for quite some time after that. But even in the spring of 1944, many Ukrainian poets included the Carpathian Mountains, along with the Dnieper, in their anthem verses. The first verse of Pavlo Tychyna’s original submission included the following two lines:

We have sun and happiness, our people are free,
And the Dnieper with the Carpathians are ours forever.

This was not simply an emphasis on the vast territorial expanse of the republic. Neither the Dnieper nor the Carpathian Mountains were taken for granted. Ukrainians had to fight for them both, and many paid with their lives. These are simultaneously features of Ukraine's physical geography that had to be defended and also cultural and historical symbols of two parts of a previously divided nation: Western Ukraine and Naddnipryanshchyna or Dnieper Ukraine.

Although Tychyna was eventually named the winner, his text was revised many times before it received official approval. During the second round of the competition, in mid-June, all of the four major national symbols - Shevchenko, Khmelnytsky, the Dnieper, and the Carpathians - were eliminated entirely. It was at this time that the Kremlin sent signals indicating that the relatively permissive cultural environment during WWII had come to an end. Elements of

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357 Ibid., 313.
patriotism particular to a specific Soviet republic were no longer tolerated. For the Ukrainian cultural circles, the public censure of Dovzhenko’s “Ukraine in Flames” conveyed this message clearly. Three Anthem texts were submitted to the Ukrainian Central Committee. Each of these had been revised according to the new signals before re-submitting for the second round. Tychyna’s verses were selected in November 1944 with Khrushchev’s approval. Khrushchev was the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine at that time, from 1938-1949.

It took another five years for the final version of the Ukrainian State Anthem to receive official authorization in 1949. As Ukrainian composers struggled to include just the right amount of traditional folk elements in their musical scores and Khrushchev temporarily lost Stalin’s favor in 1947, a new Soviet cultural policy further narrowed the boundaries of what was permissible in the Ukrainian Anthem. This policy, known as zhdanovshchina, prevailed from 1946 until Stalin’s death in 1953 and reinforced central party control over cultural production. Although the policy was ostensibly aimed at eliminating “bourgeois” western influences, in Ukraine it was directed at “nationalist deviations.”

Somewhat surprisingly, the text adopted in 1949 retained the opening salute, “Live, Ukraine!”, a partial inversion of the nationalist, antibolshevik anthem: “Ukraine has not yet perished.” However, direct mention to the Ukrainian people’s struggle for freedom was replaced by a celebration of their struggle for the good of the masses, with help from their Russian brothers. Tychyna’s original reference to Ukraine’s geography, “the Dnieper with the Carpathians are ours forever,” became, “a country forever reunited.” This line, incorporated into the refrain, was the only remaining element specific to the Ukrainian republic. All over verses simply replicate standard Soviet slogans. The shift away from

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358 Ibid., 317.

359 “Ukraine has not yet perished” was used as the opening line of anthems associated with the Ukrainophile and Ukrainian independence movements from the 1860s. In 1918 it was adopted as the anthem of the West Ukrainian People’s Republic but banned by the Soviet regime soon after. It made another brief appearance in Carpatho-Ukraine in 1939. The national anthem of independent Ukraine begins with this line.
specific geographic markers not only made the lyrics more generic, but also moved the emphasis from Ukraine’s territorial sovereignty to the act of reuniting the territory and the powers in Moscow responsible for this act. Serhy Yekelchyk has convincingly argued that despite the anthem’s generically Soviet content, the Ukrainian population recognized its significance as an institution of Ukrainian statehood.\textsuperscript{360} Although the 1949 version would remain the official anthem for almost thirty years, it was performed without lyrics under Khrushchev and Brezhnev. Three elements were removed from the Ukrainian Anthem in 1978: Stalin, the reunification of Ukraine’s western territories, and WWII. In 1978, the Party was introduced into the Anthem text, as was labor and “October,” specifically the “banner of October.” Whereas the 1949 Anthem mentioned both Lenin and Stalin, in the 1978 revision Lenin was mentioned twice. The word “homeland” [\textit{vitchyzna}] is used in both versions, but “fatherland” [\textit{batkivshchyna}] was added to the 1978 version.\textsuperscript{361} [See Figure 2]

\textbf{The Competition: Writing the Anthem of the Thaw}

Khrushchev’s haphazard de-Stalinization agenda put the process of writing the anthem of Soviet Ukraine into motion once again. Although his ‘Secret Speech’ in February 1956 does appear to have been a stimulus for the Anthem project, its history began at least two years earlier. Proceedings of the Central Committee Presidium meeting on 29 April 1954 indicate that at this time, the two original authors of the 1949 Ukrainian Anthem, poets Pavlo Tychyna and Mykola Bazhan, were instructed to revise the current Anthem text and submit it to the Central Committee for consideration. Specifically, they were asked to “make some corrections.”\textsuperscript{362} We can only

\textsuperscript{360} Yekelchyk, "When Stalin's Nations Sang: Writing the Soviet Ukrainian Anthem (1944-1949)," 310, 23.

\textsuperscript{361} I have underlined the parts that were changed: https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Гимн_Украинской_ССР (accessed on 13 March 2019)

\textsuperscript{362} Tsentral’nyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Hromads’kykh ob’iednan’ Ukrainy (TsDAHO), f. 1 (Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine), op. 6, d. 2064, st. 4 (Proceedings of meeting № 5 of the Presidium of the Central
assume these corrections were intended to de-Stalinize the 1949 Anthem, whose second verse included the line: “and Stalin leads us to great heights.” The project to completely re-write the Soviet anthem also began before the ‘Secret Speech,’ based on a Soviet Central Committee resolution from 7 December 1955. This resolution established a Union-wide closed competition to create the text and music. In March of 1956, the Ukrainian Central Committee received, per their request, a copy of the contest regulations for the Soviet Anthem.\textsuperscript{363}

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<tr>
<td>Живи, Україно, прекрасна і сильна, В Радянськім Союзі ти щастя знайшла. Між рівними рівна, між вільними вільна, Під сонцем свободи, як цвіт, розцвіла.</td>
<td>Живи, Україно, прекрасна і сильна, В Радянському Союзі ти щастя знайшла. Між рівними рівна, між вільними вільна, Під сонцем свободи, як цвіт, розцвіла.</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Refrain:] Слава Союзу Радянському, слава! Слава Вітчизні народів-братів! Живи, Україно, радянська державо, Воззєднаний край на віки-вікив!</td>
<td>[Refrain:] Слава Союзу Радянському, слава! Слава Вітчизні на віки-вікив! Живи, Україно, радянська державо, В єдиній родині народів-братів!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Нам завжди у битвах за долю народу Був другом і братом російський народ, І Lenін осяв нам путь на свободу, І Сталин веде нас до світлих висот.</td>
<td>Нам завжди у битвах за долю народу Був другом і братом російський народ, Нас Lenін повів переможним походом Під прапором Жовтня до світлих висот.</td>
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<td>[Refrain]</td>
<td>[Refrain]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Розіб’ємо всі ми ворожі навали Народного гніву священным мечем! Під стягом радянським ми дужими стали І в світ Комунізму велично ідем!</td>
<td>Ми славим трудом Батьківщину могутно, Утверджуєм правду безсмертних ідей. У світ комунізму — велично майбутнє Нас Lenінська партія мудро веде.</td>
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<td>[Refrain]</td>
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**Figure 2: 1949 and 1978 Soviet Ukrainian Anthems**

In early June of that year, the Ukrainian Central Committee Presidium met to discuss the

\textsuperscript{363} TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4262, st. 6-8
creation of an entirely new Ukrainian Anthem with a competition based on the All-Union model and similar to the competition held previously for the 1949 Anthem. According to the proceedings of this meeting, two reasons were given for creating a new Anthem rather than simply “correcting” the original one. The first was that the text approved in 1949: “mainly reflects the peculiarities and aims of the Ukrainian soviet socialist state in the first post-war years.”\textsuperscript{364} This statement highlights not only a clear break with Stalin in the transition to Khrushchev, but also the anomaly or deviation of Stalin’s rule within the Soviet experiment - past, present, and future. The second reason focused on form, rather than content. In the name of the workers of the republic who had expressed concerns over the complexity of the current melody, the creation of a new Anthem was also aimed at making it easier for the working masses to perform.\textsuperscript{365}

To achieve this goal, the Presidium entrusted the organization of a republic wide competition for the creation of new text and music to the Ministry of Culture, Writers’ Union, and Composers’ Union. They were also instructed to ensure that the very best poets and composers were enlisted. A fifteen-person commission to review the submissions and ultimately recommend a final product - text and music - to the Central Committee for approval was also created at this time. This commission - chaired by Demian Korotchenko - was composed of Presidium members, as well as leading Ukrainian writers and composers.\textsuperscript{366} Among the writers were poets Mykola Bazhan (1904-1983), Maksym Rylskyi (1895-1964), Platon Voronko (1913-1988), and the winner of the first Anthem competition, Pavlo Tychyna (1891-1967). Tychyna was the primary author of the 1949 anthem, though Bazhan was asked to step in at the very end

\textsuperscript{364} TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 6, sp. 2438, st. 13

\textsuperscript{365} This was likely a genuine reason. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 6, sp. 2438, st. 13

\textsuperscript{366} TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 6, sp. 2438, st. 13-14
to help with final revisions. Rylskyi also took part in this first competition, both as an author and reviewer. Bazhan was a two-time recipient of the Stalin Prize and the head of the Ukrainian Writers’ Union (1953-1959) at that time. During the Ukrainian cultural renaissance of the 1920s, Bazhan and Tychyna were associated with VAPLITE, a literary organization that supported the Communist party but maintained the independence of culture from politics, siding with Mykola Khvylovy during the ‘Literary Discussion’ in 1925-1928. Faced with violent criticism from the Communist Party, VAPLITE’s independence, like that of culture and politics in Soviet Ukraine, was eliminated. Associated with the Neoclassicists during the 1920s, Rylskyi also came under attack for keeping politics out of his art. But all three of these talented modernist writers survived the purge of Ukrainian culture in the 1930s by re-directing their work to party aims. Both before and after this shift, Rylsky distinguished himself for his attention to the themes of nature and man’s harmonious relationship with the environment.

Voronko, on the other hand, belonged to a younger generation who was not active during the literary renaissance. He began his literary career after the war, joining the editorial team of the journal *Dnipro* in 1945. Voronko’s first collection of poems, *Carpathian Raid* (1944), was written in the style of Ukrainian folk songs and highlighted partisan themes. Shortly after the war ended, he wrote his poem, “I am who destroyed the dams,” which pays tribute to Lesya Ukrainka’s play, *The Forest Song*, written in 1911 and first performed in 1918. The central theme of her play is the complicated and often difficult relationship between mankind and nature. She utilized popular pagan folk motifs with ancient roots. One of her central characters is Mavka. In Ukrainian Slavic mythology, “mavkas” [*mavki*] are forest nymphs or spirits similar to “rusalkas” [*rusalki*], which are water nymphs, associated with rivers, swamps, and lakes. Both varieties typically take the form of beautiful women with long hair, naked or dressed in translucent fabric. According to popular belief, the souls of drowned girls, or those who died without being
baptized, are transformed into “mavkas” or “rusalkas.” Traditionally, these spirits have insidious or even nefarious intentions, luring men to their watery graves or simply weakening them by enchantment and unrequited love. But the “mavkas,” more than “rusalkas,” are often portrayed in a positive light. They serve as an intermediary between mankind and the natural world, including both plants and animals, often in the role of caretaker. With the geography and ecological variations of the Ukrainian territory in mind, it is not surprising that tales of these forest nymphs originated in the forested regions of Western Ukraine and the Carpathian Mountains. In Ukrainka’s play, the character of Mavka personified both the beauty of nature, and its vulnerability.

Voronko’s poem begins:

I am who destroyed the dams.
I was not sitting on the rocky embankment,
When the ancient oaks were torn down.
In the forest dwelling of the partisans
On trampled, yellowed grass
I lay, covered by purple leaves.
And drops of blood leaked through the bandage.
And the forest god [lisovyk] with a gray beard
Asked me:
– Did you break all of the bridges?
– All of them…
Then, bending over me,
Tender Mavka sat all night.

The forest god (or demon) is another character that Voronko borrows both from Ukrainka and ancient Slavic mythology. Unlike “Mavkas,” the “Lisovyk” is male, with long gray hair. He is the tutelar deity of forests, their patron and guardian. When men get lost or disappear in the

367 In my introductory chapter, “Making the Dnieper River Myth,” I will introduce the reader to “rusalki” in the context of Shevchenko’s poem “Bewitched Girl” (1837) which begins with the line: “The wide Dnieper roars and moans.” The poem tells the story of ill-fated young lovers who fall prey to these water nymphs and other pagan forces of light and dark that make up the natural world.

368 http://ukrlit.org/voronko_platon_mykytovych/ya_toi_scho_hrebli_rvav (translation from Ukrainian is my own) [accessed on 11/2/2017]
forest, the “Lisovyk” was believed to be responsible. This pagan conception of the world, which existed alongside Eastern Orthodoxy, identifies men, rather than women, as the primary aggressors who senselessly harm the natural environment for their own benefit. Voronko’s protagonist is a partisan soldier who, along with the Red Army, was forced to retreat eastward across Ukraine during WWII. As the front dividing German and Soviet forces moved back and forth across the territory of Soviet Ukraine, the war “trampled” the grassy steppe, turned rivers red, and left scares on the native land. As pro-Soviet and pro-Ukrainian forces retreated, they destroyed hydro-power dams and bridges to hinder the advance of the German Wehrmacht and its “green snakes”. Later in the poem, Voronko writes:

‘Save me,’ Mavka pleads,
‘Because over there on the blue Prut [a river in western Ukraine]
Still stand bridges that have not been destroyed.
Along them crawl voracious and cruel
Green snakes.’

Voronko was awarded the Stalin Prize in 1951 for the poetry collection titled, Peace is Glorious.

These four poets were joined on the Anthem commission by the prominent playwright, Oleksandr Korniichuk (1905-1972), a dominant figure in both the cultural and political spheres of Soviet Ukraine. By this time Korniichuk was a five-time winner of the Stalin Prize and formerly served as the head of the Writers’ Union in Soviet Ukraine for twelve years, immediately before and after the war. His play about the Civil War, “Destruction of the Squadron” (1933), was performed throughout the Soviet Union. This play earned him considerable fame and Korniichuk developed ties to Stalin. His subsequent works fit narrowly within the bounds of Socialist Realism, serving political aims. Specifically, many of his works, such as the play “Bohdan Khmelnytsky” (1939), celebrated the close bonds between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples. George Luckyj describes Korniichuk as someone who was “valued no so

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369 The introduction of Western Ukraine and the Carpathian Mountains into Soviet Ukrainian poetry and geographical imagination of the nation is a major shift during the war.
much for their talent as for their devotion to the Party.”\footnote{George S. N. Luckyj, \textit{Literary Politics in the Soviet Ukraine, 1917-1934} (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 62.} One of his most famous plays written after Stalin’s death is titled “On the Dnieper”, a comedy in three acts published in 1960. As its title suggests, much of the action is set on the river and its banks, emphasizing the natural beauty and agricultural bounty that the area surrounding the Dnieper provides.\footnote{Oleksandr Korniichuk, \textit{Oleksandr Korniichuk: Tom Chetvertyi Dramatychni Tvory, Kinostsenarii, Nezaverweny Tvory, 1958-1969} (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1987), 6-64.} Anton Lebedynets (1895-1979), who won the music competition for the 1949 Anthem, was among the composers appointed to the commission.\footnote{As with the text, the final version of the Anthem’s music was created by a group of composers, including Lebedynets.} In 1932 he composed the musical score to accompany Volodymyr Sosiura’s 1926 poem, “Dniprostroi,” published in 1928 to celebrate the construction of the DniproHES dam and hydropower station.\footnote{This poem will be discussed in Chapter 2: “Hydropower to the People.” Volodymyr Sosiura, \textit{Volodymyr Sosiura: Tom Perwyi, Poezii 1916-1930} (Kyiv: Vydavnystvo khudozhn’oi literatury 'Dnipro', 1986), 262-67.}

The biographies of these men, the cultural elite of Soviet Ukraine who took part in the creation of a new Anthem, highlight the degree to which culture and politics were intertwined in Soviet Ukraine, and in the Soviet Union more broadly. At this time, Tychyna was serving as the chairman (1953-1959) of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, a position that Korniichuk held from 1947-1953 and then again from 1959-1982. Besides being a member of the Ukrainian Communist Party Central Committee from 1949 and a member of its Presidium from 1953-1954, Korniichuk was also a member of the Soviet Central Committee from 1952. Bazhan, a recipient of two Stalin Prizes for poetry (1946 and 1949), was also a deputy to the All-Union Supreme Soviet during this time (1946-1946). In Soviet Ukraine, he was the Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers in 1949 and a member of the Party Central Committee from 1952-1983.

Throughout the month of June, this commission of leading Ukrainian cultural and
political figures worked out the details of the competition, which was originally set to run from late June to late September 1956. The commission planned to then review the results and by 1 October submit their selections to the Central Committee for approval.\footnote{TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 6, sp. 2438, st. 13-14; TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, sp. 351, st. 54-55.} On 29 June, the Presidium of the Central Committee met and approved the competition’s structure, rules and regulations, and budget, which the Ukrainian Council of Ministers was responsible for paying.\footnote{TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 6, sp. 2444, st. 15.} Projected costs included 25,000 Soviet rubles for the two winners - one poet and one composer, 15,000 for 2nd place, 10,000 for 3rd place, and 5,000 for Honorable Mention.\footnote{TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 6, sp. 2444, st. 44-47.} Based on the official historical exchange rate with US dollars and inflation between 1956 and 2019, these prizes are approximately equivalent to $57,830 (first); $34,700 (second); $23,130 (third); and $11,560 (honorable mention) today.\footnote{For the official historical exchange rate (0.25 USD per Soviet ruble): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_ruble [accessed on 11/7/2017] and http://www.in2013dollars.com/1956-dollars-in-2019 [accessed on 2/18/2019]} 

Invitations to participate in the competition to create a new State Anthem were sent to the list of poets and composers agreed upon by the Ministry of Culture and the two creative unions. The structure of the competition was closed in the first round and open in the second round. Submissions for the text were made anonymously, using “devices” or titles used to identify and differentiate each piece. Writers were instructed to mail a second envelope containing their name, address, and “device”, which would remain sealed during the initial review period. Participation in the competition was by invitation only, and therefore limited to “official” writers and composers, though the invitation process was intended to encourage wide participation, rather than limit it.\footnote{TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 6, sp. 2444, st. 42-43.} In the second round, the authors of the most promising texts would be invited to
participate in the work of revising them. These texts would then be shared with the composers, who were given one month to compose music, so that the texts and music could be finalized by 1 October 1956.\textsuperscript{379}

The timeframe, three months from start to finish, was ambitious at best. Not surprisingly, the 15 August 1956 deadline for phase one, drafting and revising the text, was extended by seven and a half months to 1 April 1957 per a Central Committee Presidium ruling on 12 October 1956.\textsuperscript{380} At the same time, the deadline for submission of a completed anthem to the Central Committee and Council of Ministers was extended to 1 June 1957. A memo submitted to the Central Committee on 2 April 1957 sheds light on the surprising reason for this delay.\textsuperscript{381} The memo contains a report authored by four members of the Anthem review Commission, who provide a brief history of the competition thus far. Although the terms of the competition, including the quite substantial cash prizes, were circulated in June 1956, during the first month of the submission term, not a single entry was received!

To stimulate more active participation, a republic-wide meeting was convened on 25 July 1956, with 60 poets and composers in attendance.\textsuperscript{382} Over the course of the next two months, 20 submissions were received. Upon review, the Commission concluded that these texts failed to meet the ideological and artistic standards necessary for a new State Anthem. The deadline was therefore extended and the Anthem Commission went back to the drawing board. In light of the very small number of submitted texts, the Commission organized a series of meetings with poets in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv, and Odessa. These meetings involved a critical examination of the 20 submitted texts, including discussion of their specific shortcomings and merits. By the beginning

\textsuperscript{379} TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4262, st. 8 and TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 6, sp. 2444, st. 43.

\textsuperscript{380} TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 6, sp. 2483, st. 100.

\textsuperscript{381} TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, sp. 4493, st. 50-53 (report)

\textsuperscript{382} TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, sp. 4493, st. 51 (report)
of March 1957, an additional 48 texts were submitted for consideration.\footnote{TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, sp. 4493, st. 52 (report)}

On 19 March 1957, the Commission met to discuss the preliminary results of the competition and outline the next steps.\footnote{TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, sp. 4493, st. 52 (report) and TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, sp. 351, st. 56 (meeting agenda)} They agreed that the quality of submissions had indeed improved, but nevertheless, they were not able to select one text that met the needs of a new State Anthem. The Commission suspected, based on the artistic level of the submitted texts, that the leading poets of the republic were not actively taking part in the creation of their Anthem or were not holding themselves to appropriately high standards.\footnote{TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, sp. 4493, st. 53 (report)} They concluded that further work should be done to revise and improve the draft texts “Illuminated by the October Revolution” [Osiaiana Zhovtnem], “Great fate” [Velyka dolia], “Kateryna,” and “Native land #2” [Ridna zemlia - 2]. In addition, they recommended that seven texts be adapted into songs for the celebrations surrounding the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution: “Dnipro,” “Ray,” “Star,” “Banner,” “Patriot,” “Sharp #4” [Diez-4], and “Immortal #3.” And finally, the Commission decided to personally invite a group of poets to review the texts and take a more active role in producing a text suitable for the State Anthem of the Ukrainian Republic. The writers were given a few weeks, until 15 April 1957, to revise and re-submit draft texts to the Commission for final consideration.\footnote{TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, sp. 351, st. 57 (proposals based on the Commission’s meeting on 19 March 1957)}

\textbf{The Poets: Collective Work}

The proposed meeting took place in Kyiv on 26 March 1957. Commission members Mykola Bazhan, Pavlo Tychyna, Maksym Ryl’s’kyi, and Platon Voron’ko were joined by Leonyd Novychenko — the deputy chairman of the Writers’ Union and former (1950-1952) editor-in-
chief of the journal *Fatherland* [Vitchyzna] — and prominent Ukrainian poets Volodymyr Sosiura, Mykola Nahnybida, Liubomyr Dmyterko, Ivan Nekhoda, and many others.\(^{387}\) This was the third time during the competition that an event of this kind was convened.\(^{388}\) Participants were understandably frustrated by the ongoing difficulties involved in composing a new text for the Anthem.\(^{389}\) The purpose of this “creative meeting”, like those that were held in July 1956 and at the end of the year, was to stimulate more active work on the text and to guide collective improvements to the existing texts. This group of poets and literary critics were asked to review the submitted texts and provide a thorough analysis of their merits and flaws, with the ultimate aim for recommending the best five or so to the government Commission. These finalized texts would then be given to the composers for the second phase of the competition. They were responsible for quality control, for ensuring the literary merit of the future State Anthem. The official competition regulations included specific suggestions on the content of the new text, but the Writers’ Union group provided guidance to help the poets understand what a State Anthem should look (or sound) like. If only they could agree. The transcript of this meeting shows that they had a lot of different opinions about what the anthem should be, but only agreed on the fact that none of the current texts were suitable. Six of the most successful texts were selected for detailed discussion at the meeting and were meant to serve as examples - both positive and negative - to guide further work on all of the draft texts under consideration. Still anonymous at this stage, though it is likely that their authors were present, each text was referred to by its corresponding “device”: “Kateryna,” “Great Fate,” “Native Land,” “January,” “Dnieper,” and

\(^{387}\) Others who were named in the transcript: Kotliarov, Ushakov, Masenko, Oliinyk, and Efremenko: Tsentral’nyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv–Muzei Literatury i Mystetstva Ukrainy (TsDAML), f. 590 (Union of Writers of Ukraine), op. 1, sp. 285, st. 1-36 (Transcript of meeting with poets about the creation of text for the State Anthem of the URSR, 26 March 1957)

\(^{388}\) TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 25.

\(^{389}\) Complaints about delays and the amount of time they had already put into the project. for example: TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 22, 25.
“Illuminated by October.” In fact, it is likely that all of the poets in the room had already contributed a text, whether or not it was discussed specifically.

Having the advantage of hindsight, and thus knowing that all of these efforts ultimately came to nothing, the poets’ discussion in the Writers’ Union provides insight into why the project failed on the Republic level. This assembly of the “best poets” in the Ukrainian Republic expressed a fundamental disagreement surrounding the desired content, form, and function of their State Anthem. Their disagreement extended from what kind of text a State Anthem should be - which words and ideas it should include - to exactly who the author of a State Anthem should be. The structure of the competition was anonymous and thus meant to encourage broad participation especially among younger, less established poets. Participation, however, was remarkably low. This is likely because many writers assumed that the top prize would simply go to a famous poet. On the other hand, the rigid anonymity of the competition (and the prize structure) hindered the type of collective work that was not only ideologically valued, but also thought of as especially productive. Finally, the project may have failed because it took too long. Initially conceived as a de-Stalinization project, its driving force from above may have waned as Krushchev’s popularity waned. After he lost power in 1964, perhaps the Anthem competition simply lost momentum. More broadly, the poet’s discussion of the anthem drafts serves as a window into the process of creative production in Soviet Ukraine. This process, I suggest, was defined by collective work, not just in ideological rhetoric, but in practice.

