

### Author Biography

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## Budynok Slovo and The Executed Renaissance

*Ayn Duringer*

### Introduction

On March 8th, 2022 a series of Russian artillery bombardments over the Kharkiv Region in Ukraine damaged a monument of local significance, Budynok Slovo ('Slovo House'), located at #9 Culture St., in the central city of Kharkiv.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 1:** Slovo House in 2021 (left) and after shelling in March 2022 (right) (Source: EU-EEAS Strategic Communications)<sup>2</sup>

After its completion on Christmas day of December 1929, Budynok Slovo became home to sixty-six members of the Ukrainian literary elite, as well as their families. The building was composed of spacious three-to-five room apartments,

<sup>1</sup> Strategic Communications, "The Word is Adamant: the Struggle for Existence of Ukrainian Literature," European Union External Action Initiative, April 18, 2022. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/artvswar-word-adamant-struggle-existence-ukrainian-literature\\_\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/artvswar-word-adamant-struggle-existence-ukrainian-literature__en) (accessed December 1, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

built five stories high using imported materials, designed according to the most fashionable Soviet avant-garde, and constructed to resemble the Cyrillic letter “C” (or, in English, “S” for ‘Slovo’). Complete with a kindergarten on the bottom floor and a solarium on the roof, the ‘budynok’ functioned as a gated community with access reserved only for its elite residents and their guests. It soon grew into a luxurious paradise, a cultural hub, and a sanctuary for Kharkiv’s most talented authors, poets, and dramatists.<sup>3</sup>

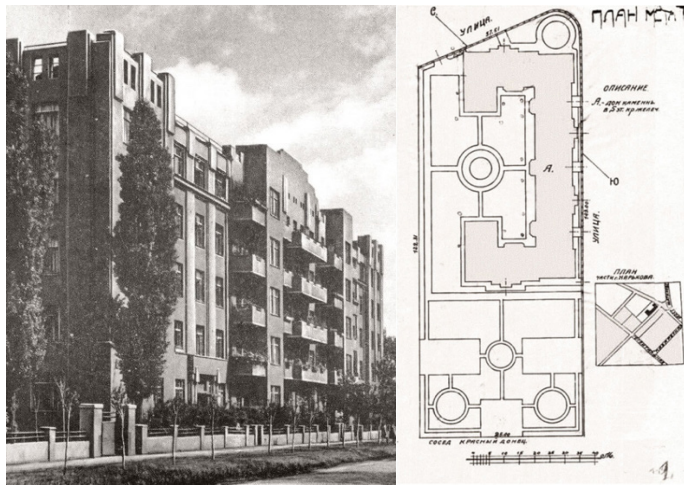


Figure 2: Slovo House photograph and floor plan at Completion in 1929 (Source: proslovo.com)

In the later months of 1930, however, the writers’ sanctuary transformed into their cage. Intrusions (by members of the State Political Administration (GPU), Kharkiv’s Central Committee (CC CP(b)U), and the Department of Internal Affairs (NKVD)) into the work, lives, and property of the Slovo House writers became commonplace during the Counter-Ukrainization movement between 1930-1935. As they walked home, Slova’ny began to take notice of strangers following closely behind them. From their windows, they saw strangers smoking cigarettes for hours under their balconies. The same strangers were soon seen in the corridors, freely going in and out of residential apartments while occupants were away. In contrast to the carefree, extravagant atmosphere of Budynok Slovo’s early days, the writers’ house had now become a place festering with paranoia.<sup>4</sup>

3 Olga Bertelson, “Spatial Dimensions of Soviet Repressions in the 1930s: The House of Writers (Kharkiv, Ukraine)” (Thesis for doctorate of philosophy, University of Nottingham, July 2013), 55-66, [https://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/13390/1/SPATIAL\\_DIMENSIONS\\_OF\\_SOVIET\\_REPRESSIONS\\_IN\\_THE\\_1930s.pdf](https://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/13390/1/SPATIAL_DIMENSIONS_OF_SOVIET_REPRESSIONS_IN_THE_1930s.pdf).

