

V. Myslavskyi

Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, Kharkiv, Ukraine

O. Bezruchko

Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, Kyiv, Ukraine

## THE TOPIC OF THE SOVIET-UKRAINIAN WAR (1917–1921) IN UKRAINIAN CINEMATOGRAPHY OF THE 1920s

### V. Myslavskyi, O. Bezruchko. The topic of the Soviet-Ukrainian war (1917–1921) in Ukrainian cinematography of the 1920s

Most of the films about the revolution and the Soviet-Ukrainian war (1917–1921), made by AUPhCA in 1928–1930, proved to be uninteresting and did not gain big success among the audience. These films were made mostly by the methods of propaganda, posters, without much depth into the essence of the phenomenon, the script was built on a certain pattern – a parallel demonstration of good, brave guerrillas and scornful whites, i.e. on the one hand stupid bourgeois, mocking and torturing their class enemies, on the other hand – smart, heroic, friendly representatives of working class. According to some contemporaries, films about the events of the Soviet-Ukrainian war required other forms, a different embodiment. From naked propaganda, from stencil scheme to a more in-depth identification of the moments of class struggle, from a simplified external reflection of events, to a more specific individualization of the participants of the events. However, these films played an important role in the development of adventure cinema.

**Keywords:** *film history, the USSR, AUPhCA, motion picture industry.*

### В. Н. Миславський, О. В. Безручко. Тема радянсько-української війни (1917–1921) в українському кінематографі 1920-х рр.

**Актуальність теми.** Фільми про радянсько-українську війну (1917–1921), як її тоді називали, громадянську війну, займали одне з провідних місць у репертуарі українського кіно 1920-х рр. Але в працях істориків кіно ця тема не набула належного відображення і є маловивченою сторінкою в історії українського кінематографу. Тому актуальність цього дослідження полягає, головним чином, у заповненні істотного пробілу в історії українського кіно.

**Мета статті** – дослідити жанрові і тематичні особливості українських фільмів про радянсько-українську війну (1917–1921) у 1920-ті рр.

**Методологією** цього дослідження є методи і принципи мистецтвознавчого аналізу фільмів Всеукраїнського фотокіноуправління (далі ВУФКУ)

в 1920-ті рр. про радянсько-українську війну (1917–1921) як складової вітчизняного і світового кінематографу.

**Результати.** Сучасний мистецтвознавчий аналіз фільмів, знятих українськими кінематографістами в 1920-ті рр. про радянсько-українську війну (1917–1921), засвідчив, що, незважаючи на вагому частку стрічок вищевказаної тематики в загальній частці кінокартин ВУФКУ, кількість не переросла в якість. Насамперед це пояснюється домінуванням ідеологічної складової, яка на той час превалювала над мистецькими засадами.

**Новизна.** Стаття є першою спробою сучасних українських кінознавців проаналізувати художні фільми про радянсько-українську війну (1917–1921), зняті сто років тому фахівцями ВУФКУ.

**Практичне значення.** Всесторонньо досліджена тема радянсько-української війни (1917–1921) в українському кінематографі 1920-х рр. може стати основою для подальших наукових розвідок й написання як дисертацій, так і навчальних посібників з історії кіномистецтва.

**Висновки.** Переважна частина фільмів про т. зв. революцію і радянсько-українську війну (1917–1921), як її тоді називали, громадянську війну, створена ВУФКУ в 1928–1930 рр., виявилася малоцікавою й не користувалася значним успіхом у глядачів. Ставилися ці фільми, здебільшого, за методами агітки, плаката, без особливого заглиблення в суть явища, сценарій створювався за певним шаблоном – паралельний показ хороших, відважних партизанів і плюгавих білих. Тобто, з одного боку, дурні буржуї, знущаються і катують своїх класових ворогів, з іншого – розумні, героїчні, доброзичливі представники робітничого класу. На думку деяких сучасників, фільми про події, як її тоді називали, громадянської війни, потребували інших форм, іншого втілення. Від агітки, трафаретної схеми – до поглибленішого виявлення моментів класової боротьби, від спрощеного зовнішнього відображення подій до конкретної індивідуалізації учасників подій. Однак ці фільми відіграли важливу роль для розвитку пригодницького кіно.