After an introduction by the meeting’s chairman Mykola Bazhan, Leonyd Novychenko provided critical remarks on each of the six draft texts under review. His remarks represented

390 It is likely that the All-Union context also played a major role, since the project to compose a new Soviet Anthem at this time also failed. Perhaps because the process took too long. In the meantime, the political landscape shifted at the end of Krushchev’s tenure and the Anthem projects were displaced.
391 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, sp. 4493, st. 53 (report)
392 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 2-11 (Novychenko)
not only his own assessment, but views expressed by Commission members during their own internal discussion. One unifying point of criticism, which many of the speakers addressed, was that the Anthem texts displayed a poor use of the Ukrainian language. This seemed to be a cause of major frustration, especially among the older generation of writers. In “Great Fate”, Novychenko highlights the word “nenastia,” which he says with distain “is not a Ukrainian word.”\(^{393}\) My experience suggests that Soviet typists made mistakes… In the context, it seems the author probably meant “neschastia” [misfortune] rather than the russian word “nenast’e” [bad weather], although every copy of that text that I have found does include that error.

Novychenko blamed the writer’s poor command of the Ukrainian language. Although he found one verse to his liking, the subsequent verse was neither logical nor Ukrainian. Specifically, Novychenko accused the author of “contamination,” combining the Russian word “izvestivshi” [heralded?] with the Ukrainian word “provistyvshy” [heralded?] to make “prozvistyvshy,” concluding that “[t]his text requires very significant revisions.”\(^{394}\) About “January,” Novychenko says that he likes one stanza, but “unfortunately the rest of the stanzas were created without even an elementary sense of the Ukrainian language, with annoying [prykrymy] stylistic errors”.\(^{395}\)

Much of the subsequent criticism surrounding language focused on the poets’ use of the vocative case, which for the most part exists as a distinctive form in Ukrainian but not in Russian. Maksym Ryl’s’kyi was appalled by the sloppy grammar he saw in the draft texts: “First of all, how is it possible that slovenly language is used to write such an important work as an Anthem? Instead of ‘a,’ an ‘o’ may be used in the word ‘Ukraino,’ but when the vocative form of

\(^{393}\) TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 2 (Novychenko)

\(^{394}\) TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 3 (Novychenko)

\(^{395}\) TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 8 (Novychenko)
‘earth’ [zemlia] is used, then the emphasis changes to ‘zyomle’.396 Exasperated, Pavlo Tychyna also took issue with the authors’ weak grasp of the Ukrainian vocative case, asking why it is being discarded from contemporary usage. He said that while it was true that everyday everyone was exposed to mistakes, either on the radio or as a result of illiterate editors, those errors were not permanent. The distinguished poet surely spoke from experience when he suggested that simply screaming at young editors was all that was needed to correct such mistakes.397 But the Anthem was different, he argued: “Here, every word has significance. Errors in the vocative case are especially unacceptable.”398 After providing a handful of embarrassing examples from the few texts under discussion, Tychyna repeats: “The main thing is the vocative case.”399 Why all this fuss over an “a” where an “o” should be? Indeed, their anxiety was warranted. This was a battle in defense of the Ukrainian language, and they placed its fate in the hands of the vocative case. The Ukrainian retention of the vocative case in modern usage represents one of the most significant grammatical differences between Russian and Ukrainian. As Tychyna points out, the stakes were uniquely high with the Anthem. A text of this importance has the power to legitimize errors and cement language norms, bringing the two distinct languages closer together.

Beyond grammar, many of the speakers criticized the draft texts simply for being bad poetry or on the other hand for being too poetic. Even though the discussed drafts were considered some of the strongest examples, about “Great Fate”, Novychenko said that it “smells of primitivism” and it was “clear to everyone that its lines are inept and clumsy”.400 He

396 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 11 (Ryl’s’kyi)
397 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 13 (Tychyna)
398 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 13 (Tychyna)
399 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 13 (Tychyna)
400 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 2 (Novychenko)
complemented some sections of “Kateryna,” but concluded that overall it lacked “unity of meaning.” Reviewing “Native Land,” Novychenko said that the content of its verses was not well thought out. Many important elements were left unsaid, while others were repeated unnecessarily. He objected specifically to the word [zliutovanyi]. Novychenko argued that the word was too ambiguous for an anthem, and could mean the opposite of what the author intended it to mean: either “forged by Soviet power” or “enraged by Soviet power.” In “January,” he attacked one verse that describes a flock of eagles flying together in a line, intended as a metaphor for the unity of Soviet peoples. But Novychenko points out that cranes fly in that way, not eagles. Thus, the metaphor failed. Further in the text, he objected to the author’s overly “loose and poetic” use of the word “banner” [znameno]. Although words for “flag”, “banner”, or “standard” were used in many of the submitted texts, the lines, “From the gold of harvests and steel from factories, we weave the flag of the future,” were too figurative for Novychenko’s liking. He said that in the context of a State Anthem, the word “flag” should retain its official, formal meaning. Before Novychenko could move on to his next point, someone in the audience called out: “And how does one sing the word “weave” [tchem]?” Novychenko agreed that this word was difficult to say and thus not at all suitable for singing.

Novychenko, the Government Commission members, and the participating poets were wrestling with distinct, often conflicting, conceptions of the ideal form and function of an anthem. Before anyone could create a suitable text, the anthem itself needed to be defined.

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401 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 3-4 (Novychenko)

402 “Народів ніхто не поборе, злітіваних владою Рад.” Based on various sources, I believe it can mean either “forged / fused together by”, “compressed / collapsed”, “condemned” or “enraged by”?

403 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 5 (Novychenko)

404 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 9 (Novychenko)

405 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 9 (Novychenko)
However, participants at this meeting seemed to have clearer ideas about what should not be included, than what should. And even then, no clear consensus was reached. Ukrainian’s national geography was represented in different ways across every text. Five out of the six texts contain direct reference to the Dnieper river. The author of “Kateryna” included “the beloved Dnieper valleys” in the anthem’s refrain.406 Although the word “Kateryna” does not appear in the text, it references a poem of the same name by Shevchenko about a girl who wanders across the Ukrainian lands.

The fourth verse of “Great Fate” — and the only verse that Novychenko liked — describes the newly created flag of Soviet Ukraine:

\[
\text{Across the entire bright expanse} \\
\quad \text{On our banner blazes} \\
\quad \text{The crimson blood of freedom fighters,} \\
\quad \text{The azure of the boundless Dnieper.}\]

When the Ukrainian and Belorussian republics were awarded separate UN seats in 1945, the United Nations stipulated that each must have a flag distinct from the Soviet Union’s. The new Ukrainian flag, officially adopted in 1950, simply replaced the bottom third of the red Soviet flag with a blue stripe (the Belorussian republic added a green stripe). Therefore, this proposed version of the anthem draws attention to the symbolic meaning of the blue stripe on the state flag, representing the emblematic and ubiquitous river.

The author of “Illuminated by October” utilized the central Dnieper river metaphor, which links the river with the Ukrainian people: “Our people build and sow, [they are] strong, like the waters of the Dnieper.”408 The final verse of “Native Land” harnesses the inevitability of

406 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 30 (“Kateryna”).
407 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 31 (“Great Fate”).
408 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 36 (“Illuminated by October”).
natural phenomena to support standard Soviet content:

The sea will never dry up,
The Dnieper will not flow backwards.
Fused together by Soviet power,
No nation will be repressed!\(^\text{409}\)

The author links two key Soviet motifs of the post-war decades, friendship of the (Soviet) peoples and liberation from Nazi occupation, with laws of nature and seemingly inexhaustible natural resources.

However, construction of the Kakhovka Hydropower Station and its massive manmade reservoir was in the final stages and two other additions to the Dnieper Hydropower Cascade were well underway at that time. These hydro-engineering construction projects would exert man’s power over the laws of nature. Irrigation canals throughout southern Ukraine could direct the Dnieper’s flow in ‘any’ direction planners dictated, but they also drew attention to the reality that ponds and reservoirs - or artificial seas – do in fact “dry up.” In the Ukrainian context, periodic droughts and substantial seasonal fluctuations demonstrated that water resources were finite and did not consistently meet agricultural demand. The author of “Dnieper” alluded to water use and hydropower as well: “And the Dnieper’s defeated wave [s]hines with rays of light for us.”\(^\text{410}\) In different ways, both “Dnieper” and “Native Land,” and perhaps even “Illuminated by October,” reflected the extensive hydro-engineering and nature transformation underway in Soviet Ukraine at the time. Of course, none of them took an overtly negative stance, which would be inconceivable in the context of a state anthem. In his report to the poets and writers, Novychenko asserted that the anthem’s lyrics should include a representation of Ukraine’s past, present, and future, “in a poetic, condensed form.”\(^\text{411}\)

\(^{409}\) TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 33 (“Native Land”).

\(^{410}\) TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 35 (“Dnieper”).

\(^{411}\) TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 7 (Leonyd Novychenko).
use as the anthem of Soviet Ukraine reveal a consensus, among poets, that Ukraine’s natural landscape and how this landscape is used represent that past, present, and future.

The Dnieper river was not mentioned in the verses of “January,” but the author wrote extensively about the Ukrainian territory, nature, and the natural world. The proposed anthem begins: “The land of Ukraine is bountiful and generous,” followed later by a description of music flowing across an open field.412 The chorus repeats the lines: “Like a garden of blooming branches – the existence of Ukraine, the beauty of Ukraine, our people and our land!”413 The difference between how geography is used in “January” compared to the other texts is significant. The author of “January” provides only a vague sense of space and uses generic nature metaphors, rather than specific elements of Ukraine’s natural geography. The phrases “our land” [nasha zemlya] and “native territory” or “homeland” [ridnyi krai] appear throughout many of these six anthem texts.

Ukraine’s geography dominated the anthem drafts to such an extent that Novychenko cautioned the authors against relying too heavily it, especially in cases when specific features were repeated. The Commission members and reviewers at the meeting agreed that the text titled “Dnieper” had “certain advantages” that made it preferable to the other texts, but also that it suffers from “excessive geographic nomenclature.”414 The source of their objections may be found in the first and second verses of the text:

From the Carpathians to the expanse of Donetsk
From Polissya415 to the quiet Danube
Our joyful fate extends across
The renewed Ukrainian territory.

412 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 34 (“January”).
413 Ibid.
414 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 6 (Novychenko).
415 Forested region of northern Ukraine, along its border with Belarus and Russia.
[Chorus]
The Poltava woods become green,
The fiery Donbas roars,
And the Dnieper’s defeated wave
Shines with rays of light for us.416

Significantly, Novychenko directs his criticism at the repetition of geographic features, drawing attention to the similarities between the first and second verses (out of three). Although he and the Commission members reacted positively to this text generally, repetition is a luxury that cannot be afforded in the context of an anthem.417 Novychenko did find fault in the first line of the second verse. While the other lines produced images that resonated with the editor, he dismissed “[t]he Poltava woods become green” as meaningless: “no one says that.”418 Therefore, the lines of the anthem needed to express concrete ideas that were both personal and universal.

However, support for including Ukraine’s national geography was not entirely unanimous. The Russian poet and translator Nikolai Ushakov (1899-1973) spoke out against it, addressing his audience in Russian rather than the Ukrainian used by most other participants. Ushakov was born in Rostov, near Moscow, but moved to Kyiv in 1908 for school and stayed. Shortly before his death in 1973, he was awarded the Shevchenko State Prize in recognition of both his own poetry and his translations of Ukrainian poetry into Russian. Ushakov argued that texts under discussion were “in no way anthems,” but rather songs, and thus more suitable for the upcoming 40th Anniversary celebrations. The State Anthem, he insisted, belonged to a different category, neither song nor poem. As a model he pointed to the marked difference between the original French text of the “Internationale” and the Russian “translation.” In French, he said, the “Internationale” is a wonderful poem and it illustrates the “kind of poetic concreteness” that

416 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 35 (“Dnieper”).
417 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 6-7 (Novychenko).
418 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 7 (Novychenko).
Novychenko advocated. The Russian version, used officially by the Soviet Union before adopting a new anthem in 1944, discarded the concrete elements of the original for more abstract ideas. This is the type of text, “less concrete, more general” that Ushakov believed was suitable for the State Anthem, or more specifically, the type of text that he thought would be accepted. The problem with including specific geographical features in the anthem, according to Ushakov, was that if you name one feature, like the Dnieper river or Carpathian mountains, then you will also need to include Donetsk and other places, to fully describe the Ukrainian territory.\footnote{TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 15-16 (Ushakov).}

Ushakov seems to have underestimated the symbolic potential of using a single geographic feature, such as the Dnieper river, to represent the entire nation.

Ushakov advocated for the text titled “Kateryna,” which Novychenko had also determined to be one of the best overall draft texts. Like Novychenko, Ushakov considered the refrain to be especially successful, even while arguing that the anthem should not include a refrain at all. The two differed in regard to word choice:

\begin{quote}
Beloved Dnieper [river] valleys,  
Carpathian Mountains, [and] the deep seas,  
You glorify Lenin’s bright star,  
which will eternally burn in the sky of Ukraine.\footnote{TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 30 (“Kateryna”).}
\end{quote}

Novychenko complemented the refrain, saying: “This is poetic, good, sonorous.”\footnote{TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 3 (Novychenko).} Ushakov concluded that “Kateryna” could very well serve as the foundation for the future State Anthem, if the refrain were improved by removing the geographic identification of “Dnieper” \textit{[dniprovs’kî]} and “Carpathian” \textit{[karpats’kî]}, “because a complete enumeration is not possible.”\footnote{TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 16 (Ushakov).} Indeed, many authors resolved the enumeration issue that Ushakov addressed by including the one
geographic feature that most universally represented the Ukrainian territory and people: the Dnieper river.

Beyond Ukraine’s geography, the speakers corrected a few “errors” in the submitted texts. Tychyna complained that in their texts some authors put Ukraine higher than the party: “The party should lead [us], not Ukraine.” In reference to “Great Fate,” Novychenko said, “Ukraine should be characterized by the general notion of ‘the people,’ not named individuals, even her genius sons.” Apparently, this was obvious to everyone except the author of “Great Fate,” who referred to Ukraine as “the land of Bohdan Khmel’nyts’kyi, the land of [Taras] Shevchenko and [Ivan] Franko.” Out of the sixty four draft texts that I reviewed, this was the only one that included any “named individuals” other than Lenin. Ryl’s’kyi addressed the misconception that the Anthem must include reference to “our friendship with the Russian people.” He suggested instead that they could speak more broadly about “friendship with all Soviet peoples.”

Regarding the content of the new anthem, the biggest challenge the poets faced was how to incorporate the prescribed themes into their text without sacrificing artistic quality. As Dymterko put it, the crux of the problem was producing a text that was “outstanding, both poetically and politically.” In fact, many reviewers objected to what they saw as an excessive adherence to the prescribed themes. This testifies to the poets’ perception of the type of text that they thought the Government Commission was looking for. Several speakers urged participating

423 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 14 (Tychyna).
424 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 2 (Novychenko).
425 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 31 (“Great Fate”).
426 I will analyze all 64 submitted texts later in this chapter.
427 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 12 (Ryl’s’kyi).
428 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 18 (Dymterko).
poets not to adhere quite as closely to the instructions of the competition. Masenko, who like
many of the other poets present at the meeting had participated in the original Anthem
competition, addressed this issue first: “We all face the problem that we need to write about
many politically significant things. There are those elements that must be included, perhaps in a
poetic, lyrical form: that is, the friendship of the peoples, October, and the banner of Lenin. But
when we begin to re-read the instructions and enumerate [the specified elements], it is
impossible to include them [all] in three verses.” Tkachenko agreed. The instructions sent out
to the poets included a long list of prescribed themes. “Indeed, these points weighed heavily on
us,” he said. Tkachenko described working on his own text and struggling with how to
incorporate these points. He proposed sending out an amendment to the original instructions
indicating that the list of “politically significant things” should not weigh too heavily on the
poets: “It is not necessary for all of the listed points to be included in the Anthem.” Nahnybida
confirmed that based on the draft texts submit thus far, the writers had suffered from an
“incorrect perception” of the official instructions. Efremenko concluded by urging the poets to
focus on the ideas represented by the prescribed themes, rather than the specific words: “We are
not saying that there is a specific point that needs to be included in the Anthem. We are talking
about the poetic embodiment of these ideas, about trying to understand their meaning.”

429 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 18 (Masenko).
430 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 20 (Tkachenko).
431 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 20 (Tkachenko).
432 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 21 (Nahnybida).
433 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 23 (Efremenko).
examined the texts, they did not insist on following the provisions. The Anthem is generally considered to be a poetic work. The regulations did not weigh heavily on the Commission.”

In an effort to pack their texts with as many of the prescribed themes as possible while also trying to express their own voices, the poets had produced long, cumbersome texts. Ryl’s’kyi complained that the texts were all too long and the other ones that Novychenko had not reviewed for the meeting were even longer. While he liked a lot about the text titled “Kateryna,” it needed to be much more concise. To make his point, he quoted in Russian from the poet Nikolai Nekrasov (1821-1877): “Words should be cramped, but the ideas spacious.” Ryl’s’kyi argued that the most basic requirements of an Anthem are that it is simple, concise, and absolutely transparent: “Here [in an anthem], there should be no repetitions. The next line should not repeat the previous one, but [instead should] add something new.” To Ryl’s’kyi’s point, Bazhan criticized “Kateryna” for repeating the word “glory,” saying that in an Anthem such repetition was a luxury that could not be afforded. This criticism may have been confusing to the writers since the current State Anthem employed the word “glory” six times, twice in each refrain. Indeed, the words “glory” or “glorify” were used a total of 214 times in 56 out of 64 submitted texts. It was the second most commonly used, behind “Ukraine.”

Although many speakers emphasized the need for a beautiful poem, rather than an awkward list of prescribed themes, Ryl’s’kyi pointed out the differences. While a poem could be thought provoking, encouraging readers to contemplate the author’s intended message, anthems

434 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 23 (Efremenko).

435 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 11 (Ryl’s’kyi). The Nekrasov quote is from his 1877 poem, “Form,” in the cycle “Imitation of Schiller.”

436 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 11 (Ryl’s’kyi).

437 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 28 (Bazhan).

438 My complete analysis of the words and content of the draft texts is presented below.
must be different: “an anthem should be such that it immediately falls into the heart and memory of the singer. But here there are too many verses, so they are not so easy to learn.” An anthem needs to be easy to understand, easy to perform, and easy to remember. To this point, Kotliarov suggested that the poets “should not fear the trochaic tetrameter,” which is common in children’s rhymes and consists of four stressed syllables per line.

Many of the speakers addressed their conception of the overarching function of a State Anthem. Kotliarov argued that their Anthem should continue the tradition of revolutionary songs, in contrast to the anthems of monarchical states, which are static and emphasize invariability, such as “God save the King.” The Anthem, he said, should “serve to recruit and be filled with the spirit of struggle.” Tkachenko agreed that the text of the Anthem needed to “call people to something.” To do this he explained that the text needed to be both lyrical and emotionally elevated, or animated. A lot of the discussion surrounded the appropriate balance between lyricism and solemnity. Both Sosiura and Masenko disputed Novychenko’s claim that lyricism erodes solemnity.

Masenko recalled how during the first Anthem competition he and Sosiura had championed one proposed version of the text that he described as “fresh, in Ukrainian coloring” and “extremely optimistic, a beautiful poem.” This text was later dismissed by the composers for lacking in respectability and deep solemnity. Masenko urged his colleagues to reject what he considered to be unsound reasoning.

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439 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 12 (Ryl’s’kyi).
440 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 15 (Kotliarov).
441 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 14 (Kotliarov).
442 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 20 (Tkachenko).
443 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 16 (Sosiura) and 17 (Masenko).
444 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 17 (Masenko).
445 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 17 (Masenko).
including himself, where perhaps constrained by existing examples of anthems, by metre, by asserting the “beauty of our life” that they neglected to include a dynamic appeal and display of Ukraine in motion: “If the competition is extended, I will try to write the text again, because in examining these texts, my own and those of my comrades, I now have a crystalized image of Ukraine. I believe it should be presented in motion. And if the picture is static, it will not be an anthem.”

Although no one seemed to share a consistent vision of what the anthem text should be, by far the biggest source of conflict was the structure of the competition itself and how this structure impacted the potential to produce the best possible State Anthem. Many poets insisted that the anonymous nature of the competition impeded the process. Instead they advocated for open, transparent, collective work. On this issue, Dmyterko said: “It is absolutely clear to me that such a great work in 12-16 lines is very difficult to create in this restricted way, hidden under catchwords, so that no one knows anything. We are already accustomed to collective forms of work, to the exchange of ideas.”

Masenko proposed that for the next month they return to the previous tradition of poets and composers working together, each poet with one composer, despite what the official instructions outlined. He reminded his colleagues how tremendously important that was during the composition of the first anthem of Soviet Ukraine during the 1940s.

Dmyterko supported Masenko’s proposal but added that they should work in groups rather than pairs, perhaps bringing younger writers, even non-union members (!!), together with masters. He argued that such collective work would allow them to piece together the final text, “like jewelry work,” from what had been submitted, discard what was inappropriate, keep only

446 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 16-17 (Sosiura)

447 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 18 (Dmyterko)

448 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 17 (Masenko).
the best lines, and produce an anthem that will be eternal.\textsuperscript{449} Nahnybida agreed in principle that a collective form of work, “collective creativity,” was what they needed, but that they could not change the terms of the competition. Instead of opening the envelopes to form working groups, he suggested that this could be accomplished informally, among friends.\textsuperscript{450} Regardless, Masenko noted, all of the composers were currently attending a congress of composers so would not available to work on the anthem in the near future. Therefore, if nothing else, the present group should meet more often.\textsuperscript{451} To these poets, the anonymous and isolated structure of the competition produced a work environment that was unnatural for them. The collective style of cultural production they advocated was, therefore, more than just ideological rhetoric. This style of work was exemplified by Maxim Gorky’s 1935 collaborative chronicle of the White Sea Canal, which begins with a “note on the method of writing”: “All the thirty-four authors take full responsibility for the text. They helped one another, corrected one another. On this account it is difficult to indicate just who wrote the various sections.”\textsuperscript{452}

On the other hand, many in attendance felt quite strongly that maintaining the current structure of the competition was of utmost importance. This seems to have stemmed from two related factors. The first was uneasiness about the surprisingly low participation rate. Bazhan, a member of the Government Commission and thus privy to a full view of the submissions, bemoaned the poor turnout thus far: “Really, a very insignificant portion of our poets took part in the competition. In particular, not one russian text was received for the competition.”\textsuperscript{453} He then

\textsuperscript{449} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 19 (Dmyterko)

\textsuperscript{450} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 21 (Nahnybida)

\textsuperscript{451} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 25 (Masenko).


\textsuperscript{453} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 28 (Bazhan)
appealed to his Russian comrades, assuring them that the Commission employed excellent translators who would not ruin the Russian text. The second factor was the prevailing assumption that the top prizes would be awarded to the most prominent and powerful poets. The younger generation of writers had good reason to be skeptical in this regard because the anonymous first round of the 1944 competition did not prevent the top prize from going to Tychyna. Moreover, Tychyna was forced to accept Bazhan as his official co-author through the last stage of revisions. The two were later accused of plagiarism by a much lesser known poet, whose submitted text bore a strong resemblance to Tychyna and Bazhan’s final text. Borys Oliinyk (1935-2017), a young poet associated with the “sixtiers,” made this assumption explicit: “There are many poets here and it is clear to all of us that there is no real Anthem text. And now, those present today will take up this important work. Opening the competition is worthless. And you know why. Because many comrades who would like to take part in this work will immediately withdraw, knowing already that names often influence the outcome.”

The anonymous structure of the competition, Oliinyk continued, at least makes it possible for the younger generation of writers to have their text selected by the Commission. From the audience someone yelled out: “But they didn’t write anything.” Several other voices from the audience chimed in, to support maintaining the anonymous structure until the final text had been approved. Bazhan, the meeting’s chairman, put an end to the discussion, confirming that the stipulated structure would remain.