4 Bertelson, “Spatial Dimensions,” 119.

The first arrest (that of Galina Orlivna) occurred on January 20th, 1931.<sup>5</sup> By 1935, the GPU had detained residents from forty of the house’s sixty-six apartments. Many of them were arrested, executed, sent to labor camps, or simply disappeared— this generation of Ukrainian writers became known as the Executed Renaissance.<sup>6</sup>

Historiography relating to the Executed Renaissance and Budynok Slovo is scarce, particularly in the English-speaking world. The most comprehensive collection containing the works and professional biographies of early twentieth century Ukrainian writers is Yuriy Lavrinenko’s famed anthology *The Executed Renaissance*, 1917-1934. Lavrinenko’s essay “Literature in Liminal Spaces” and his contemporary Czeslaw Milosz’s novel *The Captive Mind* provide further analysis into the impact of Soviet repression on writers’ creativity and freedom of expression. These works have been hugely influential in shaping the modern perception of nationalist and Neo-Classical thought in Soviet republics during the early decades of the Soviet Union. In recent years, Lavrinenko and Milosz’s conclusions have received increased scrutiny from historians wishing to reevaluate the ‘Executed Renaissance Paradigm,’ namely Halyna Hryn and Pawel Krupa. An authoritative resource on the architectural background and the daily lives of Budynok Slovo’s residents (as well as the source of much of the history related above) is Olga Bergelson’s “Spatial Dimensions of Soviet Repressions in the 1930s: The House of Writers (Kharkiv, Ukraine).” In *Literary Purges in Soviet Ukraine (1930s): A Bio-Bibliography*, George Luckyj thoroughly explores the impacts of arrests, interrogations, and book banning on intellectual trends among early Soviet writers in Ukraine. In *Literary Politics in Soviet Ukraine, 1917-1934*, Luckyj provides an extensive number of translations of printed literary pamphlets, as well as Central Committee speeches and Literary Discussions held between 1920 and 1930 in Kharkiv and Kiev. Thus far, historiography relating to the Executed Renaissance has made the government regulation of early Soviet Ukrainian literary movements its focus, primarily examining the psychological and professional impacts of these repressions on members of the Ukrainian literary intelligentsia and Budynok Slovo.

It is the aim of this essay to add to this historiography by answering: Why did Soviet authorities in Ukraine begin repressing the intellectual ideas expressed by the Slova’ny authors?

5 Leonid Aleksandrov. *Archives of the Executed Renaissance* (Kiev: Smoloskyp, 2010), 13-146.

6 George Luckyj. *Literary Politics in the Soviet Ukraine 1917–1934* (New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1956), 173-203.

In order to get at this question, it is necessary to trace which ideas were targeted. In the first two sections of this essay, I discuss the growing influence of Neo-Classicism in Ukrainian literary circles (1923-1926), arguing that adoption of these ideas by two prominent Slova authors (Mykola Zerov and Mykola Khvylovyi) stemmed from their desire to redefine the national identity of the newly created Ukrainian Soviet Republic. In the third and final section of the essay, I discuss the opposition mounted (between 1926 and 1928) by other authors and academics, Ukrainian Central Committee members, and Moscow Communist Party officials against the Neo-Classical theories promoted by Zerov and Khvylovyi. While Neo-Classicalists believed that Ukrainian literature could flourish by developing a literary tradition aligned toward Europe's and stylistically independent of Russia's, their opposition (largely Socialist Realists) strongly disagreed. I argue that, seeing the proliferation of Western European and Byzantine literary works and techniques in Ukraine as tantamount to a revival of the class-based bourgeois ideals so recently eradicated by the 1917 Revolution and Russian Civil War, many of Ukraine's government officials and literary elites began to fervently oppose Zerov and Khvylovyi's ideas. This conflict over the course of Ukraine's literature, and, by extension, its national identity, became the reason for the GPU's suspicion and subsequent repression of the Slova authors.