**Ключові слова:** *історія кіно, УРСР, ВУФКУ, кінопромисловість.*

**Problem statement.** Films about the Soviet-Ukrainian War (1917–1921) occupied one of the leading places in the repertoire of Ukrainian cinema of the 1920s. But in the works of film historians, this topic was not properly reflected and remains a little-studied page in the history of Ukrainian cinema. Therefore, the relevance of this study lies mainly in filling up a significant gap in the history of Ukrainian cinema.

**Analysis of recent researches and publications.** In the works of Ukrainian film critics on the history of Ukrainian cinema, the diversity of the repertoire was not analyzed in terms of theme and genre constructions. Only in some publications of V. Myslavskiy an attempt was made to consider certain genre-thematic aspects of the formation of Ukrainian cinema: children's films (Myslavskiy, 2017, pp. 119–123), social films (Myslavskiy, 2015, pp. 91–95), comedies (Myslavskiy, 2016, pp. 109–113), films on international topics (Myslavskiy, 2019, pp. 132–158). Thus, this issue did not become the subject of a separate study, although it played a key role in the development of Ukrainian cinema in the 1920s.

**The purpose of the article** – to explore the genre and thematic features of Ukrainian films about the Soviet-Ukrainian War in the 1920s.

**Presentation of the main research material.** Films about the Soviet-Ukrainian War (1917–1921) occupy a significant place in the repertoire of AUPhCA in the 1920s. In 1923 director V. Gardin was entrusted with staging a film based on L. Nikulin's story "Khmel". The joint production of the Yalta and Odesa film studios was called "Ataman Khmel". It was a production made exclusively by creative forces from Moscow ([Ed. art.], 1923 (2), p. 13), with the participation, as reported in the press, more than 3000 extras ([Ed. art.], 1923 (1), p. 14). The film was set in one of the southern cities. The remnants of the White Guard troops, pressed by the Red Army, are united with the formation of the ataman Khmel. On the background of these events, a love conflict in one bourgeois family is developing. The head of the family, as a result of his wife's betrayal, becomes disillusioned with the people of his circle and goes over to the side of Soviet power. Gardin's film which depicts a melodramatic love story on the background of the Soviet-Ukrainian War (1917–1921), was widely criticized. Moreover, from the point of view of professionalism, it did not raise doubts in anyone. For the director Gardin, such an essentially empty topic became a good reason to demonstrate his skills (Mick, 1924, p. 43).

The picture was mainly criticized for the concept, incorrectly placed accents, thanks to which the White Guard aroused the viewer's sympathy. But the main problem was that, thanks to the professional embodiment of this "harmful story" the film could intoxicate the audience and in working areas it has no place ([Ed. art.], 1926 (1), p. 16).

Another Gardin's film about the Soviet-Ukrainian War (1917–1921) was released in 1924, when the Ukrainian film production of AUPhCA began to expand. The film "Ostap Bandura", based on a script by the Ukrainian writer M. Maiskiy, is about a native of a peasant family who became a formidable leader of a partisan detachment. In prison, Ostap meets the worker Anisim. Under his leadership, Ostap became a literate and conscientious revolutionary fighter. On the way to Siberia, they both flee. They hide in a dense taiga forest. Ostap is going through the underground resistance movement school. He actively fights against tsarism.

The film was received ambiguously. Press reviews ranged from sharply negative to praiseworthy. "It is enough to look at the first two parts to see that an interesting topic, an entertaining plot, has been turned into a boring psychological gum. Half of the plot, instead of the action, is given in the story by memories. – The critic I. Urazov noted. – The main roles are played by Kapralov and Bystritskaia. The actress has powerlessness in movement. Kapralov plays a little better than his partner, but "Ostap Bandura" is not up to him either" (Urazov, 1924, p. 3).

Other reviewers, on the contrary, considered the film an achievement of Soviet cinematography. "The whole picture is close to the content of the worker, but, unfortunately, the battle between the Red Army and the Whites is unnatural, which looks more like maneuvers. But, in general, the whole picture, as a propaganda one, is very valuable for the proletarian masses and should also be shown in the workers' cinema at the clubs" (Kholmskaia, 1924, p. 8). "The figure of Ostap Bandura as a fighter and a revolutionary is very good. The script for this film was composed with deep Marxist thoughtfulness ... "Ostap Bandura" is undoubtedly one of our best films" (Skrynnikov, 1924, p. 13). "With regard to the production, in particular, in the crowd scenes, great success has been achieved in this film. No, the truth of the beauty and symmetry of Liubich's techniques, but the spectator, in any case, is captured by the liveliness of the crowd scenes and by the masses

themselves that are always natural and theatrically disciplined” (M. V., 1924, p. 4).