454 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 28 (Bazhan)
455 Yekelchyk, "When Stalin's Nations Sang: Writing the Soviet Ukrainian Anthem (1944-1949)," 319.
456 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 19-20 (Oliinyk).
457 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 20
458 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 24
459 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 26 (Bazhan)
Many authors confirmed that they benefited enormously from the discussion and would revise their texts accordingly.\textsuperscript{460} Platon Voron’ko lamented the secrecy surrounding the Government Commission’s detailed review of the submitted texts, because all of the poets would greatly benefit from their feedback.\textsuperscript{461} Bazhan replied that the Commission’s reviews would not be made public, but he would ask for permission to release all of the submitted drafts. He confirmed that a transcript of today’s meeting would be made and stored in the library, where any participants not in attendance should review it carefully.\textsuperscript{462} Bazhan concluded with a summary of the meeting and his hope that it would encourage writers to rally around this “extremely important matter, a matter of both our poetic honor and our social responsibility.”\textsuperscript{463}

There was a consensus that none of the existing texts were viable, but that a few showed strong potential if correctly revised. Bazhan explained that they needed to end up with 5-6 solid drafts for the Commission. After that the authors would be revealed and they would each work closely with the Commission to further develop the texts. Despite frustration over significant delays, Bazhan and the other Commission members present at the meeting endorsed Novychenko’s critical remarks and agreed that the poets needed another 5-6 weeks, until 1 May 1957.\textsuperscript{464} The next Commission meeting was scheduled for early May 1957.\textsuperscript{465} But, as Bazhan pointed out, writing the Anthem text was just half of the work that needed to be done.\textsuperscript{466} Only then could the

\textsuperscript{460} For example: TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 25 (Nekhoda)

\textsuperscript{461} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 22 (Voron’ko)

\textsuperscript{462} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 26-27 (Bazhan)

\textsuperscript{463} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 26 (Bazhan)

\textsuperscript{464} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 27-28 (Bazhan) and TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, sp. 4493, st. 53 (2 April 1957 report on the work done thus far to create a new State Anthem)

\textsuperscript{465} TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, sp. 4493, st. 53 (report, 2 April 1957)

\textsuperscript{466} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 285, st. 27 (Bazhan)
composers begin their work in earnest, ushering in the second phase of the Anthem competition.

**Losing Momentum: The Failed Anthem Project**

After the Writers’ Union meeting in late March 1957, which resulted in another extension of the text deadline, and a report on the progress of the Anthem competition dated 2 April 1957, the momentum of the Anthem project (and the archival trail) seem to have dwindled. The proceedings of a Central Committee Presidium meeting indicate that on 10 June 1957 they discussed and approved a request made by the Anthem Commission to further extend the deadline. The Commission was asked to report back to the Central Committee on their progress by 1 September 1957. For review, the original deadline for the text portion of the competition was 30 July 1956. This was first extended until 1 April 1957 and then to 1 May 1957, a deadline that was apparently not met. Once again, the same explanation for the delay was given: “no text was found that met the necessary ideological and artistic standards…”

It seems little progress was made towards a new State Anthem. On 17 July 1958 the preliminary results of the competition were discussed at a meeting of representatives from the literary and musical communities, hosted by the Ministry of Culture, with the aim of “revitalizing work on the creation of a new State Anthem of the Ukrainian SSR.” The deadline for final text revisions was (re)set to 31 October 1958. In the meantime, “in order to attract the composers of the republic” to the competition, the Commission sent them what they considered to be the ten best draft texts, thus finally moving into the second phase of the Anthem

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467 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 6, d. 2645, st. 77
468 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 6, d. 2645, st. 77
469 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4703, st. 36-37; I am quite sure TsDAVO holds some Ministry of Culture documents on this Anthem project. My initial contact with the archivists there came to nothing (I was told that I had my dates wrong and the only such competition took place in the 1940s.) It is very unlikely that Ministry of Culture retained no records of a competition that stretched over more than three years. Unfortunately, I was not able to follow up further. I hope to follow this trail, but it will not be within the scope of my dissertation.
competition. A report from the Commission to the Central Committee on these preliminary results, dated 22 July 1958, indicates that a total of 69 texts were submitted during the first round of the competition. In addition, they reviewed seven texts produced outside of the competition: three jointly written by Tychyna and Bazhan, two by Ryl’s’kyi, and two new variations of previously submitted texts, “Katerina” by M. Nahnybida and “A. Dniprovs’kyi” by O. Novyts’kyi. The top ten contenders included these seven added texts together with three from the competition: “Illuminated by October”, “Great Fate, and “Labor”. The authors of the July 1958 report notably did not include any of the Commission’s cultural figures, drafted instead by the Commission’s chair Demian Korotchenko and three other bureaucrats on the Commission. After two full years of work, they gave a scathing review of the progress and current status:

Among all of the 76 reviewed texts, there is still not a single one that, in terms of its ideological and artistic level, meets the requirements of the competition and could be recommended for approval as the final version of the text for the new State Anthem of the Ukrainian SSR. Based on this it can be concluded that the poets of the republic still have not used all of their creative potential, and some authors have submitted texts to the competition without sufficiently high standards in regard to their content and form.

While Korotchenko’s complaint — that the submissions did not represent the poets’ best efforts — is likely unfair, in fact one poet simply submitted the text of the original 1949 anthem, only replacing Stalin’s name with the Party: “And the Party leads us to bright heights.” Of these 76 draft texts, I was able to locate and review 64 of them myself, including the ten selected by the Commission in July 1958 and the six discussed in March 1957 at the Writers’ Union meeting. An analysis and discussion of these texts follows in the next section.

To my knowledge, the last few archival mentions of the Thaw era Anthem project appeared again in the spring of 1960. These records confirm that the Anthem competition

470 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4703, st. 36. (Commission’s report to the Central Committee)

471 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4703, st. 36. (D. Korotchenko, M. Hrechukha, O. Ivashchenko, and S. Chervonenko)

472 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 351, st. 106 and TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 674, st. 89 (“Shuster”)
ultimately failed but also reveal an effort to revive the project at that time. During a meeting of the Presidium of the Writers’ Union on 9 April 1960, the highly decorated poet Andrii Malishko brought up the State Anthem in relation to ongoing preparations for the celebration of “A Decade of Ukrainian Literature” in Moscow later that year. He argued that the opening of the “Decade” festivities should be marked by the performance of the Ukrainian anthem by a choir of 1000 singers: “There was an Anthem, but now there is not. There is [only] music.” Malishko proposed petitioning the Central Committee to approve the formation of a “poet brigade.” His proposal was confirmed by the Presidium members: because the competition format “did not yield results” and because at the “Decade of Ukrainian Literature” the Anthem of Ukraine should resound “not only with trumpets, but also with words.” Their Anthem proposal, along with three other proposals from the same Writers’ Union meeting, was transmitted by letter to the Central Committee secretary Andrii Skaba. It is perhaps with Skaba that the Anthem project not only lost momentum, but hit a road block. Skaba was known as a Communist Party true believer, proponent of russification policies in Soviet Ukraine, and enemy of the national intelligentsia - the “sixtiers”. In 1972, he played a key role in the persecution of Ivan Dziuba, one of the defining moments in a wave of anti-national repressions that cost almost 200 Ukrainians their freedom.

An internal Central Committee memo dated 23 May 1960 verifies that the four Writers’ Union proposals presented in the letter to Skaba were discussed. Three were approved and

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473 TsDAMLM f. 590, op. 1, d. 391, st. 54-57; As discussed above, the original State Anthem of Soviet Ukraine was performed without words after Stalin’s death.

474 TsDAMLM f. 590, op. 1, d. 391, st. 54-56.

475 TsDAMLM f. 590, op. 1, d. 391, st. 56.

476 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 1454, st. 47-48. (letter from the Presidium of the Writers’ Union to Andrii Skaba in the Central Committee, 23 April 1960)
measures were taken to enact them. However, regarding the proposal for an Anthem, the memo simply stated: “that question remains under review.”

**The Anthem(s) That Could Have Been: 64 Draft Texts**

Despite years of meetings and critical reviews and revisions, the Thaw era Anthem project never produced an Anthem. It did, however, produce a substantial collection of draft texts, each composed by a different author with the same purpose in mind. Collectively, these 64 odes to Soviet Ukraine produce a distinct image of Ukraine, one that cuts across generations. Analysis of these texts, combining the methodologies of traditional close reading with a digital text analysis tool, revealed three prominent themes, beyond those prescribed by the official instructions. These themes are: the national geography of Ukraine, fertility, and freedom.

References to Ukraine’s geography include descriptions of its territorial space, such as “native land,” and specific geographical features — regions, rivers, seas, etc. The Dnieper River is by far the most dominant geographic feature, which attests to the river’s paramount place in Ukrainian imagined geography and its enduring significance as a national symbol. The second theme that pervades the anthem drafts is the fertility of Ukrainian lands, which combines metaphors of “blooming” and “blossoming” with images of Ukraine as an agricultural paradise. And finally, the theme of freedom stands out, which includes free will, liberty, and independence. While freedom would not be a surprising element in other national anthems, in this context it is especially interesting and complex.

Figure 3 lists the 35 most commonly used words within the 64 Anthem draft texts. In it, I

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477 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 1454, st. 45.

478 I used the Voyant Tools web application. While I was able to create and input a Ukrainian stop list (automatically ignore common words like “на”and “і”), I had to manually group words with the same root. This type of software does not do well with Slavic word declension and thus considers “Україна” and “Україно” to be distinct words, let alone “Україна.” I know there are people who are working on writing code to solve this issue and hope to explore that more in the future: https://voyant-tools.org
have grouped words by their root and ordered by the total number of texts that contain that word. [See Figure 3] The fourth column provides the total number of times that a root word appears, across all 64 texts. The most commonly used word, as one would expect, is “Ukraine”, spelled two ways. It appeared a total of 217 times in 61 out of 64 draft texts, indicating that it often appeared multiple times within a single text. In this table, I gave priority to the number of distinct texts containing a root word over the total count because, as we saw in the Writers’ Union discussion, brevity matters in an Anthem. Therefore, it seems to me that the decision to use a word once is more significant that the decision to repeat it, often within the refrain. The “total count” column does give extra weight to the words chosen for inclusion in the refrain, which typically repeats three times.

The second most universally used word, “glory” or “glorify,” is really only slightly less common than “Ukraine.” It may not seem surprising given that it was included three times in the refrain of the post-war State Anthem of Soviet Ukraine, “Glory to the Soviet Union, Glory! Glory to the Fatherland of fraternal nations [narodiv-brativ]!”479 It is likely that the authors of the new texts considered the original Anthem to be safe model. However, the word has other roots in Ukrainian culture, including the familiar phrases: “Glory to God” and “Glory to Ukraine!” or “Glory to the heroes!” The former is of course linked directly with religion and the latter two with the Ukrainian national struggle for independence.480 On the other hand, the third most frequently used word is “Lenin.” Soviet themes, many of which were specified in the


480 “Glory to Ukraine!” is linked with the Ukrainian War for Independence (1917-1921) and the Ukrainian nationalists of the 1920s. Its use was forbidden in the Soviet Union. “Glory to the heroes!” is linked with the members of OUN and UPA in the 1930s. See, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glory_to_Ukraine (accessed 7 April 2019)
instructions, factor heavily in the texts, as illustrated by Figure 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 35 Words</th>
<th>Root Word</th>
<th>Drafts (64)</th>
<th>Total Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>україна, вкраїна</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glory; to glorify</td>
<td>слава, славній, славити/про-</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenin</td>
<td>Ленін</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flower, bloom, blossom</td>
<td>(роз)квіт-, (роз)цвіт-</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people</td>
<td>народ</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>партія</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>happiness</td>
<td>щастя, щасливий</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soviet</td>
<td>радянський</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>108</td>
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<tr>
<td>labor</td>
<td>труд</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>98</td>
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<tr>
<td>communism</td>
<td>комунізм</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>free, independent</td>
<td>вільний</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friendship</td>
<td>дружба</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>land, earth, ground</td>
<td>земля</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dnieper (River)</td>
<td>дніпро</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brother</td>
<td>брат</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strong, powerful</td>
<td>могутній</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>state</td>
<td>держава</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>border; region</td>
<td>край</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sea</td>
<td>море</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>star</td>
<td>зоря</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>union</td>
<td>союз</td>
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<td>55</td>
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<td>sun</td>
<td>сонце</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>native</td>
<td>рідний</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beauty</td>
<td>краса, красивий</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>banner</td>
<td>стяг</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>bright</td>
<td>світлій</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>way, route, path</td>
<td>шлях</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>great, big</td>
<td>великий</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ukrainian</td>
<td>український, вкраїнський</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>factory</td>
<td>завод</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strong, powerful</td>
<td>сильний</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freedom</td>
<td>свобода</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>жовтень</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>will, freedom</td>
<td>воля</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family</td>
<td>сім'я</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Top 35 most frequently used words
Direct reference was made to the Dnieper river 50 times in 32 texts, making it the 14th most commonly used word in the Anthem drafts. This is significant. The refrain of “Star” includes the following lines: “Glory to the Dnipro, mighty like a warrior! [bohatyr]”\(^4\) The fact that this represents only half of the submitted texts simply speaks to the diversity of the individual texts, for example “Lenin” was left out of 11 texts, “the party” was absent from 15. “Labor” was only included in 8 more texts than “Dnieper” and “Communism” is found in only 6 more. Most of the words that were used in more texts than “Dnieper” were part of prescribed Soviet-related motifs. As discussed at the Writers’ Union meeting (above), in drafting their texts many poets were perhaps excessively concerned with including these elements. It is therefore the words that were not prescribed that I find more interesting and more revealing.

In Figure 4, I grouped commonly used words in ways that I found meaningful. [See Figure 4] This allowed me to see the broader occurrence of different types of words and larger themes. For example, although the Dnieper’s infamous rapids, Khortytsia Island, and Kakhovska Sea (reservoir) only appear a handful of times, their inextricable association with the river suggests that reference was made to the Dnieper in four additional texts, bringing its total to 36 different drafts. One draft begins with a description of the largest, most dangerous of the Dnieper’s former rapids roaring through the steppes of Ukraine.\(^5\) Another uses the Dnieper rapids to allude to past glory of the Cossacks: “For centuries, native warriors [narodni biitsi] bore your [Ukraine’s] glory across the rapids and far beyond.”\(^6\) Read together, these texts are absolutely filled not only with abstract references to the Ukrainian natural world — forests, fields, the sun, and seas — but also to specific features of Ukrainian geography. However, with

\(^4\) TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 351, st. 81 (“Star”)

\(^5\) TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 351, st. 97 abd TsDAHO, f.1, op. 31, d. 674, st. 80 (“Waterfall 2”)

\(^6\) TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 351, st. 115 (“Glory to Ukraine”)
the considerable exception of the Dnieper river, most named geographical features only appear a few times, though the Carpathian Mountains appear 20 times in 14 different texts. This speaks both to the importance of geography and the natural world to these poets’ image of Ukraine, but also to the unique position held by the Dnieper river in the imagined geography of their native land. The third verse of the text titled, “On the seas/reservoirs of the Dnieper,” enlisted major rivers to denote Ukraine’s allies to the east in Russia and to the west in the communist bloc: “The enduring friendship of the Volga and the Danube, and even the Dnieper, grows stronger.”

Another text opens with a verse that links the river with electrification and the Soviet modernity project: “Cherry orchards filled with the nightingale’s song, the stars of DniproHES spread out across the steppes, this is Soviet Ukraine, the land of workers and peasants!”

Thinking more broadly about Ukrainian geography, Figure 3 indicates that the word “zemlia” — land, earth, ground — falls just above “Dnieper” because it was included a total of 67 times in 32 distinct texts. In Figure 4, I grouped “zemlia” with other words used to describe the territory of Ukraine: region/edge [krai], republic [respublik], fatherland [bat’kivshchyna], country/land, [kraina], homeland [vitchyzna], and even Rus’ [Rus’], which was used 6 times in 6 different texts. Behind the long list of Soviet themes and the direct use of the word “Ukraine”, this category comes next. The words in this category define Ukrainian territory in different ways. “Republic” and “Rus’” not only refer to two different territorial spaces, but also two very different times. In fact, only the word “republic” denotes a bounded territory, defined by a political border. The other words describe abstract notions of Ukrainian space, which have more of an emotional resonance than political meaning.

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484 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 351, st. 75 (“On the seas of the Dnieper”), Of course the author chooses to ignore the fact that the Danube not only passes through the territories of Soviet aligned Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, but also non-aligned Austria and Yugoslavia.

485 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 351, st. 116-117 (“Volga”)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Groups</th>
<th>Root Word(s)</th>
<th>Drafts (64)</th>
<th>Total Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine + Ukrainian</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>україна, вкраїна</td>
<td>61</td>
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<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>україна</td>
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<td>вкраїна</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rus'</td>
<td>Рус'</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soviet Themes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenin</td>
<td>Ленін</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labor</td>
<td>труд + праця</td>
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<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people</td>
<td>народ</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>партія</td>
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<tr>
<td>soviet</td>
<td>радянський</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>banner / flag</td>
<td>стяг + прапор + знаменю</td>
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<td>71</td>
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<td>communism</td>
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<td>friendship</td>
<td>дружба</td>
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<td>жовтень</td>
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<td>32</td>
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<td>батьківщина</td>
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<td>країна</td>
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<td>вітчизна</td>
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<td>reunited (territories)</td>
<td>возз’єднаний</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Карпати</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Крим</td>
<td>4</td>
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**Figure 4: Word Groups**
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<td>пороги</td>
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<td>вода</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Дунай</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volga (river)</td>
<td>Волга</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dniester (river)</td>
<td>Дністер</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| star               | зоря    | 26  | 43  |
| sun                | сонце   | 24  | 33  |
| sky                | небо    | 11  | 16  |

| factory            | завод   | 20  | 25  |
| collective farm    | колгосп | 7   | 10  |
| village            | село    | 5   | 5   |

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</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>степ</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(cultivated) field</td>
<td>нива</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meadow</td>
<td>лука</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| mountain           | гора    | 7   | 12  |
| valley             | долина  | 6   | 11  |
| expanse            | простір | 6   | 6   |

Figure 4 (Continued): Word Groups
### Russia

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<td>Kremlin</td>
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<td>Moscow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volga (river)</td>
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### Family

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<th>мати</th>
<th>сестра</th>
<th>батько</th>
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<td>brother</td>
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<td>3</td>
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### Adjectives

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### Agriculture and Fertility

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**Figure 4 (Continued): Word Groups**
The fourth most frequently used root word was “flower” / “bloom” / “blossom.” It appeared 99 times in 52 different texts, just beating out “people” / “nation” [narod] on the list of top words. In the anthem texts, “blossom” was sometimes used metaphorically to describe the republic’s flourishing (under Soviet rule, presumably). But it was very often linked with agricultural abundance and the fertility of Ukrainian land: “Above the blue Dnieper, in the green Carpathians the factories sing, the fields bloom…”486 Figure 4 makes the prominence of this theme even more apparent, incorporating related words such as “garden” and “cultivated field.” This observation corroborates arguments made in other chapters of this dissertation about the special significance of agricultural fertility to self-perceptions of Ukraine.487 One text begins: “Like a garden, Ukraine blossomed,” which described how Ukraine flourished within “a family of fraternal nations.” Later, the author described “golden fields” and “seas of wheat and steel.”488 Another text begins: “Ukraine, your earth is bountiful, your core is rich, and your fields are fertile.”489 “Core” [nadra] in this verse refers to the geological layer deep below the earth’s surface that is mined for natural resources such as coal and iron ore. It is common, as in these examples, to celebrate the productivity of Ukrainian nature by pairing references to both agricultural and metallurgical resources.

Lastly, various words for “free” / “freedom”, “independent” / “independence”, and “liberty” [vil’nyi, svoboda, volia, nezaleznyi] were heavily represented in the Anthem texts [See Figures 3 and 4]. The word “vyl’nyi” was the 11th most used word and appeared 74 times in 37 different texts, “svoboda” appeared 25 times in 18 texts, and “volia” appeared 25 times in 16 different texts.

486 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 351, st. 105 (“Banner”)
487 See Chapter 1 on using the Dnieper’s water for irrigation rather than energy. See Chapter 2 on Dovzhenko’s “Poem of the Sea.” See Chapter 5 for fertility in Honchar’s “Cathedral”.
488 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 351, st. 113-114 (“Patriot”)
489 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 351, st. 64 (“Fortieth Anniversary of October”)
texts. Among the most frequently used adjectives, “free” [vil’nyi] tops the list, followed by “strong”/“powerful” [mohutnii] and “native” [ridnyi]. This suggests a broad expression of freedom as an important value, but not anti-Soviet sentiment. Looking individually at the context in which words for “freedom” are used reveals that they often appear as an expression of freedom within the Soviet family. This is especially true of drafts that received praise during the competition’s review process. In reference to the familial bond between republics, one author wrote, “Ukraine blossoms among free sisters.” Another author began their text by crediting Moscow and Soviet power for granting Ukraine its freedom: “Previously a land of enslavement and sorrow — you [Ukraine] blossom under the sun of the Kremlin” and then in the second verse continues: “Beautiful, free [svobodna], big, and powerful in a circle of republic-families.” This, Soviet-linked idea of Ukraine’s freedom is rooted in the original post-war anthem of Soviet Ukraine, which begins: “Live, Ukraine, beautiful and strong, [I]n the Soviet Union you found happiness. An equal among equals, free [vil’na] among the free, [u]nder the sun of freedom [svobodî], like a flower, you blossomed.” In contrast to the nationalist anthem, “Ukraine has not yet perished,” which is a call-to-arms in Ukraine’s long struggle for freedom, these draft texts celebrate “freedom” as a condition that had already been achieved within the Soviet Union.

Following the Writers’ Union discussion in March 1957, the poets picked up their red pens and got down to work on their texts. Subsequent versions show substantial revisions based on the criticism they received. The author of “Native Land” slashed their hefty eight-line chorus in half. The phrase “free labor” was replaced by “peaceful labor” and the ambiguous word

490 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 351, st. 91 and TsDAHO, f. 1, op, 31, d. 674, st. 74 (“Sharp 3”)

491 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 351, st. 98 and TsDAHO, f. 1, op, 31, d. 674, st. 81 (“Waterfall 3”)

“forged / enraged” [zliutovanyi], which Novychenko attacked, was replaced by [zhurtovanyi]:

“united by Soviet power!” The author of “Dnieper,” criticized by some for repeating geographic images and by others for excessive use of named places, removed their second reference to the Donbas region and also the line, “[t]he Poltava woods become green,” which Novychenko had called meaningless. In their place, the author inserted less-specific images of factories, cultivated fields, and forest groves, while retaining the original geographic markers: Carpathian, Donesk, Polissya, Danube, and - of course - the Dnieper.

Of the six texts discussed at the Writers Union meeting, three were included on the Government Commission’s list of the ten most promising drafts in July 1958 and thus remained in contention: “Illuminated by October,” “Great Fate,” and “Kateryna.” The text of “Great Fate” does not appear to have been changed at all, despite receiving criticism for including Khmel’nyts’kyi, Shevchenko, Franko, and a non-Ukrainian word. The author of “Illuminated by October,” on the other hand, submitted two additional variations, but it was ultimately the original version that Commission held on to in 1958. The second variation contained only a few minor changes, but the third variation shifted from one central Dnieper metaphor to another. In the original (preferred) draft, “Our people build and sow, [they are] strong, like the waters of the Dnieper,” the metaphor linking the river and the Ukrainian people is reinforced. Here the river is the “narod,” the Ukrainian people, who are not only strong, but productive. In the third variation, the Dnieper river takes on a political, territorial meaning: “From the Dnieper we can see the Kremlin’s stars.” The poem suggests that despite substantial physical distance, the two are close in other ways. In this line, both the Dnieper river and the Kremlin are more than just a point or line on a map. Their symbolic geography is expanded to encompass something larger, territorially. Here the Dnieper was used as a symbol of the entire Ukrainian state or republic.

493 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 351, st. 66 (“Native Land - corrected version”)
The author of “Kateryna,” Mykola Nahnybida (1911-1985) entirely rewrote the three verses of his text. However, he made only one small change to the refrain, replacing “beloved” with “our”: “Glory to our Dnieper river valleys, Carpathian Mountains, deep seas.” At the Writers’ Union meeting Novychenko had highly praised the refrain but criticized the rest. In response to many objections about repetition, Nahnybida removed one of two references to “friendship of the peoples” and added description of the state flag, a “concise image” he lauded at the poets’ meeting. The fourth text to come out of the Anthem competition and make the Commission’s top 10 list was a text under the title, “Labor.” The opening verse of this text is filled with images of Ukrainian geography and nature:

Above the high banks of the Dnieper river,
Across the fields and oak groves,
From the Carpathians to the Black Sea,
Vast, native land, let your voice be heard,
With factory whistles
And golden fields of rye.

As is common throughout the draft texts, the natural world and industrial world converge. These two sources of productivity are paired. The refrain begins, “Ukraine blossoms in the sun of freedom, a free and powerful state,” thus completing the trifecta of freedom, fertility, and national geography, including the Dnieper river specifically.

Oleksa Novyts’kyi (1914-1992) authored the fifth text in the top ten, giving it the title, “A. Dniprovs’kyi.” Rather than a direct reference to the river, he more likely used the word as a surname, perhaps an homage to Ivan Danilovich Shevchenko (1895-1934) who wrote under the pseudonyms Dniprovs’kyi and Kobzarenko. The first initial “A” may be his own name, “Aleksei” in Russian. Besides the “device,” Novyts’kyi’s revised text does not directly reference

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494 I do not know why the authors of “Great Fate”, “Illuminated by October”, and “Labor” were not also revealed at this late stage.

495 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 31, d. 351, st. 73; TsDAHO, f.1, op. 24, d. 4703, st. 43 (“Labor”)
the river by name. It does, however, glorify Ukraine’s geography more generally, its “seas and rivers” and “my land” [zemlia]. The first verse stresses the themes of freedom and the family metaphor for the Soviet Union: “Glory to Ukraine, mighty and free, glory to my spacious [razdol’naia] land. Glory to freedom, fraternal harmony, a united family of free peoples [narodiv].”