### Mykola Zerov: Reevaluating Ukrainian Literary Tradition

Mykola Zerov (a Kyivian poet, literary critic, and professor of philology at the Kyiv Institute for Public Education) endorsed Neo-Classicism and looked to revive Ukraine's forgotten ties to European (particularly ancient Greek and Roman) literary tradition. For Zerov, reevaluating Ukrainian literary tradition in terms of its European influence was equivalent to a revival of Ukraine's true heritage; he believed that the Ukrainian literary tradition could flower by looking to Europe. Though these were not wholly atypical views during the Ukrainization movement of the 1920's, by 1925, Zerov's Neo-Classical attitudes spread from small-circulation literary pamphlets and closed-door discussions to journals and periodicals for the mass consumer; it was then that these beliefs began to acquire unfavorable attention from leaders of the Soviet Communist Party.

In his poem "Kyiv from the Left Bank," Zerov illustrated the permanence of European influence on Ukraine's cultural history by examining St. Sophia's Cathedral, an architectural monument built by the Byzantines early in the eleventh

century.<sup>7</sup> In 1923, at the time of this poem's publication, St. Sophia's Cathedral had narrowly escaped complete demolition. The Red Army's victories during the Siege of Perekop in November of 1920 (a decisive battle during the Russian Civil War in Crimea) prompted the Soviet urban planning commission to seek suitable grounds within the city of Kyiv for the development of a commemorative park to be named 'Heroes of Perekop.' St. Sophia's Cathedral was the first site chosen; however, due to fervent protests from Kyiv's citizens and members of the Institute of Material Culture, the project was abandoned.<sup>8</sup> Though it escaped demolition, the cathedral was soon closed to religious services and its twenty tower bells removed. In his 1923 poem, Zerov addresses St. Sophia's bell tower directly, writing,

*"Your glory days have waned, your pride diminished,  
and the hundred echoes of your tower bells  
cannot dissolve the evil charms and spells  
that took your blossoming statehood and your glory."*<sup>9</sup>

Zerov saw the 1920s as a period of nation building—culturally and politically. While he supported the Soviet Communist Party's political restructuring of the Ukrainian territory into a Soviet Republic, cultural reforms were, for Zerov, a separate matter. Located in the very heart of Kyiv, for Zerov, St. Sophia's Cathedral once epitomized pride and glory for Ukrainian cultural history. The Party's endeavor to replace the cathedral with the 'Heroes of Perekop' park signaled early attempts to fashion a new, unified Soviet identity. The ease with which this cultural monument was nearly torn down indicated to Zerov that its "glory days ha[d] waned."

<sup>10</sup>Though Zerov bitterly lamented this decline (as seen in his own words quoted above), he also saw it as an opportunity to reassess Ukraine's cultural history. To the chagrin of his many Party colleagues, Zerov identified the predominating forces of Ukrainian artistic heritage in the European Mediterranean rather than in the Northern Rus. The genesis of these views, so characteristic of much of his later work, can be seen in the following excerpt of his 1923 poem,

<sup>7</sup> Yuriy Lavrinenko, *The Executed Renaissance, 1917-1934* (Paris: Kultura, 1959), 130-131.

<sup>8</sup> Lavrinenko, *The Executed Renaissance*, 122-124.

<sup>9</sup> Original text: Давно в минулім дні твоєї слави, / І плаче дзвонів стоголоса мідь, / Що вже не вернеться щаслива мить / Твого буяння, цвіту і держави

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

*"But, even you poor pilgrim, standing here upon the  
Dnieper's bank,  
Can look upon the stone chimaeras, the Baroque,  
Upon Schedel's white-columned marvel:  
Its spirit still lives on, its strength sustained  
Within this green hill that's for the moment languid,  
Piercing the azure sky with its jutting golden spires."*<sup>11</sup>

Though originally constructed in 1018, due to a number of robberies, partial destructions, and repairs, by the 1920's the cathedral's architectural framework most closely resembled Ukrainian Baroque—a polychromatic style rich with floral ornaments and stucco decoration adapted from late-sixteenth century Italian architecture.<sup>12</sup> Zerov's mentions of stone chimaeras, white columns, the Baroque style, and Johann Gottfried Schedel (the German architect and designer of St. Sophia's bell tower) all highlight these European stylistic influences.