Another film about the Soviet-Ukrainian War, released in 1924, was also directed according to the script of the Ukrainian writer D. Buzko. The painting “Forest Beast” (directed by A. Lundin) told about the struggle of the Red Army against the remnants of white gangs in Ukraine in 1921, in the Odessa region. The young cossack Yukhym, the right hand of ataman Zabolotnyi, nicknamed as Forest Beast, after long deliberations, goes over to the side of the Reds. The film was one of the most important ones for AUPhCA, and the shooting process was often reported in the press. The opinions of the reviewers were almost the same. Some believed that the film would be prolonged (Lel, 1925, p. 6) and some elements were borrowed from the adventure film “The Red Devils”, and that Soviet spectators had outgrown “The Forest Beast” long time ago (Sokolov, 1926, p. 16).

Other reviewers drew attention to the fact that the political and social side of banditry in the film was only partially revealed and the director’s failure was attributed to a weak script, in which only the external aspects of banditry were covered (Weiting, 1925, p. 6). And, nevertheless, along with criticism, some reviewers noted that “Forest Beast” is one of the best pictures produced by AUPhCA (Ur, 1925, p. 12).

In 1925, two more films about the Soviet-Ukrainian War were released. The two-part film “Ukrazia” was conceived as the most ambitious film production, on which AUPhCA spent colossal funds. The script of “Ukraine and Asia” was written by the prose writer N. Borisov and the screenwriter and G. Stabovoi. The production was entrusted to the most experienced director P. Chardynin. The shooting of the picture lasted more than five months in different cities of Ukraine, with the involvement of up to 3000 extras. The premiere of the film was to take place simultaneously in Moscow, Leningrad, Kharkiv, Kyiv and Odesa. The script was based on the documents of Odesa Ispart and the memoirs of responsible party workers, direct participants of the events of the Soviet-Ukrainian War of 1918-1920 in “Ukrainian Asia” (I. Z., 1924, p. 14).

The staging of adventure films about the Soviet-Ukrainian War was associated with certain risks, since the theme of the picture was already very well known to the audience – the Whites and the Reds, white rear, red underground, struggle and victory. By 1925, a lot of similar pictures of different quality were released on the screens of the USSR. And a certain stereotype of heroes has

already been developed. Thus, a communist had a “spiritualized” face, long hair, and wore a leather jacket with an unbuttoned collar. The types of revolutionaries were lined up according to the principle that “good heroes must be beautiful”. The types of bad heroes, as a rule, were cruel, ugly, in difficult situations they lost their inherent influence, cruelty and became objects of mockery. A similar approach in characterizing negative characters was typical for film campaigns of 1918–1920, when negative characters were presented by people who were helpless and caricatured. This approach had very negative consequences, since it was false and the audience, brought up on such films, according to the spot-on remark of the Ukrainian writer A. Poltoratskyi, perceived the enemies of the revolution with the famous slogan “we will throw our hats on them” (Poltoratskyi, 1930, p. 40).

Despite the fact that the influential Russian writer and politician V. Kirshon at that time gave Ukrainian films about the Soviet-Ukrainian War (“Ukraziya”, “Trypillian tragedy”, “Forest Beast”) the characteristics of “very rough and absurdly made propaganda films” (Kirshon, 1927, p. 31), the film “Ukraziya” received a wide response. Thus, the central Soviet newspapers “Pravda” and “Izvestia” published reviews of “Ukraziya” on the same day – February 22, 1925 ([Ed. art.], 1925 (4), p. 40).

In general, the picture was well received. Many reviewers emphasized that “Ukraziya” was the first great achievement of AUPhCA, but at the same time noting that the picture was prolonged (Be, 1925, p. 11; A-v, 1925, p. 17; Kelder, 1925, p. 17; Syrnik, 1925, p. 9; Ed.Art., 1926 (6), p. 31).

Of course, the film “Ukraziya” was created by AUPhCA in such a way as to show all the achievements of Ukrainian cinematography, and at the same time to be interesting for the spectator and have commercial success. In those few negative reviews, the picture was criticized precisely for this approach, the protractedness, as noted above, and the lack of the necessary emphasizes on the heroic struggle of the proletariat.