The revised versions of “Kateryna” and “A. Dniprov’s’kyi” that the Commission ushered forward were “received outside of the completion,” which may indicate that recommendations for edits were made to the authors directly without anonymity. Nahnybida and Novyts’kyi belonged to a younger generation of writers, between the rising “sixtiers” and the firmly established older generation. Of the five texts that were, at least initially, created within the Anthem competition, four name the Dnieper river directly and the fifth alludes to it in the title, whether directly or indirectly. Freedom appears in all five texts, while the theme of fertility appears in four.

The remaining five texts were also written “outside of the competition” but by heavyweights in the Ukrainian literary world: three jointly authored by Tychyna and Bazhan, two by Ryl’s’kyi. When younger writers spoke out at the Writers’ Union meeting about the importance of an anonymous competition, this was precisely what they feared… Not a single one of these texts mention the Dnieper river. This omission probably has more to do with their “imagined” audience than with the writers themselves. Each of these highly regarded poets frequently included the river and Ukrainian nature in their poems. All five Anthem drafts celebrate fertility, while only two include freedom. The three drafts written by Tychyna and Bazhan are tightly packed with soviet themes: workers, the Party, Lenin, fraternal peoples, communism, etc. All three describe Ukraine as a land in bloom. “Draft #1” begins and ends with

496 TsDAHO, f.1, op. 24, d. 4703, st. 40 (“A. Dniprov’s’kyi”); I believe “razdol’nyi” is a Russian adjective, not Ukrainian?

497 TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4703, st. 36. (Commission’s report to the Central Committee)
freedom. The last line of this text is especially interesting: “The banner of communism — the banner of truth and freedom [svobodi] — we do not bend/bow down [mokhylym], nowhere and not ever!” In fact, Ryl’s’kyi included a similar line in the first verse of “Draft #2”. A buzzword of the Thaw era, the word “truth” did not quite make my list of “Top 35 Words,” however it was used 20 times in 14 different texts. Tychyna and Bazhan’s other two drafts are quite similar but stand out for describing Ukraine as holy or sacred in the first verse: “The earth of the Fatherland is sacred [sviata]” and “This is native, sacred [sviaschchenna] land.” Even more interestingly, the sources of this sacred quality are the “ancestors” buried in “the graves of heroes.” Words for “sacred/holy” were used in ten texts, including these two. In most cases the object described as sacred was something that can be categorized as a Soviet subject, like the party or friendship between republics.

Ryl’s’kyi’s two draft texts are filled with images of the natural world and agricultural fertility: eagles and nightingales, honey, green groves, and vineyards. He described the happiness of those who “plow and hammer” and even used the agricultural fertility metaphor to describe Lenin as a farmer or sower: “What Lenin sowed, what our labor grew, that will never perish [zhyne]” The verb Ryl’s’kyi chose for “perish” [zhynuty] caught my eye. While it is not the same verb used in the infamous first line of “Ukraine has not yet perished” [shche ne vmerla Ukraina], “zhynuty” is derived from the word used in the original Polish version of the song.

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498 TsDAHO, f.1, op. 24, d. 4703, st. 44 (“Draft #1 by Tychyna and Bazhan”)

499 TsDAHO, f.1, op. 24, d. 4703, st. 48 (“Draft #2 by Ryl’s’kyi”): “Under the banner of truth and freedom [voli].”

500 TsDAHO, f.1, op. 24, d. 4703, st. 45-46 (“Draft #2 and Draft 3 by Tychyna and Bazhan”)

501 The one or two exceptions were two different drafts of the text “Dnipro,” which also referred to the Ukrainian fatherland as holy. This text was considered very positively during review. Perhaps Tychyna or Bazhan was its anomalous author. In fact, Ryl’s’kyi also used the word “sacred” in “Draft #2” to describe the “holy borders,” which were defended from enemies with help from Russian brothers.

502 TsDAHO, f.1, op. 24, d. 4703, st. 47-48 (“Draft #1 by Ryl’s’kyi” and “Draft #2 by Ryl’s’kyi”)

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which served as the model for the Ukrainian version. The Polish anthem was written a few years after Poland was erased from the map, partitioned by the Russian Empire, Prussia, and the Austrian Empire. Both songs now serve as the official National Anthems of independent Ukraine and Poland. The spelling of the Polish lyrics has been modernized and now appear more similar to the Ukrainian version, but the original word used in the opening line, “Poland has not yet perished” was “zginęła.”

Although Ryl’s’kyi did not name the Dnieper river in his two texts, he did dedicate a verse to the hydroengineering projects underway on the river: “Under the Party’s sun, you [Ukraine] shine, with a powerful sweep of your hand you fill new seas, you ignite new stars.” This verse is not purely metaphorical. The massive reservoir, or Kakhovka Sea, above the hydropower dam at Nova Kakhovka was filled between 1955-1958 and construction of the dam that would form the Kremenchug reservoir was about to begin. In addition, stars were often used as poetic metaphors for electricity. Therefore, Soviet power on the Dnieper did indeed fill new seas and ignite new stars.

Conclusions

Despite all of their similarities and their differences, not one of these potential anthems were ever adopted. With slight modifications, the Stalin-era Anthem survived until the collapse of the Soviet Union but was never popularly embraced. More recently, independent Ukraine returned to the beloved national text that was forbidden during Soviet rule, “Ukraine has not yet perished.” Its lyrics do not mention the Dnieper river by name, but the song is an ode to the Ukrainian Cossacks, the national warrior-heroes of the Dnieper. What makes this Anthem so

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503 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland_Is_Not_Yet_Lost#cite_note-kuczyn-7 (accessed April 2019)

504 TsDAHO, f.1, op. 24, d. 4703, st. 47 (“Draft #1 by Ryl’s’kyi”)
different from the Anthem of Soviet Ukraine is its national specificity. Although its incipit resonates broadly with other nations who have fought for territorial sovereignty, the content speaks directly to Ukrainian identity, heritage, and history. Aside from the word “Ukraine” in the first line of the Soviet text, the republic’s anthem could have just as easily been the anthem of any of the other republics. The reference in the 1949 text to Ukraine’s “reunited” western territory is important, but it was directly linked with the Red Army victories in WWII and the suppression of nationalist forces in that region after the war. This word was removed from the revised anthem in 1978. During the Thaw era competition to create an entirely new State Anthem for Soviet Ukraine, the Dnieper river was unquestionably the chosen national symbol. Within a dense array of Soviet slogans, this river stood out as the most common element specific to Ukraine. The Dnieper was also probably a reasonably safe choice for the Soviet era anthem, a geographic feature that was as much a symbol of modern (Soviet) Ukraine as it was a symbol of Ukraine’s national history.

This Anthem project therefore failed on two levels: It failed to fulfill its stated purpose, to re-write the State Anthem of Soviet Ukraine, and it failed to introduce an element of Ukrainian national specificity into an otherwise generically Soviet text.
Chapter 4

Eco-Patriotism on the Dnieper: For the Love of Beautiful, Native Nature

Mykola Hlushchenko sat on the deck of a steamship as it moved along the Dnieper river. Mykola was born on the banks of the Samara River, about ten miles from where this tributary joins the Dnieper at the city of Dnipropetrovsk.505 The artist had been away from Ukraine for many years, since the civil war, but eventually was allowed to travel throughout the Ukrainian republic to gather inspiration for his paintings from the built and natural environment of his homeland. On that day in 1937, Mykola painted scenes of his native landscape as it slowly passed by. An old man watched Hlushchenko paint. After observing the artist for a while, looking back and forth between the canvas and the river, he said, “You know what? As long as I have lived, I am only now seeing its beauty.” Oleksandr Dovzhenko, who was in Ukraine to work on his latest film, sat on the ship’s deck next to the painter and overheard the old man’s observation. The two longtime friends were struck by the old man’s words, which caused them to recall the words of Diderot: “Painting is quite a remarkable thing. It adds charm and enchantment to things that we don’t notice in [everyday] life.”506 Hlushchenko told this story many years later in 1958 at a meeting between members of the Ukrainian Society for the Nature Conservation [UkrPryroda], the Writers’ Union, and the Artists’ Union.

In the context of the Soviet Union’s promotion of high modernist values that celebrated the power of science and engineering to conquer nature, this chapter examines voices that


506 Tsentral'nyi Derzhavnii Arkhiv–Muzei Literatury i Mystetstva Ukrainy (TsDAMLM), f. 590 (Union of Writers of Ukraine), op. 1, sp. 334, st. 56 (Mykola Hlushchenko, transcript of conference dedicated to “Nature Protection and its Aesthetics,” 26 May 1958).
increasingly expressed a revision of this value system. Without directly criticizing the Soviet leadership, establishment writers such as Maksym Ryl’s’kyi and Oles’ Honchar fostered the idea that Ukraine’s national geography was more than just a natural resource to be harnessed by science to serve the Soviet economy. These voices of “eco-patriotism” represent the early roots of later environmental activism and “eco-nationalism.” These eco-patriots were firmly rooted in Soviet official culture. They collectively articulated a shift in the public discourse on nature and national geography after WWII. Expressions of local and regional patriotism were permitted during the war effort, but lingered, even surviving post-war crackdowns by Moscow-based authorities. Eco-Patriotism defended what I call “unproductive nature,” nature that served Soviet Ukrainians but not the Soviet economy. Unproductive nature is nature that is valued for its beauty and cultural symbolism. This was a native nature, with national specificity. Our forests, our rivers, our Steppe. In Ukraine, this meant nature that was distinct from Russian nature.

Douglas Weiner identified three major strands of environmental thought that existed in the proto-Soviet space in 1917. Arguments for the protection of nature were made based on “pastoralist”, “ecological”, or “utilitarian” reasoning, though usually some combination of the three. The pastoralist viewpoint valued nature for its beauty rather than its utility for mankind. Weiner calls this view “anti-modernist,” because it represented a critical response to modern, industrial and urban society, whether capitalist or socialist. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the pastoralist view was tied to German neo-romanticism and thus infused with patriotism and nationalism, celebrating the unique elements of native nature. However,

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507 On econationalism, see: Dawson, Eco-Nationalism: Anti-Nuclear Activism and National Identity in Russia, Lithuania, and Ukraine.


509 Ibid., 229.

510 Ibid., 229-30.
in the Soviet Union by the mid-1920s, it was no longer possible to express arguments for nature protection in pastoralist terms.\textsuperscript{511} Alternatively, Weiner found that the ecological conservationists harnessed their scientific expertise to defend the fragility of nature and precarious balance of diverse Soviet ecosystems. The ecological or scientific defense of nature dominated in the first decade after the Bolshevik revolution but was swiftly superseded by utilitarian rhetoric ushered in by the First Five-Year Plan. In practice, this utilitarian conservationism tended to be state-oriented, short-sighted, and driven by quantifiable economic growth. Weiner found that a combination these last two approaches existed throughout the Soviet Era.\textsuperscript{512} In a recent article based on her work on Soviet sanatoriums in Sochi, Johanna Conterio introduced the idea of “medicinal conservation,” which she defines as “expert-led management of natural resources and environments reserved for medical, therapeutic, and prophylactic use, to promote health” and includes some aspects of both utilitarian and ecological nature conservation.\textsuperscript{513} Together with the work of Stephen Brain, Weiner and Conterio’s contributions demonstrate that nature protection was never a marginal agenda in the Soviet period and can even be considered a Stalinist value.\textsuperscript{514}

However, from the 1950s onward many aspects of this agenda did change significantly. New actors entered the arena, strategies changed, the boundaries of permissible public discussion expanded, and arguments for nature protection were made in different terms. Most scholars describe the emergence of two distinct but unequal nature protection movements in the 1950s, gaining momentum with time and culminating in response to the Chernobyl disaster in 1986.\textsuperscript{515} The scientific intelligentsia constituted the dominant branch, while the cultural intelligentsia -

\textsuperscript{511} A Little Corner of Freedom, 12-13.

\textsuperscript{512} See ibid.


\textsuperscript{514} Brain, Song of the Forest.

\textsuperscript{515} On the Chernobyl disaster see, Plokhy, Chernobyl: The History of a Nuclear Catastrophe.
associated with the Village Prose writers in the Russian republic - played a much smaller role. The cultural intelligentsia linked their defense of nature in terms of Soviet patriotism, which gradually morphed into eco-nationalism. The conference in Kyiv, to which this chapter is dedicated, provides important insight into the shifts in Soviet environmental discourse in the decade after after Stalin’s death. In particular, the conference was organized around the idea that the scientific intelligentsia and the cultural intelligentsia should not pursue nature protection separately. They very much needed each other and recognized that together they had the greatest potential to succeed in their aims. At the conference they spoke as a single, united community. Moreover, this conference on “nature protection and its aesthetic value” placed beauty at the forefront and thus testifies to the return of the aesthetic dimension in public discourse. In his study of “Baikal Environmentalism,” Nicholas Breyfogle also found that beauty was regularly cited in arguments for the lake’s protection. Baikal’s beauty was linked with Soviet patriotism and celebrated as a symbol of the Soviet people in the same way that the Dnieper River, Carpathian mountains, and Ukrainian Steppe were. Breyfogle argues that 1958 and the now famous 1958 conference in Irkutsk, which took place five months after the Kyiv conference, marked a turning point in the history of Soviet environmentalism, especially in terms of public discussion and participation.

The 1958 conference in Kyiv exposes the first stage of transition from employing patriotic language to employing national(ist) language in defense of nature. At this point, it was not a deliberate transition. I call the participants eco-patriots, rather than eco-nationalists, because they positioned themselves firmly within the Soviet project. They argued for the

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518 Ibid., 148-49.
protection of Ukrainian nature in explicitly Soviet terms. But in doing so, they reinforced ideas about the significance of Ukrainian national geography, the Ukrainian landscape, and Ukrainian nature, distinct from Russian geography, landscape, and nature. The aesthetic and patriotic/national approach expressed at the conference has many similarities with the “pastoralist” approach inherited from the late-Imperial period, even adopting spiritual language at times. However, the ecological thinking of these Ukrainian eco-patriots also incorporated utilitarian arguments. Essentially, they articulated pro-modernist, rather than anti-modernist, environmental views. Unlike pastoralists who opposed all human influence on nature, eco-patriots advocated nature-engineering for human benefit. Unlike pure utilitarian conservationists, they valued nature’s beauty as a natural resource like coal or iron ore. In particular, nature’s beauty was valuable when Soviet citizens experienced it. Many of the conference speakers dedicated their speech to the creation of accessible “leisure landscapes,” specifically in urban settings, including towns and factories.

The Conference: Nature and Its Aesthetic Value

The conference took place in Kyiv on 26 May 1958: “The purpose of this meeting [is] to discuss the current state of nature protection [okhorony] in connection with its aesthetic significance and to identify ways to mobilize public opinion around the issue of protecting the nature of our fatherland [vitchyznianoï pryrody] and to encourage writers, artists, journalists, publishers, newspapers, radio stations, television programs, educational institutions, [and] biologists to popularize knowledge about nature and cultivate a feeling of Soviet

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520 On the connection between “medicinal conservation” and urban leisure in the health resort setting, see ibid., 24-25.
patriotism, careful treatment of natural treasures, and love for the native land. Mykola Hlushchenko was one of the main conference organizers, along with H.A. Honcharenko, and V.I. Pylypenko. As the stimulus for the conference, the organizers pointed to the widespread rapid development of industrial and agricultural production currently underway across the Soviet Union. It was against these forces that nature needed to be protected. Of the 33 invited members of the Writers’ Union, eighteen were in attendance. 130 members of the Artists’ Union were invited with thirteen attending. In addition, 100 more people were invited to attend, including members of UkrPryroda, newspaper editors, journal editors, and representatives of other state organizations. Of this third group, 62 were present at the meeting.

The conference produced ten resolutions: 1. Ask the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian RSR to issue a general law on the protection of nature within the territory of Ukraine. 2. Ask the Council of Ministers to oblige [zobov’iazyty] regional, city, district, and town authorities to dedicate resources to creating and preserving green spaces, including parks, squares, boulevards, and lakes for recreation near cities and factories. Ask the Council of Ministers to oblige industrial enterprises to install protective equipment on their chimneys - in order to reduce air pollution - and to prevent enterprises from operating without appropriate wastewater treatment - in order to reduce water pollution, especially the pollution of the Dnieper river. 3. Ask the Council of Ministers and Party Central Committee to authorize the publication of a popular journal in Ukraine dedicated to nature protection and natural resources, including current issues, best practices, literary essays, and art. 4. Cultural and educational institutions aimed at youth and children should encourage a positive attitude towards nature conservation. Specifically, the meeting organizers will submit a concrete plan to the Ministry of Education for

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521 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 84 (chronicle of the conference).

522 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 84 (chronicle of the conference).
the introduction of “tree care programs” in schools. Under the guidance of their teachers, students will plant a tree and then be assessed on their regular care for that tree over the course of subsequent years. 5. Ask the Writers’ Union together with UkrPryroda to assemble a list of the best works by Ukrainian writers that foster love for nature and their native land. 6. Ask the Journalists’ Union to partner with UkrPryroda in organizing exhibitions of photographs, which celebrate the beauty of the Ukrainian landscape. 7. Ask the Artists’ Union to encourage Ukrainian artists to depict the issue of nature protection and nature aesthetics in their works and to organize exhibitions of paintings dedicated to the Ukrainian landscape. 8. Ask the Department of Propaganda and Agitation to convey instructions to the applicable institutions to depict the theme of nature protection on posters, postage stamps, advertisements, and the covers of school textbooks. 9. The landscape design of cities and towns should reflect the new, modern age. Therefore, both artists and the general public should be included in this discussion when building or reconstructing cities and towns. 10. Charge the Presidium of UkrPryroda with publishing individual brochures containing the remarks presented by each of the main speakers at the conference.523

Not only did the conference participants represent a broad segment of the Soviet Ukrainian intelligentsia, but they aimed to enlist the help of an even broader segment of the population, including youth leaders, educators, and journalists. They envisioned a comprehensive campaign in support of nature protection across all media and cultural outlets. The primary goal of these participants was to influence and reshape public opinion on a large scale. Their strategy for mobilizing public opinion around the issue of protecting the nature of their homeland was to celebrate the beauty of that nature, a value that is distinct from nature’s economic value. In doing so, they expected that a greater appreciation for nature’s beauty would stimulate patriotism,

523 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 1-3 (conference resolutions).
articulated as Soviet patriotism but framed within the Ukrainian cultural and territorial space. In the context of extensive urbanization, conference participants aimed to bring the rural experience of nature to the cities and factories. However, they envisioned nature in a new form, compatible with modern Soviet society.

**Petro Pohrebniak: UkrPryroda and National Specificity**

The meeting of artists and scientists in May 1958 got underway with remarks by academician Petro Pohrebniak, who spoke on “the role of the artist in the matter of nature protection.” Pohrebniak was a geographer and a leading forestry and soil scientist at the Ukrainian Academy of Science. He was also the current chairman of the Ukrainian Society for Nature Conservation (*UkrPryroda*), a post he held between 1950 and 1962. *UkrPryroda*, which at the time was dedicated to aiding the protection and development of natural resources under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences, was founded in 1946 with Khrushchev’s blessing. The scientific community had called on the Communist Party Secretary to create this type of organization in response to the devastating drought of that year. *UkrPryroda* was founded with utilitarian aims related to maximizing the availability of natural and agricultural resources but quickly became the center of environmental activity in Ukraine. It was where questions about the natural world and natural resources were discussed before sending recommendations to the government. The Society's activities also represent the early roots of modern environmental activism in Ukraine. These natural scientists recognized that the creative community was an

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524 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 84.


526 Dawson claims that there was no “significant interest in environmental degradation” in Ukraine before 1986 other than among writers. She writes that it wasn’t until the mid-1960s that the literary community began to voice concerns about the environment. The activity of the Society for Nature Conservation and its early involvement with the artistic community suggests an earlier periodization. Dawson, *Eco-Nationalism: Anti-Nuclear Activism and*
important source of allies and that, as Diderot suggested, it was the artists - poets, authors, filmmakers, and painters - who had the power to make the public take notice.

In his speech, Pohrebniak introduced his audience to the purview of UkrPryroda, stressing its roots in Lenin's stewardship of Russian forests and his attacks on rapacious fishing practices. Perhaps to situate the origins of some of the critical aspects of his report on firmer ground, Pohrebniak relied heavily on two convenient sources: a recently published article by the President of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Aleksandr Nesmeianov, and a recent story in the Communist Party newspaper, Pravda, titled "The Carpathians should remain green." Nesmeianov reflected on the reciprocal relationship between nature and art and their mutual influence on patriotism: "Our nature - forests, waters, the plant and animal kingdoms - are near and dear to the heart of every Soviet patriot. It is reflected in many of the works of our great poets, writers, and artists. It continues to inspire our art and literature. Nature, especially wildlife - has great educational power. It is our responsibility to lovingly safeguard native nature [rodnaia pryroda] and a noble undertaking for us and our descendants." But despite certain achievements in the sphere of nature conservation, Nesmeianov argued that serious flaws remained, and that current practices were generally insufficient.

Given Pohrebniak's expertise in the area of forestry, it is not surprising that he dedicated a large part of his talk to the Carpathian forests. Immediately after WWII, the economic development of this newly incorporated area was pursued vigorously. As a result of extensive

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*National Identity in Russia, Lithuania, and Ukraine, 67-68.*

527 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 7.

528 Ibid. 7-11.

529 Ibid. 7-8.

530 Nesmeianov specifically points to the significant loss of fish populations in waters that were earlier abundant. Ibid. 8-9.
logging and industrial development, the Carpathian forests and the rare biodiversity they support were disappearing at alarming rates. Furthermore, in 1951 the area of land allotted to nature preservations across the Soviet Union had been dramatically reduced. Two months prior to the present meeting, in March 1958 the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences - on the recommendation of the Society for Nature Conservation - had adopted a resolution to pursue the expansion of nature preserves and reduce logging, especially in the Carpathian Mountains. The environmental degradation of the Carpathian forests was severe enough that it had already become an All-Union issue. Pohrebian explained: “The question of the Carpathian forests is very near and dear to us [in Ukraine and] has become the center of attention on the Soviet stage.”

In March 1957 a major conference was held in Moscow. Over the course of six days, 300 participants from across the Soviet Union discussed the issue of valuable but rapidly disappearing biodiversity - “native species of plants and animals” - and the “rational use” of the Soviet Union’s unique geological resources. The deforestation of the Carpathian mountain range was one of the major issues addressed at this conference. It appears that the Moscow conference served as both model and stimulus for the present meeting in Kyiv. Although the discussion in Moscow was clearly framed in the language of effectively using natural resources, the conference resolutions articulate what would be considered today as environmentalism and a harsh censure of the Soviet status quo. Pohrebian quoted many of these resolutions for his audience in Kyiv. They took aim at inflexible, short-sighted planning, “based only on meeting the needs of the present day.” Pohrebian encouraged Ukrainian writers and artists to pay attention to one resolution in particular: “Without a doubt, literature plays a large role in

531 Ibid. 12.
532 Ibid. 9.
533 Ibid. 9.
534 Ibid. 9.
popularizing ideas about nature conservation and cultivating a love for nature.” The authors of the resolution point to the impact and popularity of Leonov’s novel, Russian Forest (1953), and works by Paustovsky and others. They concluded with the decision to formally ask Soviet writers to take part in the popularization [propoganda] of ideas about nature protection and in the “concrete implementation” of those ideas.535

Pohrebniak turned next to the creation of urban landscapes and green spaces, another area that the Society sought input on from writers and artists. This was a matter of providing the new Soviet urban population with access to nature. In particular, he said, landscape design needs "national specificity." Echoing Dovzhenko’s idea of a “new beauty” and new modern nature, discussed in Chapter 2, Pohrebniak argued that “our nature" should reflect advanced modern ideas, the principle of serving the people, our best examples of art, and the creation of new models.536 For Pohrebniak, this new nature should reflect the ideals of order and uniformity, which should be conveyed not only in the placement of trees but especially in the selection of tree species. He noted that quite a lot of attention had been paid to urban design, but that for the most part this was limited to the built environment. Nature had been neglected, especially in the areas surrounding rivers.537 With regards to Kyiv, a city that overlooks the Dnieper river, Pohrebniak argued that there was a lot of work that needed to be done regarding the "vertical greening" of the city and surrounding area. This term referred to planting trees in an urban landscape. In the past, this “greening” had been done in a cheap and rough way, he said. Thankfully, this situation appeared to be moving in a better direction. At a recent local party committee meeting, he and the other members resolved to "never again plant a hideous American
maple tree in Kyiv." The American maple, he explained, is "not as graceful and attractive as the white poplar [topolia],” a variety native to Ukraine. In particular, of the many types of poplar trees that grow in the region, the one he referenced - "topolia" - is the specific type that is frequently found on the floodplains of large rivers in Ukraine.

**Maksym Rylskyi: Nature Writers**

The chairman of the Society for Nature Conservation then turned the floor over to three representatives of the artistic community in Soviet Ukraine: Maksym Rylskyi, Mykhaïlo Chabanivskyi, and Mykola Hlushchenko. Rylskyi (1895-1964) was born, raised, and educated in Kyiv, where he became a prominent poet and major figure in the Ukrainian literary renaissance of the 1920s. He was linked with a group of poets and critics known as the "Neoclassicists," though their literary style was more neo-romantic and symbolist than neoclassical.

Thematically, Rylskyi dedicated much of his lyrical poetry to nature, folklore, and music. The Neoclassicists had ties with the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences and preferred the name, "Academists." Rylskyi himself became an Academician in 1943, the same year that he joined the Communist Party, and he served as the director of the Academy's Institute of Art, Folklore, and Ethnography from 1944 until his death. In the political climate of the late 1920s and 1930s, Rylskyi's apolitical themes were politicized for not conforming to the official norms of proletarian art. He was arrested briefly in 1931, but he survived the purge that claimed the lives of much of the Ukrainian literary community by fully embracing official themes and glorifying the Party in his work. His shift proved quite successful professionally. Despite continuing to

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538 Ibid. 17-19.


publish poetry collections throughout the rest of his life, he was most valuable to the post-WWII generations as an advocate for Ukrainian culture and society, such as his involvement with the Society for Nature Conservation.541

The purpose of Rylskyi's contribution, titled “nature and literature,” was to highlight the "indissoluble and enduring unity of nature and art," for the most part referring to literature. Rylskyi's speech at the conference in 1958 was later adapted for a public readership and published by the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in 1960.542 Rather than a comprehensive review, the poet promised merely to provide "a glance and something," [vzgliad i nechto] which is an expression based on a passage in Griboyedov's Woe from Wit (1823) and is used to describe a loosely constructed statement on something the speaker is not thoroughly knowledgeable about.543 The academician was surely being overly modest. Rylskyi went on to illustrate this unity between nature and art with examples ranging from ancient Greece and Faust to his own contemporaries in Soviet literature. But as a colleague graciously pointed out later in the conference, Rylskyi omitted one very significant writer on nature themes: himself.544 The range of sources that Rylskyi provided - classical, western European, Russian and Ukrainian writers from the nineteenth century to his own contemporaries - is significant because it speaks to the models and points of reference that Rylskii and his contemporaries employed when relating to the natural environment. When speaking about nature generally, across time and across space, two categories emerge. For Ryl’s’kyi, nature meant forests and rivers, bound by their symbiotic relationship.


542 Pryroda I Literatura (Kyiv: Vydavnytstvo Akademii Nauk Ukrains'koi RSR, 1960). My discussion is based on the original meeting transcript, unless otherwise specified.

543 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 19.

544 Ibid. 54.
In the “Tale of Igor’s Campaign,” Rylskyi saw Igor’s “constant connection with nature at the most difficult moment of his life” and quotes the passage when Igor hides among the reeds of a riverbed to avoid capture.\( ^{545} \) This epic poem dates from Kievan Rus’ in the late 12th century and describes the Rus’ prince’s failed military expedition against a nomadic tribe - the Kipchaks or Polovtsi.\( ^{546} \) Igor led his ill-fated army from the Desna River, a left bank tributary that joins the Dnieper just north of Kyiv, south-eastward across the steppe to the Don River. The rivers of Southern Ukraine and the Russo-Ukrainian steppe provide one of the central themes of the epic.\( ^{547} \) In the lament of Igor’s wife, she calls to the Dnieper - “Oh Dnepr, famed one!” - and asks the river to protect her husband and transport him safely to the sea.\( ^{548} \) The geography in this case is likely entirely metaphorical, since it is more likely that the Donets river or the Don, both to the south-east of the Dnieper, would transport Igor to the Sea (of Azov).

In the next portion of his address to the conference, Ryl’s’kyi expressed what I suggest is a subtle criticism of the large-scale nature transformation projects pursued by Stalin and continued by his successors. To do so, he proposes a literal, rather than allegorical, reading of Goethe’s *Faust*. Ryl’s’kii quoted from a Ukrainian translation of Part 2, Act V by Mykola Lukash. Lukash was a successful literary translator at the time, having gained membership to the Ukrainian Writers’ Union in 1956. His success, and career, would come to an abrupt end when he expressed support for Ivan Dziuba following Dziuba’s arrest in 1972.\(^{549} \) At first glance, the lines

\( ^{545} \) Ibid. 21. Lines 752-753 of the poem.

\( ^{546} \) The authenticity of the “Tale” has been disputed, but the current consensus is that it was written in the late 12th century. It therefore, provides a rare view of both the real-life event and Kievan Rus’ culture at the time. Paul R. Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine: The Land and Its Peoples*, 2nd, rev. and expanded ed ed. (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 108-09.


\( ^{548} \) Ibid. loc 1301-1302. Lines 711-719 of the poem.

\( ^{549} \) Dziuba’s best-known work is “Internationalism or Russification?” (1965) in which he criticizes Soviet nationality polices, in particular the Russification of Soviet Ukraine.
that Ryl’s’kii chose are surprising given the context of a conference dedicated to nature protection. In them, Faust describes his plans to drain a putrid swamp and transform it into fertile fields, a paradise, as his greatest act and the victory of man’s will over nature. After acknowledging that “all of ‘Faust,’ especially part two, is a work of allegory,” Ryl’s’kii contradicted himself and proposed a literal reading. He alluded to parallels with Soviet projects and appears to applaud them: “With wisdom drawn from years and experience, Faust presents what we now call a general plan for the transformation of nature.”\textsuperscript{550} Especially in light of the fact that the published version omitted the word “general” from Ryl’s’kii’s speech, I would suggest that he chose his words specifically to refer to the Stalin era propaganda surrounding such projects and the grand scale in which Soviet land transformation projects were conceived after WWII. Of course, we can assume that the ten lines he quoted were not the only lines that Ryl’s’kii read. Instead, the play reveals that nature transformation schemes come at a price and that building a new world requires the destruction of the past. In part 2, Act V of \textit{Faust}, the “victims of modernization” were represented by an elderly peasant couple who paid that price with their lives.\textsuperscript{551}

Surveying his successfully reclaimed land, Faust becomes upset at the presence of a peasant hut and chapel and he orders the removal of the buildings and their occupants. Mephistopheles interprets Faust’s words in the same way that Stalin’s \textit{apparatchiks} interpreted the word \textit{likvidatsiia} [liquidation, elimination] and thus kills the peasants. Ryl’s’kii’s reference to \textit{Faust} in May of 1958 was made at a time when two massive hydro-engineering projects were forcing hundreds of thousands of villagers from their modest homes on the banks of the Dnieper river to make way for vast reservoirs above the hydroelectric dams at Kakhovka and

\textsuperscript{550} Lines 11559-11569 of Faust. TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 22-23 (Maksym Ryl’s’kii on “Writers and Nature”)

\textsuperscript{551} For this interpretation of nature transformation in Faust see: Blackbourn, \textit{The Conquest of Nature}, 11, 62.
Kremenchuk. To prepare the reservoir basins, residents were responsible for tearing down their own homes and clearing their former land. This decade of forced resettlement, although certainly not a singular event in Soviet history, was described in the Soviet press with a similar promise of the creation of a future paradise.

Referencing Ivan Michurin (1855-1935), Rylsky articulated an important modification to the official Soviet narrative on the relationship between Soviet man and nature: “In connection with our conversations about the transformation of nature, about battling against the forces of nature, we often cite I.V. Michurin to stay that we should not wait for the gifts of nature, that we should take them ourselves.”

Michurin was a botanist who earned acclaim from Lenin for his work on gene selection and hybridization. He successfully cross-bred fruit trees from distinct climates, making it possible for Soviet farmers in northern regions to cultivate plants native to southern climates. The botanist was also the subject of the 1948 feature film, *Michurin / A Life in Bloom* by Oleksandr Dovzhenko and Yulia Solntseva, earning the pair a Stalin Prize in 1949. The quote by Michurin that Rylsky referenced was widely employed in support of Soviet nature transformation projects. But Rylskii suggested that Michurin’s words had been misused: “These words should not be understood as an expression of hostility towards nature. Michurin would not have been Michurin if he did not understand that only by knowing and respecting the laws of nature can it be transformed for human benefit.”

When speaking on the topical subject of Nature Transformation, Rylskii made his argument safely in Soviet terms. On the surface he applauded the “wisdom” of transforming nature even while alluding to the sacrifices involved in such endeavors. His argument for the protection of nature from massive hydro-engineering projects such as the ongoing construction of hydroelectric dams and reservoirs on the Dnieper

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552 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 23.

553 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 23. The word “respecting” [shanuiuchi] was added to the published version of the text: Ryl's'kyi, *Pryroda I Literatura*, 6.

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river maintained the existing relationship - nature should serve man - but modified the narrative, replacing the aggressive war on nature with love and respect.

Rylskii continued his argument in terms of protecting traditional forms of human interaction with nature. He said that it would be hard to imagine nineteenth century Russian literature without the Russian landscape and without the hunting and fishing that this landscape supports. Bringing the discussion out of the past, he reminded his audience that hunting and fishing were not just pastimes but important industries in their own right. The hunting and fishing industries, he explained, were locked in conflict with the industrial factories that poison rivers, killing fish, and the practice of excessive deforestation, which destroys the forest homes of wild animals.554

Returning to the “formalist” approach that got him in trouble in the early Stalin-era, Rylskii argued for the value of nature independent of its service to man or unambiguous depiction of socialist values. In other words, nature has inherent value, not only as a potential economic resource but also as a result of its beauty. The assertion in the Soviet context that beauty is a value on par with productivity or utility in itself signals a significant shift. Ryl’s’kyi referred to a recent doctoral dissertation that criticized a colleague for depicting landscapes in literature simply for their natural beauty. Consistent with the guidelines of Socialist Realism, this critic asserted that landscape should instead be used only as the backdrop for the socialist activities of Soviet people. Rylskii disagreed. Pure landscape both in literature and art has the right to exist, he said, citing the landscape paintings of Savrasov, Levitan, Kuindzhi (whose nineteenth century subject was the Dnieper river), and also Hlushchenko, introduced above.555

Summoning the combined Russian and Ukrainian literary canon - from Pushkin to

554 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 28.

555 Ryl's'kyi, Pryroda I Literatura, 11-12.
Leonid Leonov and Konstantin Paustovsky, from Taras Shevchenko and Lesya Ukrainka to Oleksandr Dovzhenko and Oles’ Honchar, Rylskii argued for the protection of Ukrainian nature: forests, rivers, and steppe. “Love, honor, protect nature, the eternal source of our lives and our creative works!” Rylskyi concluded his speech with a call to more passionately serve “our” nature, which in return “will give us a hundred times more than we give it.” His thorough integration of both Russian and Ukrainian cultural sources serves to blur the distinction between Soviet patriotism and patriotism for Ukrainian national geography. In doing so, Ryslkii contributed to a gradual but radical shift in the conception of nature’s value.

Mykhailo Chabanivskyi: The Source of Soviet Patriotism

The writer-journalist Mikhailo Chabanivskyi was the next to speak. Chabanivskyi (1910-1973) was born in the village of Lyhivka on the Oril River, a left bank tributary of the Dnieper in eastern Ukraine. Chabanivskyi began with a response to Pogrebniak’s modest concession that some progress had been made recently in the sphere of nature protection, even though there was much more to do. While Pogrebniak seemed optimistic about the ability of both the Soviet and Ukrainian Academies of Science to enact real change under the direction of UkrPryroda, Chabanivskyi was “less generous” in his assessment, arguing that not nearly enough was being done, even now. “We must speak boldly and loudly about this,” he said. With reference to the current situation in Soviet Ukraine and in particular the danger that the forests and small rivers of the steppe were facing, he argued that it was not normal to have absolutely no laws that protect nature.

Chabanivskyi recounted a conversation he had with an old farmer. 15-20 years ago, that farmer used to bathe and fish in the Alta River, but it no longer exists: “I outlived the Alta

556 Ibid., 18.

557 TsDAMLMM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 40.
River. I fear that I will outlive the Trubailo River [too]… A person outlived a river. We must pause to consider this.”

In his speech, “Nature. The Source [dzherelo] of Soviet Patriotism,” Chabanivsky took aim at what he saw as the failure to unite the Soviet people around cartographic images of the vast Union of Socialist Republics. He also poked fun at Pohrebiak’s call for national specificity in the plant species used to enrich the urban spaces of Soviet Ukraine. Instead, Chabanivsky argued for a more personal, local, understanding of “native” in the term “native nature” [ridna pryroda]. The writer explained that he grew up in a steppe village, a landscape devoid of natural variety. The expanse and monotony of the steppe environment was all he really knew as a child. Instead, the diversity of the natural world came to him only as imagined geography: “The steppe child learns from stories about the existence of forests, groves, rivers, and the sea.” That is not to say that individual experience precludes a shared love for the natural world of a larger territory, just that in Chabanivsky’s view eco-patriotism stems more from the experience of nature than from toponyms that define administrative spaces:

Love is never abstract, it is always concrete and has an exact address. Love for a native land never began with geography - geographical notions came later, but first there was a native stream, a meadow, pasture, orchard, an oak or poplar. In the difficult years of war, when the enemy trampled our earth with their cobbled boots, we, the soldiers in the trenches on the front-line, remembered, not the beautiful [exotic, distant] names that we read in geography class, but our own hometown or native village, where we were born and first knew the sweetness and bitterness of life, our own grove of poplar or birch trees, our own steppe, with our own ravine, river, and even the cherry tree, from whose branches I once fell as a child… Such recollections provide soldiers in battle with strength and weapons.

Yet, Chabanivskyi was one of the first writers to speak out in defense of “native nature”

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558 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 48. “Trubailo” is another name for the Trubizh River, a left-bank tributary of the Dnieper River.

559 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 42.

560 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 44-45.
in the broader context of Soviet Ukraine. He defended not just the steppe and cherry tree of his childhood, but also forests and rivers across the Ukrainian republic and Soviet Union. In the quote above, Chabanivskyi’s reference to WWII is quite significant. Not only did he highlight the power of native nature to inspire men and women to risk their lives in battle, but he also pointed to one of the major sources of environmental thinking expressed at this meeting. The enemy had indeed “trampled” the Ukrainian landscape during WWII, leaving it badly scarred. Just when Ukrainian nature and geography may have begun to heal after the war, Soviet industrial development and hydro-engineering renewed the attack, even adopting similar wartime language.

In his speech, Chabanivskyi provided evidence that cultural perceptions of nature have consequences. In doing so, he also delicately untangled Ukrainian nature from Russian nature - a distinction that was not visible when viewing Soviet natural resources from above. Despite the large-scale afforestation envisioned by Stalin’s 1948 “Plan for the Transformation of Nature” and the current rate of deforestation, he claimed that very few trees were planted in Ukraine: “Ukraine is poor when it comes to forests.” He pointed this out because it is counterintuitive and because this widespread misperception had serious implications in the sphere of Soviet forest management: “… a myth has long persisted that we are a people rich in forests. We love to say that we have an inexhaustible supply of coal, and forests, and fish, etc. Regarding forests, I understand where this myth came from. We have this unlimited wealth in the [Russian] taiga.” The place of honor held by the legendary “Russkii Les” in the Russian imagination is well


562 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 46.
documented. This significance was not merely a remnant of the past for Russian readers and literary critics who celebrated Leonid Leonov’s novel, *The Russian Forest* (1955), earning the author a Lenin Prize in 1957. But while Leonov wrote that: “The forest greeted the Russian at his birth and attended him through all the stages of his life,” Chabanivskyi was, instead, a child of the grassy steppe. The presumption of arboreal abundance - a boundless and inexhaustible forest - appeared especially false from this perspective. Therefore, the trees that grew in Soviet Ukraine needed to be protected from this distorted imagined geography.

For the Soviet economy, the incorporation of the western territories into Ukraine after WWII meant a productive new source for lumber and potential hydropower. For many Ukrainians like Chabanivskyi, the incorporation of these territories, and the forested Carpathian Mountains in particular, offered two missing pieces of their national geography: mountains and forests. The fear of losing these natural features, just when they were newly accessible to Soviet Ukrainians, was acute and widespread. Moreover, as for the former Russian Empire, the challenges presented by great distances further limited the presumed abundance of forests in the Soviet Union. Chabanivsky made reference to a Russian scientist who proposed solving the problem of transporting trees from distant regions to central regions by way of a special aircraft designed for that purpose: “But he himself says that this is still in the realm of fantasy or science fiction.” It seems to me that the issue of scale was central to the ambitions of this conference in 1958. In the spirit of Benedict Anderson’s notion of nations as “imagined communities,” these defenders of Ukrainian nature recognized the need to use cultural products - literature and

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564 On Leonov’s Russkii Les, see: Brain, *Song of the Forest*, Dronin and Francis, "Econationalism in Soviet Literature."

565 Leonov quoted in Brain, *Song of the Forest*, 5.

566 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 46.
painting - to connect memories of a specific childhood cherry tree and nearby stream with threats to the forests in western Ukraine and industrial pollution released into the Dnieper river.\textsuperscript{567} They needed their audience to move from a personal relationship with nature to a more abstract image that encompassed the entire Ukrainian republic.

Chabanivskyi also needed help reaching a larger audience with his work. He described traveling across Ukraine, exploring the rivers and forests of the republic in order to write the story, “A Sycamore Tree Stands over the Water,” which in his words was inspired by both Shevchenko and folk tales. His aim was to produce an accessible work that would “stimulate love for nature among our youth and the will to augment this nature and protect it.”\textsuperscript{568}

Unfortunately, Chabanivskyi complained, bureaucratic regulations would prevent his book from having the broad impact he intended. In his view the problem originated with the meager edition size granted to this type of publication. His book was assigned a maximum print run of 15,000 copies. Even though, he claimed, “people say that it was written quite well, this story will not reach a wide readership.”\textsuperscript{569} Referring to \textit{KnigoTorg} - the official Soviet bookstore - he said: “They cannot tell me that they do not like [my] book, but they have their rules. Somehow it turned out that we handed over a very important branch of our life to merchants.”\textsuperscript{570}

Chabanivsky’s tone was passionate. He was “deeply and absolutely convinced” that their cause was one of great ideological significance to Soviet society, which should not be dictated by “commercial interests.”\textsuperscript{571} “It seems to me,” he continued, “that this is a big mistake, a serious


\textsuperscript{568} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 47-48.

\textsuperscript{569} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 48.

\textsuperscript{570} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 48.

\textsuperscript{571} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 48.
flaw. At last we shall remedy this.”

Publishing one book that celebrated nature was not enough to achieve the group’s aims of promoting love for nature and the native land among the Ukrainian public. Instead, what he described was an all-out assault on the public perception of Ukrainian nature, in the form of a publishing campaign: “I believe, comrades, that there should not be just one “Russkii Les,” but a great many artistic works, in which the central character is a forester, gardener, a champion of nature, an ardent patriot of our nature, our native land, because from that grows a beautiful Soviet patriotism, which enables us to overpower all of our enemies. From our native land, from a tree, a grove, a small woods - that is where patriotism takes root. One “Mykyta Bratus” [in reference to Oles’ Honchar’s 1950 novella] is not enough.”

In the decade following this conference, Chabanivskyi published widely on the theme of nature protection, culminating in a collection of essays titled, “Let Us Safeguard Our Native Nature” [Oberihaimo ridnu pryrodu], published in 1968, but written earlier. The eight volume History of Ukrainian Literature, published from 1967-1971, drew special attention to Chabanivsky’s contribution in this sphere, as well as to his travel writing. In reference to his story, “A Sycamore Tree Stands over the Water” [Stoit iavir nad vodoiu, 1959] and his novel, Water Flows into the Blue Sea [Teche voda v syne more, 1961], the authors wrote: “In both books, which after all, grew out of the writer’s acutely contentious essays, Chabanivskyi advocates for the defense of nature and for the preservation of forests and small rivers, demonstrates the great public importance of these issues, and convincingly argues his perspective.” Specifically, Chabanivskyi documented the bleak reality of the current path laid out by the national-economy and highlighted “images of people who love nature, understand it

572 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 48.
573 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 55.
574 Unfortunately, I have not (yet) been able to get my hands on this text.
575 Istoriia Ukrainskoi Literatury, 8 vols., vol. 8 (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1971), 434.
and selfishly protect it.” In addition, the authors of the *History of Ukrainian Literature*, called for the publication of more “travel descriptions based on the impressions of authors traveling through their native land,” pointing to Chabanivskyi’s contributions as some of only a few “vivid, emotional travel narratives [that portray] notable features of the new socialist Soviet country.” Here the *History* referenced Chabanivskyi’s story, “The Road Home” [*Doroga dodomu*, 1966], which chronicled his voyage along the Dnieper river from Kyiv down to Kherson. In fact, Chabanivskyi lived to see his works reprinted many times, often with print runs as large as 30,000 copies and including Russian translations published in Moscow.

**Mykola Hlushchenko: An Army of Landscape Painters**

The Ukrainian impressionist painter Mykola Hlushchenko (1901-1977) addressed the conference’s audience next. He spoke on the subject of the “Protection of the Ukrainian Landscape.” Hlushchenko was born in Novomoskovsk, about 10-15 miles from Dnepropetrovsk. He grew up on banks of the Samara River, which joins the Dnieper at Dnepropetrovsk. After recognizing the titans of Russian landscape painting - Shishkin, Savrasov, Levitan - he said that the Ukrainian contribution to this creative sphere should not be underestimated, overlooked, or ignored. “We have an entire army of landscape painters, and of course we can and must do much to protect our nature.” Soviet landscape painters had to defend the legitimacy of their subject matter against critics who claimed the medium lacked the power to clearly convey socialist values. “Above all else, the primary task of landscape painters,” Hlushchenko argued, “is to

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576 Ibid.
577 Ibid.
578 Ibid.
579 TsDAMLMM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 56.
reveal the beauty of our landscape to the people [narod].” For the most part, pure landscapes - paintings depicting only the natural environment - reappeared only in the 1950s, becoming increasingly common in the final decades of the Soviet era. During this time, Hlushchenko became a very successful landscape painter, exhibiting his works across the Soviet Union with frequent solo shows in Ukraine and Moscow. Hlushchenko is remembered as a landscape painter but began his artistic career by painting portraits, only emerging as a landscape artist in the 1950s. He was named People’s Artist of the USSR in 1976. Reviewing a selection of the artist’s exhibition catalogues, I was struck by how little his body of work resembles the conventional image of Soviet visual art. Not only does it display his commitment to pure landscape, in itself a deviation in the Soviet context, but his impressionistic style contrasts significantly with the realism dominant in official art. This reflects a return to modernist aesthetics that swept the Soviet cultural landscape and communist bloc in the wake of the Thaw. The abstraction of his impressionistic brush stroke became more pronounced over time.

In his speech to the group gathered in 1958 to discuss preserving nature in Soviet Ukraine, Hlushchenko directed his attack at what he saw to be the central issue: access to nature. The painter conveyed his conviction that nature should be accessible to all people. Specifically, he addressed public access to the Dnieper river and its river banks: “How do you explain the fact that it is now not possible to access the Dnieper?” Hlushchenko answered this question himself, claiming that the development of riverbanks for private use is to blame. Despite the eighteen members of the Ukrainian Writers’ Union in attendance, the painter did not hold back. In his view, the official writers were a big part of the problem. The picture he painted is

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580 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 56.
581 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 58.
582 For the list of Writers’ Union members in attendance: TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 86.
of the pristine Dnieper riverbank. At first sanatoria were built along the water, “that’s fine,” he said, but then other buildings started to crop up: state institutions, government dachas, and in particular the dachas of writers… As a result, the green spaces along the Dnieper were torn up. In the place of ancient pines and young saplings, stood only unfinished walls, because even after three years the dachas were not complete. Yet, he notes, there were an enormous number of dachas currently under construction: “And what for? Do our writers really have bad living conditions?" 

Without saying so directly, Hlushchenko criticized the unequal status held by writers and visual artists in Soviet society. Instead, he said that the appropriation of public green space along the Dnieper “causes enormous resentment in people because everywhere they go, they find only private property… Where can one get an aesthetic education? Enjoy the calm and quiet [of the natural environment]? Where can people spend their day off?" At the heart of Hlushchenko’s critique was his argument for the inherent value of spending time in nature and enjoying its beauty. The artist continued his dismal portrait of the Dnieper riverbanks: “The famous black poplars that stood for a hundred years were all cut down. They lie on the river banks, because a collective farmer cut them down in order to build something that has not yet been built. I could continue to paint this picture all the way [along the Dnieper river] to Kaniv. It is a very depressing picture."

Interestingly, Hlushchenko’s paintings from this period do not reflect the desolate landscape he described. It was only in 1970 that he began to bear witness - on canvas - to the destruction of nature he saw around him, and even then, only occasionally. An example of this

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583 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 58.
584 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 58.
585 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 58.
586 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 58.
rare critical lens can be seen in his painting: “To defend the forest” [Na zakhyst lisu, 1970]. [See Figure 5] Painted from above, looking down on a river with hills rising on both sides, most of the frame divides the landscape on the right of the river into three equal parts. A field of rough yellow brush strokes lies closest to the river: a cultivated field of wheat or sunflowers? The hillside to the far right is covered with logs. On the hilltop closest to the viewer, only stumps remain. The open wounds where trees once stood drip onto the fleshy red earth. Despite the artist’s infrequent depiction of landscapes that had fallen victim to the human actions he so ardently wanted to prevent, the perspective or artistic frame of “To defend the forest” is characteristic of Hlushchenko’s paintings. The view of a river, often the Dnieper, looking down from above dominates his body of work. His love for this vantage point prompted him to often paint the Dnieper from Kyiv or Kaniv, two places along this steppe river where it can be enjoyed from a significant height.