“In general, if the film had not been so heavy and long (2 episodes – 20 parts), it could have successfully demonstrated on Soviet screens. In its present form, the patience of the spectator is unlikely to withstand it” (Lel, 1925, p. 18).

Film “The Arsenals” (screenwriter. G. Tasin; director Les Kurbas), that was also released in 1925, was left unnoticed. In one of the reviews, which we managed to find, it was reported that before the start of filming, “a joint meeting was held

with representatives of the Provincial Committee, Provincial department of political education, military units, "Arsenal" plant and participants in the October events in Kyiv" ([Ed. art.], 1925 (3), p. 15). The short propaganda film, played by the actors of the Berezhil theater, told about the uprising of the workers of the Kyiv Arsenal plant against the counter-revolutionary Rada during the Soviet-Ukrainian War, and was included in the second issue of the "Makhovyk" newsreel.

AUPhCA spent significant funds on shooting the film "PKP", as well as on the film "Ukraziya" mentioned above. The best cameramen were involved for filming — F. Verigo-Darovskii, M. Goldt, I. Gudima, G. Drobin. The production was entrusted to directors A. Lundin, G. Stabovoi. Some scenes of the film were filmed by P. Chardynin and E. Mukhsin-Bei, invited from Turkey ([Ed. art.], 1926 (2), p. 27).

The basis of the film "PKP" was made up of genuine historical events (PKP stands for the abbreviated name of the state railway "Polska koleia panstvova", but Ukrainian peasants deciphered the abbreviation — "Pilsudskii bought Petliura"). The film about the struggle of the Bolsheviks against the Petliura and Polish troops in Ukraine in 1920–1921 was being shot under the working titles "1920–1921" and "Petliura and the Cheka" ([Ed. art.], 1926 (3), p. 12). The shooting of the "grandiose historical film" took place in Kyiv, Berdychiv and Zhytomyr. In the pavilions of the factory, the painter Solomon Zaritskii built the "St. Sophia Cathedral", the center of "All-Ukrainian" espionage, the palaces of Petliura and Pilsudskii, "Bar American" in Lviv, etc. (Mohylianskyi, 1926, p. 11). Initially, the film was conceived as a two-part film, but apparently after a big amount of criticism of the protractedness of the film "Ukraziya" they decided not to take a risk. As a result, the film "PKP" was released in eight parts, and, nevertheless, the reviewers noted that the film "prolonged and boring". The reviewer of the "Rabochii Klub" magazine in his detailed review noted the confusion of the plot, and at the same time praised the camera work and the debunking in the film of "Ukrainian chauvinism of the times of the UPR (Ard (2), 1926, p. 71).

Another picture that is worth our attention is "Perekop" by I. Kavaleridze, which caused an ambiguous reaction. Kavaleridze, like Dovzhenko, applied innovative methods in his work. But many reviewers regarded Kavaleridze's experiments as formalism.

The film was criticized not only for its formal aesthetic experiments, but also for understating

the true social meaning of the class struggle: "The literary pages of the heroic episodes of the Soviet-Ukrainian War and the liquidation of the intervention fade away in front of the artistic, juicy, strong images that director Kavaleridze gave in his last work "Perekop". <...> The film is striking in its greatness of artistic perception, in which psychological realism is intertwined with synthetic images" (Yanchuk, 1930, p. 14).

**Conclusions.** Most of the films about the revolution and the Soviet-Ukrainian War, created by AUPhCA in 1928–1930, turned out to be of little interest and did not gain much success in the audience. These films, as a rule, were staged using propaganda methods, posters, without much deepening into the essence of the phenomenon, the script was built according to a certain template — a parallel demonstrating of good, brave partisans and worthless whites, that is, on the one hand, stupid bourgeoisie, that mocks and tortures their class enemies, on the other hand, they are smart, heroic, benevolent representatives of the working class. According to some contemporaries, films about the events of the Soviet-Ukrainian War demanded other forms, a different embodiment. From naked propaganda, from a stencil scheme to a deeper identification of the moments of the class struggle, from a simplified external reflection of events, to a more specific individualization of the participants of the events. However, these films played an important role in the development of adventure cinema.

**Prospects for further researches.** Further comprehensive scientific researches are promising, aimed, for example, at studying the development of adventure cinema in Ukrainian cinema in the coming years.

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