Figure 5: Mykola Hlushchenko, Na zakhyst lisu, 1970
Hlushchenko spoke about a “lovely” birch grove along the Desna river between Chernihiv and where the tributary joins the Dnieper just above Kyiv. He lamented the recent destruction of this grove, saying that two years ago he was able to paint it, but now cannot.\textsuperscript{587} This comment speaks to the absence of spoiled landscapes in his paintings. Indeed, the strategy that all of the speakers proposed in order to further their aim of protecting nature was to foster a love for nature by revealing its beauty. This beautiful nature was not the productive nature or quantifiable natural resource celebrated by Soviet five-year plans. It was unspoiled by economic interests, pristine without being virgin. People were not entirely absent from his vision of beautiful nature, because the value of nature is in the joy of experiencing it. Inviting his audience at the conference to “imagine our Russian or Ukrainian birch tree,” Hlushchenko described the birch grove as if it were the remains of a battlefield after the violence of war had swept through and moved past: branches painfully chopped off and lying unnaturally on the ground, amputated trunks abandoned. Downplaying Pohrebniaš’s appeal for national specificity, Hlushchenko fervently added, “you don’t understand: whether it is a [foreign, exotic] date palm tree or it is our [native] tree: It’s just a disgrace!”\textsuperscript{588} What harm have those trees done to us, he asked. For Hlushchenko “our nature” meant the natural world that was available for Ukrainians to experience freely, regardless of their status in Soviet society.

Hlushchenko also recounted his memory - discussed above - of traveling along the Dnieper river with the famed Ukrainian filmmaker Oleksandr Dovzhenko in 1937.\textsuperscript{589} The two had been friends since meeting in Berlin in the 1920s. As a teenager during the Civil War, Hlushchenko was mobilized into Denikin’s army. He found himself in Berlin after escaping to

\textsuperscript{587} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 58-59.

\textsuperscript{588} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 59.

\textsuperscript{589} TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 56.
Poland. The painter’s path back to his native nature is not found in any of the introductions to exhibition catalogues published during the Soviet era or even after. With Dovzhenko’s help, Hlushchenko successfully applied for Soviet citizenship in 1923 and moved to Paris in 1925. Soviet authorities insisted that the young man earn the right to return to his homeland through service to the state. Deemed more valuable abroad than at home, he was recruited into the service of the Soviet NKVB and worked as a spy - code name “Yarema” for 10 years before receiving permission to return. After that Hlushchenko was confined to Moscow, though visited Soviet Ukraine in 1937-1938 in connection with an exhibition of his works in Kyiv. Finally allowed to reside in Kyiv in 1944, he continued to make frequent trips abroad likely because of his continued service to Soviet intelligence.\(^{590}\)

Oleksandr Laptaev: New Forms of Urban Greening

The final conference presenter was Dr. Oleksandr Laptaev.\(^{591}\) Trained as an economist, Laptaev represented the Office of Green Zones in Kyiv, established in June 1956 within the Executive Committee of the Kyiv City Council of Workers’ Deputies. He provided his audience with a brief history of Soviet policy on public urban green spaces from 1931 when the Party Central Committee encouraged city administrations to develop green spaces.\(^{592}\) After five years, the cities of the Ukrainian republic increased their per capita public green space from 7.5 square meters to 10 square meters. After WWII, “green construction” in Soviet Ukraine entered a new accelerated phase. On 15 July 1955, the Ukrainian Council of Ministers adopted the resolution:

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\(^{590}\) [https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Глущенко_Микола_Петрович](https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Глущенко_Микола_Петрович)

\(^{591}\) Laptaev spoke in Russian. I only have his initials, written “O.O.” in some places and “A.A.” in others, so am inferring that his first name is Oleksandr but have not been able to locate any additional information on him, see TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 61-77. (Transcript of Laptaev’s speech)

\(^{592}\) TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 62-63. (Transcript of Laptaev’s speech); In fact, this history dates from the 16 September 1921 Council of People’s Commissars decree “On the Preservation of Natural Monuments, Gardens and Parks,” translated and reproduced in Pryde, *Conservation in the Soviet Union*, 213-14.
“On the ten-year plan for the creation and development of green zones in cities and workers’ settlements of the Ukrainian SSR.” This plan called for over a million acres of new green spaces in Ukrainian cities and towns as well as 15 thousand acres of ponds and lakes. As further evidence that Ukrainian authorities “attach[ed] great importance to the development of green zones,” especially in the capital city and its suburbs, they established the Kyiv Office of Green Zones in 1956. Laptaev and his colleagues at the Office of Green Zones were responsible for carrying out the ten-year plan as it applied to Kyiv. Some of Kyiv’s most important Green Zones, which were developed and protected as part of the plan included Trukahniv Island on the Dnieper river, Dnieper Park on the Kyiv side of the river, and the “Green Slopes” of the Dnieper. His speech at the conference was dedicated to the ongoing work of this institution and the significance of urban green spaces.

“Green spaces are of great importance to human life,” Laptaev began. Ideally, he continued, urban green spaces should not be limited to a single street, square, or park, but instead encompass the entire city plan. The purpose of urban green zones, Laptaev explained, was to enhance the beauty of urban landscapes, improve the conditions for both work and leisure, improve the microclimate of the area, and to “change nature for the better.” In areas where it was not possible to dedicate space to a park or garden, attention should be given to greening the streets. Laptaev described an approach to greening cities and towns that reflected aesthetic harmony with modern urban planning: “Properly organized green spaces beautify a street, complement and enrich the shape and color of its buildings, contrasting picturesque forms with

593 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 63. (Transcript of Laptaev’s speech)
594 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 63-64. (Transcript of Laptaev’s speech)
595 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 63. (Transcript of Laptaev’s speech)
596 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 65. (Transcript of Laptaev’s speech)
597 TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 61. (Transcript of Laptaev’s speech)
the geometric shapes of architectural objects." Laptaev argued that the value of such green zones in cities extended far beyond their decorative benefits for work and living environments. Green spaces, he said, also have “important sanitary-hygienic functions.” These functions include: Improving the thermal conditions of the area, protecting the population from excessive solar radiation. Increasing the relative humidity of the surrounding air, as a result of evaporation. Protection from strong winds. Protection from dust, harmful gases, and even from noise pollution. Reduced soil erosion and improved landslide prevention. And lastly, green spaces provided “excellent places for cultural, educational and mass-physical work” as well as great opportunities for “the development of tourism, the construction of sanatoriums, rest homes, etc.”

Laptaev concluded his address by painting a picture for his audience of Kyiv 5-6 years in the future, “covered with an endless array of gardens.” Thanks to a huge team of landscapers, he promised that Kyiv and its suburbs would become an even more beautiful and comfortable place to call home. New green spaces would provide fresh fruits and also serve as leisure and therapeutic spaces for the working people of Kyiv.

Conclusions

When these writers, artists, and scientists gathered in May 1958 to discuss nature protection, they formulated a shift in Soviet public discourse on nature. They did so at a time of frenzied nature transformation. Seemingly every day a new project to radically engineer nature

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598 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 61. (Transcript of Laptaev’s speech)


600 TsDAML, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 77. (Transcript of Laptaev’s speech)
appeared – to control, to dam or flood or drain – always at an unprecedented scale. In Soviet Ukraine, the Dnieper river was at the center of this frenzy. Ten years later when Honchar’s novel, *The Cathedral*, was published in 1968, four major hydro-electric dams (and reservoirs) had been added to the Dnieper river cascade and a fifth, at Kaniv, was well underway. Every year, more factories were built on the Dnieper’s banks, dumping industrial waste into the water and releasing chemicals into the air. The voices that defended nature at this time did not simply condemn the environmental abuses they witnessed around them but articulated a new relationship with nature based on finding value in nature as a source of beauty, creativity, health, and happiness, rather than an economic resource in the traditional sense. They articulated their defense of nature in Soviet terms and in support of Soviet patriotism but incorporated direct reference to Ukrainian national geography and native nature. This infused their campaign with an unmistakably national inflection. These eco-patriots were definitely not self-conscious Ukrainian nationalists, but simply Ukrainian intellectuals whose love for nature derived from the landscape of their native land. The nationally specific language that appeared in public environmental discourse after WWII sharpened over time. The 1958 conference in Kyiv provides insight into how the issue of nature protection gradually transformed the language of Soviet patriotism into the language of Ukrainian eco-nationalism.

Soviet environmental thinking did not develop in a vacuum. In fact, scholars of environmental history and environmentalism refer to a global phenomenon called the ‘1950s syndrome’ to describe the exponential growth in industrial production across much of the world.601 The visible ecological impact of this industrial burst caused attentive observers to take notice, from Rachel Carson to old fishermen on the banks Ukrainian rivers.602 Two weeks after

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601 For example, see Breyfogle, "At the Watershed: 1958 and the Beginnings of Lake Baikal Environmentalism," 156.

602 Carson’s attack on the pesticide industry, *Silent Spring*, was published in 1962 based on her research and
this meeting in Kyiv, the Ukrainian Communist Party Central Committee and Council of Ministers adopted a resolution titled, “On Measures to Improve the Conservation of Nature in the Ukrainian RSR (2 June 1958).”\(^{603}\) In fact, between 1957 and 1964 all fifteen Soviet republics adopted comprehensive laws that dictated the management and conservation of nature and natural resources. These laws were incorporated into the criminal codes of individual republics shortly after.\(^{604}\)

Moreover, this conference dedicated to defending the native beauty of Ukrainian nature, took place only a year and a half after Oleksandr Dovzhenko’s death. The literary version of his *Enchanted Desna* was first published in 1956 by the journal *Dnipro*. The same journal published portions of his diaries dedicated to Kakhovka HES and *Poem of the Sea* in June and July of 1957.\(^{605}\) Many additional editions of Dovzhenko’s collected works and diaries were published in Russian and Ukrainian from the early 1960s onward. The film version of *Poem of the Sea* was released in late 1958, a few months after the conference. One of the conference organizers, Mykola Hlushchenko made it clear in his speech that his memories of Dovzhenko and the conversations they had about the Dnieper river, native nature, and the Ukrainian landscape were still fresh in his mind as he formulated his argument for nature protection.

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\(^{603}\) TsDAMLM, f. 590, op. 1, sp. 334, st. 84.


Oles’ Honchar’s literary career stands out as a model of Soviet success. By the end of the Soviet era, Honchar (1918-1995) was the most prominent Ukrainian prose writer having sold over 17 million copies of his books, which were translated into more than 40 different languages.\(^{606}\) Honchar was a student in Kharkiv when World War II broke out, but he volunteered for the Red Army despite his student exemption. After serving honorably throughout the war, Honchar returned to his studies, this time in Dnipropetrovsk. Honchar quickly gained both popular and official acclaim for his novels and short stories, many of which were based on the writer’s own experience during the war. In particular, the trilogy *Standard-Bearers* [*Praponostsi*, 1947-1948] earned him the Stalin Prize in 1948 for the first installment and again in 1949 for the final two installments.\(^{607}\) Honchar led the Ukrainian Writers’ Union from 1959 until he was ousted in 1970 following a controversy over his most recent novel, *The Cathedral* [*Sobor*]. As the inaugural recipient of the 1962 Shevchenko Prize in Soviet Ukraine for his novel *Man and Arms* [*Liudyna i Zbroia*, 1960] and a Lenin Prize winner in 1964 for his novel *Tronka* (1963), Honchar was certainly fluent in the language of Socialist Realism. In January 1968, the literary journal, *Homeland* [*Vitchyzna*] published *The Cathedral*, written from 1963-1967. The writer had good reason to be quite confident in his work, claiming in his diary that a “higher power” had helped him create the novel.\(^{608}\) In mid-February 1968, a month after its initial publication, a rumor circulated at the Writers’ Union that the Pope had nominated Honchar for a Nobel Prize.\(^{609}\) But by August of that year, Honchar confessed privately that he no

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\(^{607}\) The first two books of his trilogy, *Standard Bearers* [*Praponostsi*]: *The Alps* (1946) and *Blue Danube* (1947) were recognized in 1948. The third installment, *Golden Prague* (1948), won in 1949.


As the jubilee celebration of Honchar’s 50th birthday approached, his overwhelmingly successful career came crashing down. After three months of entirely positive responses to *The Cathedral*, at the 29 March 1968 Plenum of the Ukrainian Communist Party Central Committee, Oleksiy Vatchenko denounced the novel, calling it dangerously anti-Soviet. Specifically, Vatchenko claimed that with his novel Honchar took aim at the heroic Soviet working class, ignored the victories of modern science and instead slanderously depicted spiritual traits. Vatchenko’s attack was met with applause. In fact, Vatchenko had more personal reasons for instigating a large-scale campaign against Honchar and *The Cathedral*. The first secretary of the Dniepropetrovsk regional party committee noticed uncomfortable similarities between himself and Honchar’s central villain, Volod’ka Loboda. The tide of official press immediately shifted against Honchar, harshly criticizing him and the novel. Publication was suspended.

Despite the personal nature of Vatchenko’s vendetta, which instigated official censure of *The Cathedral*, Honchar indeed used the novel to voice a harsh critique of the environmental damage produced by unchecked Soviet industrialization and ill-advised nature transformation projects. Analysis of his diaries from the fifteen years leading up to the novel’s completion reveal the extent to which Honchar spoke through his fictional characters: “You pump more and more from the Dnieper river every year,” says Honchar’s central hero, Mikola Bahlay, “but what

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611 Meeting transcript of the Central Committee Plenum on 29 March 1968: TsDAHO Kyiv, f.1, op. 1, d. 2058, st. 85-87

612 TsDAHO Kyiv, f.1, op. 1, d. 2058, st. 86

are you giving nature in return? Poison! She doesn’t want your polluted waters anymore.”

Honchar’s *magnum opus* furthered the agenda and value system articulated at the 1958 Conference on Art and the Protection of Nature, discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. His novel celebrated the beauty and value of un-engineered nature, from the wide Dnieper river to the marshes of Skarbne: “… before him, his beautiful native river lapped across the whole horizon. Bahlay’s soul stirred just looking at it. It wasn’t the Ganges, but it was just as sacred to him as the sluggish Ganges was to the people of that country. The open, sun-drenched Dnipro, its vastness shone brighter than the sky.”

On 3 April 1968, *Literaturnaia Gazeta* published the article, “What we lose: In the era of technological progress, we must especially value and protect the natural wealth of our native [rodnoi] land,” signed by Honchar and seven other leading Ukrainian intellectuals, including deputies of the Supreme Soviet, scientists, and cultural figures. The authors raised alarm at the ecological damage already done by the Dnieper Hydropower Cascade and warned against future hydro-engineering schemes. In his bitter attack on the system that wreaked ecological havoc on formerly fertile Ukrainian territory and thoughtlessly razed cultural monuments to Ukrainian’s long history, the dissident critic Ievhen Sverstiuk claimed this article was “merely a weak echo of the discussion held in February 1968 in the House of the Writers in Kyiv with the scientists and builders of the power stations, who, armed with facts and figures, all agreed on the terrible ravages and even more terrible prospects resulting from the new power stations that are being erected on the Dnieper.”

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615 Ibid., 235.; the Ganges River is considered sacred in Hindu mythology and can sometimes symbolize all rivers in South East Asia. Like the Dnieper River, it is also very polluted.


617 I did search for a transcript of this meeting in the Writers’ Union fond at TsDAMLM in Kyiv but did not find any mention of it; “A Cathedral in Scaffolding” (Paris, 1970) in Ievhen Sverstiuk, *Clandestine Essays* (Cambridge, MA:
What moved Honchar, this darling of the Soviet literary establishment, to write a novel that questioned major aspects of the Soviet project and to speak out publicly against decisions of the Soviet state? His diaries provide a window into how Honchar experienced the natural world around him. Those experiences directly influenced his creative life. In July 1956, having returned from extensive travel abroad, Honchar wrote in his diary: “Back here in [my] native steppe. I toured Europe, saw the sky of Italy, the cliffs of Dover, the lakes of Sweden… No, nowhere is there such a sky, nowhere will I smell such a fragrance as we have in the steppe… It smells of holy bread. It smells of summer. It touches such strings in the soul that nothing else can touch.”\(^{618}\) It is well-known that Honchar drew material for his novels and short stories from his own life.

In this chapter, I analyze two of Honchar’s novels published in the decade following the 1958 Kyiv Conference on Nature and its Aesthetic Value, together with his diaries. Honchar began keeping diaries in 1943 and continued throughout his life. They fit within the genre of Shevchenko’s and Dovzhenko’s famous diaries in that they are comprised of events from Honchar’s personal and private life, inner thoughts, as well as extensive notes for his creative works, most often taken from his own experiences and observations. In fact, beginning in 1957, Dovzhenko’s diaries were published and thus widely available for the public consumption. Honchar even edited one of these collections himself, including an introduction by Maksym Ryl’s’kyi.\(^{619}\) As indicated in his diary entries, Honchar also had a number of opportunities to speak with Dovzhenko personally about his views on Ukrianian nature and national geography.

I suggest that two pivotal events sparked and then, over time, influenced Honchar’s

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\(^{618}\) Honchar, Shchodennyky U Tr’okh Tomakh, Tom 1: 1943-1967, 207.

\(^{619}\) In 1957, the journal ‘Dnipro’ began publishing excerpts, the journal ‘New Word’ published excerpts in 1958. Multivolume collections of Dovzhenko’s works, including his notebooks appeared in the late 1950s and especially in the 1960s.
transformation from highly successful party-liner to public activist for nature protection and
defender of Ukrainian culture. The first was the death in 1956 of Oleksandr Dovzhenko, the
subsequent widespread publication of the filmmaker’s literary works, lectures, and private
diaries, and the posthumous release of his final two cinematic projects, _Poem of the Sea_ (1958)
and _The Enchanted Desna_ (1964). Honchar’s experience of his native nature, and especially
the Dnieper river, was mediated through Dovzhenko’s lens. Ultimately, it is Dovzhenko’s defiant
spirit that roused Honchar. The second event that had a great impact on Honchar’s relationship
with Ukrainian nature, prior to the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, was the construction of Kakhovka
HES and the ecological problems that emerged in the late 1950s, related to its large reservoir.

Referencing Dovzhenko’s final creative endeavor, his scenario for _Poem of the Sea_, filmed
posthumously by his wife, Honchar wrote a few days after the film’s release in 1958: “About the
Kakhovska Sea, they say that it has putrefied, the water blooms with algae, the fish are dying, the
stench is such that you can’t approach its shores. Now this is a poem about a big swamp.”

Like Dovzhenko, Honchar fell in love with southern Ukraine where the Dnieper meets
the steppe. Although Honchar was born just outside of Dnipropetrovsk, from the age of three he
was raised by his maternal grandparents after his parents passed away. Therefore, his childhood
was spent further north in the Poltava region, about 5 miles from the Vorskla river. This left bank
(eastern) tributary joins the Dnieper between Kremenchuk and Dnipropetrovsk about 15 miles
from Honchar’s childhood home. He pursued higher education in Kharkiv for eight years before

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620 In her monograph on Honchar, Halych analyses his journalism, speeches, and articles. She dedicates 20 pages to
Honchar’s admiration for Dovzhenko and the articles related to the filmmaker. She asserts that she is the first to
produce a scholarly analysis of the Dovzhenko’s influence on Honchar. Her section on Dovzhenko in Hochar’s
journalism focuses on a comparison between an early Thaw era article and a second from the late 1980s. She uses
them to trace an evolution in Honchar’s attitude toward the Soviet state, finding that modest reservations originated
in the late 1950s and 1960s but did not become directly critical until after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. However,
her analysis does not address Dovzhenko’s influence on Honchar’s environmentalism and his conception of
Ukrainian nature and national geography, see Halych, _Oles’ Honchar: — Zhurnalist, Publicyst, Redaktor:
Evoliutsiia Tvorchoi Maisternosti_, 303-23.

enlisting in the Red Army at the onset of WWII. Honchar returned to Dnipropetrovsk after the war to finish his university education before moving to Kyiv. But, as fictionalized in *Man and Arms*, Honchar’s war service brought him to southern Ukraine during what must have been an exceptionally formative time in his life. In the geographic imaginations of both Dovzhenko and Honchar, that stretch of the Dnieper represented freedom and the heart of Ukraine. Most of Honchar’s prose was dedicated to war themes, pertaining either to WWII or the Civil War in Ukraine. In part because of the inherent significance of geography to warfare, he paid close attention to Ukrainian geography in all of his works that took place on Ukrainian territory. However, with *Man and Arms*, Honchar began his evolution. In this novel, Honchar filled page after page with long, lyrical mediations on Ukrainian nature, the Ukrainian landscape (built and natural), Ukrainian national geography, and the Dnieper river in particular.

**The Battle for the Dnieper: Man and Arms (1960)**

In the late 1950s, Honchar returned to the theme that earned him widespread acclaim and multiple Stalin Prizes, jumpstarting his literary career. His trilogy, *Standard-Bearers* (1946-1948) told the story of victory during the final stages of WWII, based on his own experiences. Completed in 1959, *Man and Arms* is a novel about the first days, weeks, and months of war. This is the story of naive optimism violently and tragically crushed, again heavily based on Honchar’s own life and the Red Army retreat in 1941. *Man in Arms* follows the fate of a volunteer student battalion, like the one Honchar himself joined. Most of the action takes place between the Dnieper river and the Ros river, a right bank (western) tributary. The story culminates with the Soviet destruction of the DniproHES dam in advance of the Nazi *Wehrmacht*. Reflecting Dovzhenko’s creative approach, Honchar does not merely place his war story against the background of Ukrainian nature and national geography, as he had done
previously. Instead, the Ukrainian landscape plays a central role in the novel. In particular, the Dnieper river features heavily.

In *Man and Arms*, the Dnieper serves a number of distinct but related functions, both for the geography of war and the national geography of the soldiers. For the war, this river is not only where a great deal of fighting took place, but it was also the most salient mental and physical reference point to describe the changing tide of war, for both sides. For the Ukrainian soldiers and civilians, the Dnieper was an important element of their memories of life without war and dreams of a peaceful future. It also functioned as the most important symbol of Ukraine and a receptacle of Ukraine’s history, culture, and modern future. Honchar described what was willingly and unwillingly sacrificed in defense of the Dnieper and the profound heartbreak felt across Ukraine at losing the river to the Nazis in 1941. The DniproHES dam and power station at Zaporizhzhia is a symbol of the modern Ukrainian nation, destroyed by a phone call from Stalin.

When the novel begins, Bohdan and Tania are studying for their final exams in the history department at Karkhiv University. Bohdan, Honchar’s central protagonist, is very bright, well-liked, and an excellent student, but he is often held back because his father was branded an ‘enemy of the people.’ Bohdan is a native of Zaproizhza and he published an article on the archeological artifacts discovered at the DniproHES construction site. During the previous summer, Bohdan worked with fishermen on the Dnieper and returned to school in the fall smelling of the river. His friends liked to joke about him going off to join the historical Zaporizhzhian Cossacks. Then they heard that single word that would make this summer so very different from any that came before: “War!”

Like Bohdan, Tanya seemed to be a rung above all of the other female students in most regards. Tania grew up in Dnipropetrovsk on the banks of the Dnieper, so close that during the

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spring floods its water would lap at her doorstep. Honchar dedicated an entire chapter to his
description of Tania’s childhood home, the beauty of its lush natural environment and the
national history engraved into its geography. Similar to the grandfathers in Dovzhenko’s films,
Tania’s grandfather was a wonderful storyteller and the keeper of history and legends. From him
she learned that at different times long ago Princes Olga, Prince Sviatoslav, and the heroic
Cossacks had taken shelter there on the nearby Komsomol Island:

In the evening, when the moon rose out of the blue mist hovering over Tatary beyond the
Samara, Tania would settle down at Grandpa’s feet and listen to his sad, endless legends. Since olden times, this area had been a winter refuge for the Zaporozhian Cossacks and
Dnieper pilots, brave and courageous men who knew all the whims of the rapids, and at
the risk of their lives, guided the princes’ ships, merchants’ barges, and the seasonal
laborers’ chiaka boats. Grandpa’s legends, recollections, and stories about olden times
must have aroused in Tania’s heart a particular love of her native land…  

As he talked or stood in silence looking out over the river, she thought he looked just like a
Zaporizhzhian Cossack himself: “He had his own ideas and opinions about everything, and Tania
liked him for never being afraid of anyone and [for] talking about the Dnieper and the Dnieper
rapids as if they were his patrimony in his own backyard.”  

Honchar created an image of the Dnieper river from the perspective of Tania’s childhood
and memories of her youth, before the war came to the Dnieper: “The upper reaches of the
Dnieper are beautiful and it is truly enchanting at Kiev, yet it is no less lovely here at its
confluence with the Samara, for it flows broadly and freely through the steppe sprawling to the
south and east. Nowhere is there such sweep and expanse as here where the Dnieper spills across
the steppe like the sky. At the isle it seems to concentrate all its might on trying to move the
rock, negotiate the crags, and burst forth with greater momentum across the rapids.”  

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623 Ibid., 64-65.
624 Ibid., 61-63.
625 Ibid., 63.
Samara river is a left (eastern) tributary that joins the Dnieper river at the city of Dnipro[petrovsk]. Through Tania, Honchar wrote a love song dedicated to southern Ukraine, and the southern Dnieper in particular. He associated a special sense of freedom with this part of Ukraine, where the wide steppe meets the broad Dnieper.

Even though Bohdan is exempt from military service, he and his friends volunteer for the student battalion. As the boys begin basic training and prepare to leave, they are naively optimistic about the certainty of a swift victory. They are portrayed like young Cossacks: free, strong-willed, principled, and fiercely loyal to each other.626 Before the students march out of camp, their female friends visit one last time. Tanya brings Bohdan a bouquet of steppe flowers: “Here, this is for you,’ she said, extending the bouquet to him, among which stood out wild red poppies and blue cornflowers, and the field flowers Bohdan had loved since childhood. There were even sprigs of gray wormwood. He immersed his face in the bouquet and greedily inhaled the strong scent of the steppe.”627 Tania tells Bohdan that she will soon be digging anti-tank ditches near Krasnograd, which is located between Karkhiv and Dnipro[petrovsk]. “On this side of the Dnieper?” Bohdan thought to himself, his heart filling with alarm.628

As the students march toward the front, Honchar included vivid details of the Ukrainian landscape they pass through, which stands in stark contrast to the chaos and destruction of war. Ukrainian nature represents vitality and fertility, while the war brings death:

Morning burst forth in dew and the green luxuriance of meadows. The whole landscape was lit by sunflowers that raised their mighty crowns to the sunshine. The waist-high potatoes were blooming with their delicate white flowers. In the gullies stood dense hemp. Everything grew riotously and overflowed with the vital juices of life at this blessed time in early summer. It seemed the land was striving irrepressibly to bring forth from its bounty and mighty fertility the best it could offer to gladden man. Potatoes bloomed, strangled with poppies in between. Sunflowers shot upward to the height of

626 Ibid., 11-77.
627 Ibid., 80.
628 Ibid., 81.
cottage thatches, and morning glory crept up their stems. The meadows were attractive for their cool swards [expanse of young grass]; mirror-like surfaces of the ponds glistened, willows, sycamores, maple trees, and cranberry bushes sprawled across half a gully. In the orchards stood whitewashed cottages of amazing beauty. Each house was a work of art bearing the stamp of individuality of the folk craftsmen who had embellished them.629

Dodging shells, they take cover in marshes, orchards, and gardens. These natural sanctuaries remain sources of safety for soldiers and civilians throughout the novel. One student is seriously wounded and sent back. Another is killed.630

As Honchar narrated the students’ experience in the summer of 1941, he highlighted the importance of rivers in the geography of war:

They were separated from the enemy by the Ross, a picturesque little river placidly flowing between the riotous greenery of the banks and willows on either side, the branches of which almost crossed in some narrow places. In peacetime, its banks resounded with the song of nightingales every spring, but now the whistle of bullets stood over them the whole day through, and much human blood had already flowed from the Ross down to the Dnieper. Along the banks under the osiers [willows] lay the dead counter attackers, and when the waves lapped them at night, it seemed as if they were moving and still alive, although they had been there for several days already. The smell of rotting corpses carried from the banks.631

Honchar wove in references to historical military exploits on the same rivers, especially those of the Cossacks, attesting to a millennium of warfare that he integrated into Ukrainian history. Centuries of Ukrainian history, therefore, are linked by its rivers. Over and over, distance and location are indicated in reference to rivers. River crossings were especially significant to military strategy. Moreover, the rivers divided the territory of war into two very different spaces. They separated enemies from allies. At times the words “beyond the Ross” or “beyond the Dnieper” pointed to a general area of perceived safety, danger — or even worse — the

629 Ibid., 98.
630 Ibid., 85-108.
631 Ibid., 122-23.
Throughout the novel, Honchar contrasted the natural world with war. He made a powerful argument that war is unnatural. This is made especially clear because the events take place during the summer: “The orchards all around stood in green attire; the cherries were turning red; the sun, standing higher now in the sky, was shining brightly; and patches of light and shade from the foliage streaked Lagutin’s naked body bronzed by a suntan. Amid these luxuriant orchards under a radiant July sun the sight of so many crippled men who but a day before had been healthy and hearty was unnatural, as was Lagutin’s maimed body, a careful youthful body of almost Hellenistic beauty.”\textsuperscript{633} The destruction of war was not limited to the bodies of soldiers. It also disfigured the Ukrainian landscape. War interrupted the natural agricultural rhythms of the Ukrainian countryside. Honchar assigned particular national symbolism to the destruction of wheat fields:

From his earlier years he had been taught an unbounded respect for bread as something sacred, and when the war had hurled their student battalion right into those collective farm grain fields and Stepura saw that bread grain meant nothing here, since it was trampled and crushed under foot and he himself was forced to do the same as he plodded with his rifle through the yellow, full-grained strands of fine Ukrainka brand wheat, it was the most painful day of his life and his most horrid experience of everything war had brought with it. The sheaves of golden stalks which stood out in all their beauty at folk holidays and on Harvest Day and were incorporated into his country’s coat of arms were now mangled and sullied with the black eruptions of shell holes. The picture still stood before his eyes just like the image of Drobakha’s mutilated body they had buried in the wheat field.\textsuperscript{634}

As time passed, more and more of the boys from student battalion were wounded or killed. They were 500 strong when they entered the war, but now very few remained: “The student battalion was going down in blood. The wounded groaned everywhere. It was not from

\textsuperscript{632} For example: ibid., 138, 61, 85, 202, etc.

\textsuperscript{633} Ibid., 180.

\textsuperscript{634} Ibid., 131-32.
the sun rising behind the willows but from the students’ blood that the Ross turned red that morning.”^635 The entire Red Army was retreating back towards the Dnieper river. One of the students dies from prior injuries as they reach the river crossing at Taras’s Hill near Kaniv, where the national bard was (re)buried. The students bury their friend next to the monument to Shevchenko. He, like many others, did not make it ‘beyond the Dnieper.’ Afterwards, another student paused to admire the famed Dnieper river for the very first time, after missing his first opportunity while riding a train through the night to the front: “He sat at the foot of the hill and looked at the Dnieper lauded in the verses of the Ukrainian Bard Shevchenko. The clouds hung low over the river; the wind furrowed the water, making it look like a plowed-up field.”^636 He had imagined seeing it flooded by sunlight, calm, the water a bright cheerful blue. But instead it appeared steel-gray and furrowed by gusts of wind that bent the trees on its banks: “On this side, the rumble of war drew nearer. Stepura longed for but a glimpse of the days to come. Would the Dnieper be the last line of defense or would the irrepressible fire of war sail across it? What would happen to the men who had remained behind on the Ross? What would happen to the sacred grave of Shevchenko and to the nation?”^637 For Honchar, the fate of the Dnieper was the fate of the nation.

Honchar switched to the perspective of the female students, who also elected to overturn their exempt student status. They contributed to the war effort by digging miles and miles of trenches: “They stretched right from the sea on through the vineyards, and the sunny steppes of the south deep into the Republic, enveloping the Donets coal fields, skirting Kharkiv, appearing in fresh gouges of earth along the Dnieper’s left bank and running farther to the north. Ditches

^635 Ibid., 175.
^636 Ibid., 187.
^637 Ibid.
upon ditches. They cut with rectilinear ruthlessness through the stubble of grain fields, melon gardens, honey-rich buckwheat, the fruit-laden orchards of collective farms, and tore through a golden host of blooming sunflowers that would soon wane, turn black, and be covered with dust.\textsuperscript{638} Even though in this case the fertile Ukrainian landscape was mared by Soviet forces and these Ukrainian students specifically, it was violence done by the war. Tania learns that her mother was evacuated from Dnipropetrovsk and thus her home on the Dnieper’s shores will soon be gone: “She had no home, there would be no more fine mornings on the Dnieper with the plant whistle hooting.”\textsuperscript{639}

Bohdan enters his hometown of Zaporizhya and is met by ruined buildings and craters in the streets from falling bombs. He experiences “soul-racking pain” when he sees trenches dug in familiar public gardens.\textsuperscript{640} However, he finds some reason for optimism: “Dniprohes, Ukraine’s electric power heart, was still beating. The steppe giant of the Zaporizhya Steelworks was still belching smoke into the southern sky…”\textsuperscript{641} The students arrive in the city in order to contribute to the defense of DniproHES: “‘To the defence of Dniprohes! Dniprohes is in danger!’ — this appeal seemed to have electrified the air in Zaporizhya.”\textsuperscript{642} The defense of DniproHES is the central episode of Honchar’s novel, culminating in its destruction on Stalin’s orders. Honchar completed \textit{Man in Arms} in 1959, but even as problems with the Kakhovka reservoir emerged and more voices spoke out in critique of the hydro-engineering giants of the Dnipro hydropower cascade, the wisdom of DniproHES was never questioned. DniproHES remained a powerful source a national pride and symbol of a modern Ukrainian nation:

\textsuperscript{638} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{639} Ibid., 205.
\textsuperscript{640} Ibid., 253.
\textsuperscript{641} Ibid., 252.
\textsuperscript{642} Ibid.
‘I never thought it looked that grand,’ Stepura said to the boys, unable to take his eyes off the dam. ‘You feel the inspiration of the people in this structure. And what a site to build it all! It was constructed at a place where the Dnieper’s rapids hadroared incessantly for centuries.’

‘Yes, it’s really the pride of our times,’ Dukhnovich said, scanning the panorama of the station.”

‘I think even the most bestial barbarian simply could not raise a hand against such beauty.’ Stepura said.

‘To destroy with bombs such a masterpiece of civilization… It’s intended for eternity, this creation of man.’

Referring to “the most bestial barbarian,” Honchar took aim at both the Nazis and Stalin. DniproHES was such a strong source of local and national pride that workers arrived at the Dnieper after their factory shifts. Disregarding their exemptions from military service and even without official authorization, they took up whatever weapon they could find and headed to DniproHES.

Honchar underlined the paramount importance of this event by presenting it from the perspective of multiple people. After Bohdan, Honchar switched to another student, Stepura, who was just seeing DniproHES for the first time in his life: “Only two months before he would have taken it for a bad joke if anyone had told him that one fine August day, he’d be lying here on the rocks at Zaporizhya to defend Dniprohes with a rifle in hand.”

An amateur poet, Stepura had written verses dedicated to DniproHES long before he saw it with his own eyes. Despite the fact that the war, inextinguishable and unstoppable, “like a steppe fire,” was rushing towards the Dnieper, Stepura remained certain that the Dnieper was an impenetrable barrier: “… on the granite shoulders of the Dnieper banks, Dnirpohes stood out in all its beauty as the symbol

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643 Ibid., 256.
644 Ibid., 257.
645 Ibid., 262.
of a new Ukraine and a new socialist civilization. The people called it the electric heart of the Republic, the electrical sun of Ukraine, and indeed it lit up the whole land like the sun. Love of the country that built it, its energy, its aspirations for happiness were embodied in this proud firstling of the five-year plans. The intellect and hands that were able to build such a thing were much stronger than all the forces of destruction!"  

Before the fighting begins, the students reflect on the nature around them, philosophizing about the steppe thistle and remembering Vasylkivsky’s landscape paintings that they used to admire at the art museum in Karkhiv, seemingly a lifetime ago. This peacefulness did not last and before the day was done Stepura was hideously maimed by a grenade.

Honchar continued his ode to DniproHES, moving next to the perspectives of the chief engineer on duty and the cleaning woman, Polia, who was one of the last to leave her post at the power station. The engineer represented a generation who came to the construction project as a teenager from the Ukrainian countryside and “dug the earth, broke the Dnieper rock.” This generation matured at DniproHES, advanced professionally, and the dam complex remained the “greatest pride of their lives.” This scene in the novel is very dramatic. As enemy troops encircle Zaproizhzhia, the engineer received a string of phone calls from substations that are progressively closer and closer. On the other end of the line he hears, “We’re surrounded by tanks! Cut us off immediately!” For over a week, the engineer had watched what appeared to be all of right-bank (western) Ukraine stream across the dam’s bridge and disappear into the east.

Polia had also been at DniproHES since the first days of construction. She remembered

646 Ibid., 262-63.
647 Ibid., 261-72.
648 Ibid., 292-93.
649 Ibid., 273.
650 Ibid., 272-80.
people flocking to the construction site to save it from spring floods decades earlier: “A special freedom and purity of nature reigned at Dniprohes. Even the birds loved it. The swallows constructed whole colonies of nests by the floodgates and in the most inaccessible places on the concrete ledge.”651 Honchar’s reference to birds is important because by the time he was writing Man and Arms, the population around the Kakhovka reservoir were complaining that the birds had disappeared from the area from lack of fish. As people poured across the DniproHES dam, Polia lets wounded men rest at the power station. One of these men is Stepura. Trucks arrive carrying explosives which begin to be packed into the dam. Polina receives an urgent order to clear the dam of people. It is clear now that the dam will be destroyed. Polina thinks to herself, “Old man Dnieper had seen many a woe, but this one was incomparable with anything of the past centuries.”652 The wounded soldiers moved on to the eastern bank, expect Stepura. With his dying breaths he called out for water from the Dnieper. But the next moment he was gone: “His eyes were closed and his parched lips no longer begged for water. Polia’s heart contracted with pain: why hadn’t she given him Dnieper water so he could drink his fill! He hadn’t had his fill of the Dnieper water or of beauty… Who would bury him here? The Zaporozhian orchards would rustle for him, the sacred Dnieper would churn, and Dniprohes would be his tombstone!”653

Soldiers, engineers, and civilians lined the banks of the Dnieper river as night fell. With everything else that was going on, they refused to take their eyes of the dam. The destruction of DniproHES is the climax of Honchar’s novel. It represents the war itself, which lacerated everything that was held most dear and required previously unimaginable sacrifices:

The explosion that followed was more like an earthquake that jarred the granite banks. The engineers and workers took off their caps and looked on tensely as the dam gradually broke up like in a slow-motion film. The breach was immediately filled by a roaring

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651 Ibid., 282.
652 Ibid.
653 Ibid., 285.
mountain of churning water, and above it appeared the black cloud of the explosion expanding in the twilight glow. From that moment on, this was a realm where a different power reigned, the power of destruction. Everything roared and groaned in the back chaos of the breach, and the mad element of water raged with wild force. It wrecked what had not yet been destroyed and thundered amidst the ruins, sending up a mighty spray. Like a voice out of the past, the tumultuous roar of water crashing down rapids split the air over the twilight-draped Dnieper. There was something primevally savage and menacing in the subterranean rumble of the water chasm.654

The Dnieper river itself was angry. Honchar described the dam in human terms. DniproHES was the heart of Ukraine, it was the Ukrainian people. The dam bled like the Ukrainian population bled during the war: “But the bleeding of the largest wound in the Dniprohes could not be stopped by anything. Day and night it would bleed with an unending avalanche of water that added to the horror of war the horror of the elements: the flood submerged the lower part of the town and descended upon the troops who got stuck in the reed covered flats. When the water subsided in Lake Lenin above the dam, the old village of Kichkas resurfaced, and one after another, the black rapids covered with green slime appeared and broke into a roar that echoed far and wide.”655 Honchar alluded to an additional tragic consequence of destroying the dam, which was absent from Soviet reporting on the event. An unknown number of Red Army soldiers and Ukrainian civilians were killed by the wall of water that burst through the dam. Soviet newspapers claimed that it was only Nazi troops that fell victim to the Dnieper’s angry waters.

Honchar stressed the significance of drinking water from the Dnieper river, before and after battle: “It was the best water in the world. Warm, soft and sweet, it smelled of the blue summertime Dnieper, and while Bohdan drank his fill he could not believe that they would ever be deprived of the possibility of drinking this water, its incomparable taste living on only in their thirsty memories!”656 After the episode at DniproHES, Bohdan continued cautiously eastward

654 Ibid., 290-91.
655 Ibid., 297.
656 Ibid., 261., and for example: ibid. 266, 284-285.
despite being surrounded by German forces on all sides. Honchar returned to the theme of drinking the Dnieper’s water. The remaining chapters of the novel contain “letters from the nights in encirclement,” which are ‘letters’ that Bohdan wrote to Tania in his head. No longer on the Dnieper’s banks, Bohdan dreamt of its water while surrounded by enemy forces and the hot, dry steppe in southern Ukraine: “The steppe tortured us for lack of water. When the dew fell at dawn, we dropped on our knees and licked it off the grass like dogs. But the dew fell scantily in the steppe. How deliriously we had dreamed of drinking our fill and quenching our thirst just once! We recalled the mighty Dnieper, and in our dreams drank its water with our thirsty, cracked lips.”657 In Bohdan’s (and in Honchar’s) imagination, the Dnieper was the lifeblood of Ukraine and of the Ukrainian people. This motif also underscores the symbolic relationship between the river and the steppe and sheds light on the early support that the Kakhovka hydro-engineering project enjoyed. The Dnieper shared its life-giving water with the Ukraine people and with the surrounding steppe. The Kakhovka reservoir and associated irrigation canals promised to transport that water deep into the arid steppe, just as power lines transported energy from DniproHES.

In the final pages of Man and Arms, Bohdan and his weary band of soldiers capture a German. Bohdan makes the unpopular decision not to kill the prisoner. The German prisoner confesses to his captors that the Ukrainian steppe has a psychologically overwhelming effect on him: “We Germans are used to short distances and small areas, but here everything has no bounds.”658 They took it for granted that conquering Ukraine would be easy, he explained, but when he first saw DniproHES and modern industrial Zaporizhzhia, he saw an advanced society and his heart sank. Written by Honchar with the advantage of hindsight, the German tells

657 Ibid., 322.
658 Ibid., 347.
Bohdan, “We were told that Germany’s destiny would be decided in Ukraine by the battle for the Dnieper…”

Honchar ended the novel with a pacifist message and a reminder to protect the natural world. As the soldiers slowly make their way through the thirsty steppe, closer and closer to the front line from the occupied west, they dream of a future without wars:

‘Just imagine, Bohdan, how people of the distant future will regard us.’ I heard Dukhnovich [a former classmate] at my side. ‘There’ll be marvelous sunlit cities and free people. Wars will be something only archeologists will know from their digs. Now imagine those people looking back at us from the centuries and wondering: Who were those ragged, exhausted savages walking in the darkness with guns and leading one of their kind at gun point? They had deep rivers but died of thirst. They built for decades only to have it all ruined in a matter of minutes. For how long had they been burning and ruining, why didn’t they take care of their wonderful planet called Earth?’

Oles’ Honchar: “Man of the World. Son of the Dnieper”

Throughout his diary, Honchar described his native landscape in detail and captured specific moments, often looking out over the Dnieper river. He paid careful attention to nature and the ways in which people interacted with it:

An autumn evening near Askold’s Grave [Kyiv, above the Dnieper]. The wind comes off the Dnieper in gusts, and with that the mist falls. […] The window of a gardener’s lodge is lit up. How cosy it is there, how solitary! Poets should be forced to live in such huts in order to listen to the fall… Yesterday I saw such a house down on the Dnieper, where someone was living, guarding the water station, which is closed for the winter. Poets - go there! To have time to think and listen to the sound of the Dnieper on an autumn night, the groaning of the wind, the voice of nature itself.

Nature inspires creativity. This is an appeal that Rylskyi made too, during the 1958 Conference

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659 Ibid.

660 Ibid., 355.


on Art and Nature Protection. Nature, in Honchar’s writing also took on healing properties: “In the steppe. Here there is something curative. In nature, in the people. This is what revived [Oleksandr] Dovzhenko, inspiration returned to him.” Referring to members of the intelligentsia convicted of ‘political crimes,’ Honchar went on to say that instead of throwing these sinners in prison, they should be sent there, to the Ukrainian steppe to “breath this air.” In a time of rapid modernization and industrialization, Honchar argued that access to nature was a necessity for the health and well-being of all Soviet citizens.

The overwhelming majority of his observations of his native landscape described nature that is calm, quiet, and peaceful:

The still, white, estuary of the Dnieper river, and the motionless sails that dot its surface are even whiter. Beauty, which is not of this world. The quiet-still expanse of water. The ocean is never like this. Cattails, flowering rushes along the estuary. Overgrowth, a thicket of cattails along the estuary, and green shadows of it on the still water. And the heron is motionless, frozen in wise contemplation. And an adder [grass snake] swims along the water.

Zburievka is the oldest settlement in this region. They say the name comes from the fact that the Zaporizhian Cossacks took cover from the storm there - with their boats, “from the storm” they went into the calm backwater, into the reeds, where their “seagulls” lay in wait for the Ottomans.

Like Rylskyi who evoked Prince Igor finding refuge in the reeds of a riverbed, Honchar described nature as a sanctuary, a place to retreat from the kinetic chaos of the modern world. This was Honchar’s spirituality. Nature was his cathedral - the nature and natural geography of his homeland.

In his diary, Honchar collected observations, memories of the places he visited, the conversations he had, the stories he heard as he traveled throughout Soviet Ukraine. Many of

663 Ryl’s’kyi, Pryroda I Literatura, 18.
these entries described the flaws, costs, and ecological damage caused by construction of the Dnieper Cascade of hydropower dams and reservoirs, a major source of alarm and anxiety for Honchar. In 1958 he noted: “The dam at Kamianske was not made from concrete, but only stone and sand: a storm washes away the sand, the stone settles, they are constantly building it up with more and more funds, to salvage it. And this was considered to be some new method of construction.”\textsuperscript{666} The Middle Dnieper Hydroelectric Station is a “run-of-the-river” hydropower station (like DniproHES) built between Kremenchuk and Dnipropetrovsk. Dam construction began in 1956 and the first power generator came online in 1962. In referring to the location as ‘Kamianske,’ Honchar chose to use the historical - and now present - name for the city of Dniprodzerzhynsk.\textsuperscript{667}

During the summer of 1960, Honchar collected conversations he overheard while traveling between Kherson and Beryslav, along the Dnieper river in southern Ukraine. Many of them had to do with the manmade Kakhovska “Sea,” which was filled with water in 1958. At the collective farm named in honor of Ivan Michurin, farmers discussed the unnatural nature that the artificial ‘sea’ created: “If only there were reeds and sedge [type of riverine grass] on the shore, but instead saltwort grows!”\textsuperscript{668} Saltwort [kurai] is a plant that thrives in very salty environments like salt marshes and seashores. It is not native to the Dnieper river banks. The farmers regarded the plant as something that should not be there, and an ominous sign. As if following in Dovzhenko’s footsteps and picking up where he left off, Honchar was preoccupied by the Kakhovska Sea. But unlike, Dovzhenko, in 1968 Honchar could bear witness to the ecological consequences and cultural impact of the reservoir: “The Kakhovska Sea lacerates the shore,

\textsuperscript{666} 13 October 1958: ibid., 241.

\textsuperscript{667} The city carried the name Dniprodzerzhynsk between 1936-2016, in honor of Feliks Dzerzhinskii, head of the early Soviet security apparatus.

\textsuperscript{668} Honchar, \textit{Shchodennyky U Tr’okh Tomakh, Tom 1: 1943-1967}, 260.
attacking it with its reddish-brown paws. Rough and uninviting, the sea’s canvas is empty, there are no birds above it because there are no fish in it - decreasing from year to year, since spawning has been impeded, there isn’t any food for fish, and furthermore, the [water] level is not consistent - it rises and falls. Everyone curses this sea, for everyone it is absurd and senseless. Just as Kakhovska HES [is senseless too]. It is simply astonishing: the vast majority of people are intelligent, but they do so many foolish things.”

As we saw in Chapter 1, controlling water and regulating the flow of the river was the primary purpose of this giant nature transformation project. Honchar attested to its failure. Furthermore, the image of birds over the Dnieper river is a common motif, making the writer’s observation of their absence especially significant.

Honchar’s diary entries provide fascinating insight into the writer’s motivations, influences, and creative process while composing The Cathedral. It is widely recognized that the Trinity Cathedral in Novomoskovsk served as the direct inspiration for the cathedral in his novel. Honchar himself was involved in an analogous crusade to preserve it. But in 1958, on the banks of the Kakhovska reservoir, across from the town of (Old) Kakhovka, Honchar discovered what is perhaps the first inspiration for his novel’s namesake: “The Beryslav Church (Vvedens’ka). A model of Ukrainian architecture. It was built in 1726 near the fortress of the village of Perevoloshyna in the Poltava Guberniya, but in 1874 in connection with resettlement onto the Steppe, the church was transported on the Dnieper [down] to Beryslav. Without a single nail.” In the novel, Honchar emphasized the fact that the cathedral was constructed without nails, an example of traditional Cossack architectural engineering.

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669 20 May 1966: ibid., 376.


As Honchar was completing the novel in 1967, he recorded a series of revealing entries into his diary: “God, grant me [the strength] to complete ‘The Cathedral!’ At least nothing [bad] has happened… and there is passion, the work is pleasing, as if everything matures on its own! Tolstoy at the same age wrote ‘Anna Karenina.’”

On 31 January 1967, Honchar made the strongest statement, that I have seen, of his intentionally critical designs for the novel: “I hate the dimwitted, self-satisfied, loud voices and big bellies, and petty souls, the pygmy-minded. I do not want to graze on their pastures. I do not want to be near their troughs. I am going to fight them. And this book, it is my hatred for them, my love for others - for the sacred in mankind.”

Those are, indeed, fighting words… especially for such an establishment writer and head of the Ukrainian Writers’ Union.

On the surface, Honchar’s novel takes place in a fictional setting on the Dnieper river. But this passage from his diary not only makes the autobiographical links explicit but also highlights the deeper significance of Honchar’s geographical imagination: “Everything draws closer together, flowing from the Sarmatian wetlands, from the Novomoskovskyi cathedral. Lomivka became Zachiplianka, everything shifted in space, became closer, a new poetic geography has already come into existence, a new interconnectivity, and you can feel how from this convergence, these tangible realities, from your conceptions, imagination, and visions grows something unique, Mozart’s harmony of art is born… There will be a ‘Cathedral’!”

Honchar’s hometown for the first three years of his life, Lomivka - now incorporated into the city Dnipro - became the setting of his novel, Zachiplianka. Like Man and Arms, The Cathedral is very, very personal for Honchar. It is inextricably linked with outlook of its author and his national

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674 (I struggled a bit with this translation…) 5 February 1967: ibid., 411.
geography. In early January 1968, as his pièce de résistance was released to the public, Honchar wrote in his diary:

My truth will be from the heavens,
If only because it is the truth.
My Dnieper will not be asiatic,
Its sacred blue does not turn yellow.
A Free Spirit is not killed, is not bound,
Somewhere in the West our sail flies!675

Honchar’s words underline the author’s self-perception, or self-fashioning, of the role he would play in Thaw era and then Perestroika era Ukrainian society. It is likely that by ‘asiatic,’ he meant ‘Russian,’ and therefore referred to Ukraine’s resistance to centuries of Russification, with the Dnieper river representing the Ukrainian people and nation. Throughout the subsequent decades, Honchar honed that role, becoming more and more vocal in his defense of Ukrainian nature, history, language, and culture.

The Ghost of Dovzhenko in Honchar’s Cathedral

Honchar’s diary entries reveal that Dovzhenko’s death in late 1956 was a pivotal moment for the writer and the starting point of his evolution, which would transform him from a lover of nature to a public critic of the Soviet state and the value system it stood on. Before even diving into the text of Honchar’s three volumes of diaries, Dovzhenko’s significance is clear. The “index of names” included by his editors contains far more references to Dovzhenko than to any other single figure in Honchar’s life. Honchar first mentioned Dovzhenko in his diaries in May 1953 when the two traveled along the Dnieper river together, passing through the locks of the Dnieper HES dam at Zaproizhia.676 In those few years before Dovzhenko’s death, Honchar’s

676 Shchodennyky U Tr’okh Tomakh, Tom 1: 1943-1967, 153., see photo of the two men together in 1953 on page 158.
diary entries establish his high opinion of the filmmaker. “Dovzhenko, of course, is a genius,” he wrote. On numerous occasions Honchar likened Dovzhenko to either Michelangelo or a prophet, or both at once: “Like Michelangelo, he had more plans, sketches, than finished works (true, it seems the Italians didn’t finish anything). It seems to me that Dovzhenko did not like to sit down at a table. He liked to walk and to sermonize. His appearance, ardent and wise, in itself suggests a comparison with biblical prophets, with those who preached in the wilderness and who spent their entire life in pursuit of truth.” On 29 June 1956, just five months before the filmmaker died of a heart attack, Honchar wrote: “Dovzhenko… from that kind of man, in ancient times, came sorcerers, fortune-tellers, and even prophets. He would be a worthy subject for a novel. Gray-haired and slender at 60 years old. Passionate and domineering. The desire to live a long life, like a raven.”

Honchar repeatedly used the image of Dovzhenko as a gardener, grower, and sower of seeds as a metaphor for his storytelling abilities: “He is an incomparable storyteller. From a few phrases he moulds a character in front of our eyes - vivid, well-defined, unique. … He walks across the earth, like a sower with a generous hand, planting precious gems wherever he goes.” This metaphor is especially apt because Dovzhenko was well-known to be an avid gardener himself and a passionate advocate for urban gardening. Honchar recounted a story that the writer Aleksandr Avdeenko told him about Dovzhenko. In 1940, a negative article about Avdeenko appeared in Pravda. Both men were in Kyiv at the time, at the film studio, where Dovzhenko kept a garden with an apiary. Dovzhenko led Avdeenko into his garden and stayed

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677 Ibid., 156.
678 For example: ibid., 198 and 208.
679 Ibid., 207.
680 Ibid., 157.
681 Honchar returns to this metaphor after Dovzhenko’s death: ibid., 208.
with him all day, even though everyone at the studio was waiting on Dovzhenko to commence filming. Not a single word was spoken about the article in Pravda, instead Dovzhenko treated Avdeenko to fresh honeycomb and apples from his garden. 

Honchar considered this story to be a perfect portrait of Dovzhenko, his “compassion, and rebellion, and his big heart.” It also underlines their shared appreciation for nature as a refuge in turbulent times.

On 16 October 1955, after Dovzhenko’s film scenario, “Partisan’s Spark” received criticism, the two friends took solace in nature: “We sit together in Koncha [Zaspa], on the meadows. Around us, the flames of a golden autumn. The trees above us are ablaze, hay fields unfold in front of our eyes, and in the distance the banks of the Dnieper appear white. ‘Is it possible for anything to be better than this? Here,’ [Dovzhenko] says, ‘this is where I would like to be when I die.’” Eight months later Dovzhenko would pass away, not overlooking the Dnieper river as he wished, but in his dacha outside of Moscow. When Honchar learned of Dovzhenko’s death he recalled that day in Koncha-Zaspa, a nature preserve on the Dnieper just downriver from Kyiv. That was the last time Honchar saw Dovzhenko. He remembered Dovzhenko’s wish to live out his days there and wrote: “But [instead] he died in honorable exile. Eternal glory to him.”

Dovzhenko’s wish is a fitting counterpart to Shevchenko’s infamous request to be buried in his “beloved Ukraine” on the cliffs overlooking the Dnieper river. Both icons were forced to spend much of their adult lives outside of their native land. Koncha-Zaspa features prominently in Honchar’s diaries and it is likely that the writer’s experiences there, and in other similar nature preserves, inspired the centrality of the Skarbne wilderness in his novel,

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683 Ibid., 318.
684 Ibid., 198.
685 26 November 1956: ibid., 208.
686 Testament [Zapovit], 1845
The Cathedral.

Dovzhenko died on 25 November 1956. The following day, Honchar wrote: “Dovzhenko died... after Vyshnya is Dovzhenko... A difficult bleak year for our culture (that is, they say, because it is a leap year). We lose the most irreplaceable, the greatest, the most powerful. Like golden giant oaks, they fall, with earth and roots turned up by a storm...”687 Honchar sensed a generational change, one that in the 1960s would catch him somewhat in the middle between the old and the young generation of the Thaw era: “Don’t the lips of Dovzhenko sing the swan song of Ukrainian literature? Who else will sing?”688 Dovzhenko dominated Honchar’s thoughts: “what a colossal loss. No, the nation, which gave birth to such [a man], will never be forgotten.”689 Dovzhenko influenced how Honchar experienced and valued his native nature, but it was Dozhenko’s long and difficult struggle with Soviet power that sparked Honchar’s transformation: “It is well known that in life an artist does not always receive - by far - a correct and accurate assessment from society. We overestimate one, we underestimate another. Dovzhenko belonged to the latter group, those who are not fully appreciated. Even now, I see his high forehead, gray-haired and wise, with a distinctively youthful and unruly head of hair, which he knew how to wear so high and independently. I see his slender, despite his age, proudly unbending figure - the figure of a man who did not bow in front of anyone...”690 Of course, that is not entirely accurate, Dovzhenko did bend and bow in front of Stalin at times. Ukrainian cultural figures would not have survived the Stalin era without knowing how to bow. But more importantly, this is how Honchar saw Dovzhenko. In many ways, Dovzhenko embodied the

688 Ibid., 211.
689 Ibid., 209.
690 Ibid., 207-08.
major values of the Thaw era, a bit ahead of the times. In the years following Dovzhenko’s
death, Honchar collected materials for the novel that would become The Cathedral, and he took
up many of the themes that the filmmaker left unfinished.

The Cathedral on the Dnieper

Composed throughout 1963-1967, Honchar’s novel, The Cathedral, synthesizes the Thaw
era values of truth and authenticity with the author’s profound anxiety about the future of the
natural environment and his geographic imagination, which links the Dnieper and the Ukrainian
steppe with the idea of freedom. In particular Honchar’s anxiety stemmed from the post-WWII
development and transformation of the Dnieper river, which produced a series of hydro-electric
dams, reservoirs, wetland reclamation projects, and industrial factories that polluted the water
and surrounding air. The novel celebrates natural and creative beauty and the value of nature,
unmediated by the Soviet economy. It is set in Zachiplianka, a fictitious industrial town on the
Dnieper river and in the nearby Skarbne wetlands, where workers flock on weekends and on
holidays to relax. Honchar speaks most clearly though the voice of his protagonist, the student
Mykola Bahlay. Mykola and a careerist bureaucrat Volod’ka Loboda clash over most things, but
their opposition centers on the fate of an old Cossack cathedral and the heart of a girl - Yelka,
who personifies the wild Ukrainian steppe.

Mykola invented a rudimentary air purifier that could filter the polluted air released from
the factories in Zachiplianka, but he failed to convince the plant directors to install it. Cost was
not the issue… air filters just did not improve production, so no one was interested: “To live in
magnificent natural surroundings, on the banks of one of the world’s most beautiful rivers, and to
have to breathe ore dust all one’s life… is that normal, mother?” 691 Yahor Katraty, Yelka’s

uncle, complains to the younger generation about the increasing pollution: “These are all your improvements, and your waters are flowing into the Dnipro making fish float to the surface belly-up. Yes, the directors pay fines of twenty and thirty thousand, taking them out of one pocket and slipping them into another. The number of chimneys is growing; you’re polluting the Dnipro, growing deaf from the clatter of machinery.”

Yelka’s fate forces her to leave the steppe and make a new life by the Dnieper river. Even though the Dnieper flows through the steppe they are two different environments, two different ways of living. The Dnieper environment in the Soviet age is modern, industrial, urban, while the steppe is not - despite the best efforts of generations of Soviet leaders. Yelka is a child of the steppe, but she is enchanted by the Dnieper, which is new to her. Honchar drew parallels between the vast steppe and the wide river. Both the steppe and the river represent freedom. Watching the factory workers boating on the river, enjoying the “calm beauty of the Dnipro’s waters” with their families, Yelka remarks, “What freedom there is here, what room for the soul!” Exploring her new home, Yelka visits a Cossack museum and muses to herself: “These were men, they defended our land, giving you this sky, the vastness of the steppes, and the glitter of the Dnipro as an everlasting dowry!”

The drama with the cathedral begins when Volod’ka secretly steals the cathedral’s plaque, which attests to its historical and cultural significance. He dreams of erecting a modern shopping center in its place. Honchar could not have foreseen that the reaction of the townspeople - in his novel - in defense of the Cathedral would be mirrored by the reaction of the Ukrainian population in defense of his novel. In both cases the conflict became bigger and

692 Ibid., 34.
693 Ibid., 107.
694 Ibid., 62-63.
695 Ibid., 101.
broader than the provocation. It was not simply about Honchar or the novel or the cathedral or
the plaque, but about freedom, independence, the abuse (and ignorance) of power, and the will of
the people. Mykola notes: “Today the people noticed their cathedral. To them, it was not subject
to destruction, because they accepted it as one accepts life’s treasures, just as they had accepted
from birth the blueness of the Dnipro…”696

Volod’ka Loboda serves as Honchar’s central villain. For Honchar, Volod’ka’s most
nefarious act is not his plans to tear down the beautiful Cossack cathedral, his decision to
consign his own father to a retirement home, or even his misplaced pursuit of Yelka. True to
Honchar’s most pressing anxieties, Volod’ka is a nature transformer. He is not a nature
transformer by profession, so this desire is revealed only in Volod’ka’s inner thoughts and in the
accusations of the person who knows him best, his father. Volod’ka sees both nature and Yelka
as something he can shape: “This Yelka was a real treasure, a rare, wild product of nature. True,
not so much a product, as material, but what material! Let her be a little savage, a little
unpolished, well perhaps this was better? He could form her himself, it was not yet too late. […]
From the earth, from nature, she was all ablaze, smelling of the sun and the steppes.”697

In Skarbne, Volod’ka visits his father - a former stakhanovite steelworker, whose “name
had thundered right down the Dnipro,” but the old man flies into a rage:

Before [Volod’ka] had been planning to demolish cathedrals, but now he was trying to
wheedle a way to flood the swamps, to drive his father from here too! This had to be pure
fantasy, complete balderdash; the son hadn’t even heard a rumor of such a thing. He
wanted to yell out, to deny it: ‘Dad!’ But his father only hissed at him and continued to
boom, sending an echo through the place: he had already gotten together with those
plunderers from the state farm; they wanted to build another Hydro-Electric Station, what
did they care about the marshes and Skarbne? They would sink with a bang! It would be
like over there near Kakhovka, where half of Ukraine was flooded, where they thought
they were building a sea, but built a mire instead! And now it rotted away, stinking across

696 Ibid., 120-21.
697 Ibid., 125.
Volod’ka was confused by his father’s accusations. Pure fantasies, he thought to himself, but on the other hand… “in reality there was something to that, this idea was worth considering! Because what good were these swamps? They only bred mosquitoes! Rubbish and food scraps all through the forest! We’re transforming the Dnipro, why not transform the Skarbne? By flooding it, or conversely, draining it?”699 The character of Volod’ka’s father, Izot Loboda, performs the role of protector of Skarbne, of natural wilderness, of untamed nature: “If it kept going this way, storks would probably stop flying over beautiful Ukraine. Some bureaucrat would get it into his head: let’s have a new dam over there, there’s your dam, and they’d start chopping the swamps up, creating in its place a stinking rotting sea, thick as oatmeal jelly, drowning millions of things […] Would they really encroach on Skarbne? ‘If they dry the marshes, there will be nothing! No mists! Hear that? There will be no mists in the morning!’” he called out to someone in his mind, as if were something horrifying.”700

Throughout Honchar’s novel the Skarbne marshes serve the nearby urban working population of Zachiplianka in the same ways that the Koncha-Zaspa nature preserve in Kyiv served Honchar, Dovzhenko, and the residents of Kyiv. Even the most devout urbanites dreamed of escaping to Skarbne on their days off.701 By defending the existence of Skarbne, the character of Izot argued for the value of public access to nature.

The marshes, at last! Skarbne. Everything in a tumult of greenery, summer in full bloom. It offered its green embraces to the arriving city dwellers, breathed fresh forest air, health. Buses kept arriving one after another, disgorging people armed with fishing rods and reels, loaded down with knapsacks. They were all immediately swallowed up by the forest, the green twilight interwoven with sunshine – they dispersed, vanished, nowhere to be seen. The numbers of them that the city spewed out here on holidays, and there was

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698 Ibid., 144.
699 Ibid., 145.
700 Ibid., 244-45.
701 Ibid., 262.
enough marsh for everyone; nature had spread out its wings, strewing the treasures of the former Cossack forests and pasture.\textsuperscript{702}

Even careerist Volod’ka could not deny the benefits of this natural sanctuary, from which he never failed to emerge “refreshed by the waters of Skarbne and caressed by the sun…”\textsuperscript{703} His inner dialogue reveals that his designs for transforming Skarbne were driven more by his desire to impress his bosses than conviction in the wisdom of his plans.\textsuperscript{704}

Toward the end of the novel, Honchar explicitly made the connection, suggested throughout - between the cathedral and Ukrainian nature: “Wide-crowned oaks – the green cathedrals of Skarbne – painted their silhouettes in the water. Yelka paused many a time, pensively looking at these forest cathedrals with green domes. […] Peace and tranquility. What more did a person need?\textsuperscript{705} Honchar’s spirituality was not religious, but drew from his appreciation of beauty, both manmade and natural.

Conclusions

Honchar’s evolution took place in the context of broader movements that pushed back against Soviet policies, including environmental abuses, russification, religious suppression, and violation of basic human rights.\textsuperscript{706} A generation of writers and artists followed Dovzhenko’s lead and challenged the boundaries of socialist realism. In response to Vatchenko’s successful campaign against Honchar and his novel, hundreds of young creative intellectuals in

\textsuperscript{702} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{703} Ibid., 133.
\textsuperscript{704} Ibid., 155.
\textsuperscript{705} Ibid., 256.
Dnipropetrovsk issued an open letter attesting to the fraudulent and insincere nature of Vatchenko’s attack and, moreover, condemning the ongoing persecution of Ukrainians for loving Ukraine and standing up against abuses of power. Authorities fought back with arrests in 1961 and 1965, followed by hundreds of arrests aimed at ‘nationalist deviations’ in 1971-1972.

In May 1972, Petro Shelest, the First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party was replaced by a Moscow loyalist. In 1970 Honchar published the novel, *Cyclone*, a continuation of *Man and Arms*. The story centers on the former student, Bohdan who became a filmmaker after the war, which is perhaps a further nod to Dovzhenko.

Between 1956, when Dovzhenko died, and 1968, when *The Cathedral* was published, Honchar’s conception of the natural world and geographic imagination evolved. Honchar’s transformation responded to the large-scale hydro-engineering and nature transformation projects underway in Soviet Ukraine, though similar projects were also underway across the Soviet Union and throughout the modern world. The Dnieper river had long been a symbol of the Ukrainian people and nation. In his works, Honchar reinforced that link and associated the river and the Ukrainian steppe with freedom, a core Thaw era value in Soviet Ukraine. In both *Man and Arms* and *The Cathedral*, an attack against the Ukrainian landscape was an attack against the Ukrainian patrimony. However, in 1968 the perpetrators of these attacks were no longer Nazis. Honchar represents a generation that, without rejecting modernity or the modern world, lost faith in the mouthpieces of modernity. It was not just the fiziki that the liriki lost faith in during the final decades of the Soviet era, but the career bureaucrats, or nomenklaturi. Carrying the torch of Dovzhenko and continuing the aims laid out in the 1958 Conference on Nature Protection and Art, Honchar and the Ukrainian intelligentsia spoke as a self-consciously modern society, which no longer needed to prove its modernity with cascades of hydropower dams, industrial giants that

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released toxic waste into the air and water, or even nuclear powerplants.
Conclusion: From “Love Ukraine” to Eco-Nationalism

This dissertation begins with voices that valued productive nature and the new aesthetics of engineered nature. It ends with the critical environmentalism expressed by Oles’ Honchar in 1968. 1968 represents the beginning of Honchar’s public environmental activism, but within a few years the landscape shifted dramatically. A major wave of arrests in 1971-1972, aimed at rooting out Ukrainian nationalism, brought an end to an era when environmental activism was visible in the Soviet press, that is, until Chernobyl changed everything once again a decade and a half later. Although the construction of DniproHES in 1927-1932 was celebrated for making Soviet Ukraine modern and Kakhovka HES was initially supported for bringing water to Ukrainian agriculture, the tide of public favor decidedly turned against engineering the Dnieper River. However, hydropower development of the river continued unabated. By 1968 the Dnieper was lined by dams and massive reservoirs. After Kakhovka HES, Kremenchuk HES was built between 1954 and 1960, with an even larger reservoir that displaced a much larger population. Two more dams, at Dneprodzerzhinsk and just above Kiev were built between 1956 and 1964. Constructed between 1963-1975, Kaniv HES completed the Dnieper hydropower cascade. Further undermining the perceived utility of the unpopular reservoirs, a second station known as DniproHES-2 was added to the existing dam at Zaporizhzhia between 1969-1975. As Dovzhenko alluded to in his scenario for Poem of the Sea, in June 1954 the Soviets unveiled the first nuclear power plant in the world.708 By 1970, when construction began on the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, the atomic age had arrived in Soviet Ukraine.

Like many of the eco-patriots examined above, this project was inspired by Oleksandr Dovzhenko’s love for Ukrainian nature and, in particular, the southern reaches of the Dnieper River where the river meets the vast open steppe. It is also there among Cossack legends and

708 This Soviet station, located in Obninsk, was the first to contribute electricity to a power grid. However, electricity had been generated by an American reactor as early as September 1948.
fertile fields that Ukrainian national history meets the bountiful future of an agricultural paradise. This dissertation is grounded in the argument that between 1946 and 1968, environmental discourse among the cultural intelligentsia was driven by the dramatic transformation of the river. In addition to the cascade of hydropower dams and reservoirs, the Dnieper was also increasingly lined with factories that released toxic chemicals into its water and the surrounding air. Although the conditions and symptoms of the ‘1950s Syndrome’ are not in themselves novel, I incorporated the memory of WWII on Ukrainian territory into this narrative, which I suggest is particularly important in the Ukrainian context: both because the war physically scarred the Ukrainian landscape in significant ways and because patriotic landscape imagery pervaded wartime culture, such as in Sosiura’s 1944 poem, “Love Ukraine.”

Ideas about nature, nature protection, and national geography were closely tied to the Ukrainian national idea, but not inherently opposed to the Soviet idea. In the 1950s, the cultural intelligentsia sincerely embraced a new, modern, engineered, ordered ‘second nature’ and blended it with Ukrainian national history and culture. The construction of DniproHES in 1927-1932 made the Dnieper river modern, it made Soviet Ukraine modern, and it remained an overwhelmingly positive symbol of modern Ukraine throughout the Soviet era. The symbolic significance of agricultural fertility made Kakhovka HES both a modern and a nationally-oriented project for Soviet Ukraine. This is why Dovzhenko fully embraced the Kakhovka project, at least until the last two years of his life when he began to have doubts. Flooding the fertile Dnieper floodplain to fill the Kakhovka reservoir, which forced hundreds of thousands of inhabitants from their private gardens and orchards, undermined this initial success. With time, even greater ecological damage emerged, further eroding the image of an agricultural paradise in southern Ukraine.

Focusing on the Dnieper River, this dissertation traces shifting conceptions of the natural
environment and national landscape within the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia. The first two chapters reveal voices that enthusiastically welcomed the transformation of nature as a powerful symbol of modern Ukraine and confirmation of Ukraine’s modernity. The historical actors in these chapters valued productive nature and the new aesthetics of engineered nature. The third chapter functions as a pivot point of the dissertation, exploring the core national symbols employed in the State Anthem in the late 1950s. These symbols were directly linked with the Ukrainian landscape. And finally, the final two chapters trace the gradual emergence of an explicitly environmentalist discourse among the cultural intelligentsia, who championed the aesthetic, rather than purely productive, value of Ukrainian nature. As the Dnieper was increasingly harnessed to serve the Soviet economy, voices emerged in defense of beautiful, native nature, that was accessible to the local population broadly.

In different ways throughout my dissertation, I have shown that the cultural intelligentsia of the 1950s and 1960s articulated a form of environmental thought that was deeply rooted in the Ukrainian national idea. In the first three chapters, this environmentalism is expressed as a celebration of the beauty and fertility of Ukrainian nature and the Ukrainian landscape. In the final two chapters, voices within the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia began to make a direct appeal to protect nature based on these same values. This strain of environmentalism grew out of Dovzhenko’s love for the nature of his native land and evolved into a critique of the Soviet nature transformation agenda and the misguided abuse of power by Soviet bureaucrats. These eco-patriots rooted their arguments for nature protection in terms of its cultural, historical, and aesthetic value, which were inherently infused with national language, without being anti-Soviet.

The Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia embraced a hybrid nature. This was the nature of marsh grasses and steppe thistles, but also the nature of cultivated meadows, private gardens, and backyard pear trees. Moreover, they defended the accessibility of nature as a respite from modern
urban and industrial life. This was the nature of leisure activities such as fishing and boating, tree-lined streets, riverbank beaches, and urban parks where Ukrainians could sit quietly and look out over the Dnieper River. My cultural approach to the environmental history of Soviet Ukraine allowed me to write the cultural intelligentsia into the narrative of Soviet environmentalism, which largely highlights the scientific intelligentsia while marginalizing the cultural community. My project shows that in the 1950s and 1960s, the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia valued a different type of nature than the scientific intelligentsia who mourned the nature preserves. They understood nature in a broader sense, which encompassed cultivated or pastoral nature as well as pristine or virgin nature. Because of this difference, the environmentalism of the cultural intelligentsia has been largely underestimated, especially before the 1970s.

The memory of WWII is particularly pertinent to environmental discourse in the Ukrainian context for two reasons. Extended occupation and shifting frontlines deeply scarred the Ukrainian landscape. Moreover, patriotic celebrations of the Ukrainian national landscape, such as Sosiura’s “Love Ukraine,” were permitted during the war. Memories of the war, especially the war on Ukrainian territory, were infused with these same patriotic images of nature. War themes dominated Soviet literature in the first post-war decade. Therefore, WWII was no less of an important moment for this narrative than Stalin’s death. In fact, the significance of 1953 is further undermined by the zeal with which Stalin’s successors continued to pursued nature transformation and hydro-engineering projects. The link between agricultural fertility and Ukrainian national idea, which the voices analyzed in this dissertation clearly attest to, also made the Ukrainian context unique. Not only was initial support for Kakhovka HES among the cultural intelligentsia derived from its explicit agricultural aims, but the entire project was made possible by its promise to deliver the Dnieper’s water to the dry Ukrainian steppe, supporting the idea of a fertile agricultural paradise in southern Ukraine.
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