In contrast to its first stanza, the final lines of Zerov's poem illustrate predominantly hopeful motifs, betraying a sequence of thought characteristic of Zerov's work: the tone of the poem's first lines is one of dissatisfaction with present events and mourning for the past; the poem's middle charts a search for identity rooted in a return to one's cultural origins (symbolized by the emphasis of the cathedral's architectural foundations); lastly, the final stanza consists of a hopeful message that the 'glory days' aren't gone but simply slumbering. For Zerov, this method of 'returning to the sources' in order to develop a distinctly Ukrainian cultural identity required identifying whom or what was responsible for creating Ukraine's greatest cultural emblems such as St. Sophia's Cathedral.

In a series of pamphlets published in 1926, Zerov appealed to Kharkiv's literary intelligencia, saying, "we must not avoid ancient or even feudal Europe."<sup>13</sup> Zerov's words were published in a cycle titled *Ad Fontes*, making clear the changes he wished to elicit in post-revolutionary Ukrainian literature. The title itself (*Ad Fontes*), when translated from its original Latin, means "To the Sources." These 'sources' which Zerov sought to reintegrate into Ukrainian literary tradition were

influential ancient Greek and Roman works such as those of Euripides, Virgil, Ovid, or Sophocles. Continuing his appeal, Zerov wrote, "perhaps it is better for a proletarian to become infected with the class determinants of a Western European bourgeois, than with the lukewarmness of a repentant Russian patrician."<sup>14</sup> By advocating for greater recognition of the European literary canon, Zerov sought to 1) obtain resources for and increase access to translations of Western literature, 2) clarify the origins and influences of Ukrainian literary heritage, and 3) develop higher educational standards within Ukraine.<sup>15</sup> It is his second goal which eventually made him a target of the GPU, and which will now be examined more closely.

Zerov further addressed the question of where the root influences of Ukrainian literary tradition truly lie, arguing that, "Whether we like it or not, from the times of Kulish, Drahomanov, Franko, Lesia Ukrainka, Kotsiubyns'kyi, and Kobylans'ka—European forms and themes have penetrated our literature and stayed there."<sup>16</sup> Each of the names mentioned above by Zerov belonged to noteworthy Ukrainian literary figures. Panteleimon Kulish (1819-1897), for instance, was a prominent writer, critic, and translator from the Chernigov Governorate (an ethnically Ukrainian territory which, during his lifetime, belonged to the Russian Empire). At a time during which the Russian Empire sought to repress the teaching of Ukrainian language and history, Kulish published prolifically on these topics, ultimately becoming the first person to translate the Bible into the modern Ukrainian language.<sup>17</sup> The last name on Zerov's list, Olha Kobylans'ka (1863-1942), belonged to a Ukrainian writer known for drawing influence from French novelist George Sand and German philologist Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>18</sup>

By emphasizing this list of authors, Zerov delineated the Ukrainian literary heritage as separate from that of the Russian. Zerov did not claim that prolific nineteenth century Russian writers such as Pushkin, Tolstoy, or Dostoyevsky exhibited no influence on Ukrainian literature. However, he believed that, while Russian literature entered its Golden Age in the nineteenth century, concurrently, authors such as Kulish and Kobylans'ka propelled Ukrainian literature into an era altogether different and distinct in its inclination toward the west.

<sup>11</sup> Original text: Але, мандрівне, тут на пісках стань, / Глянь на химери бароккових бань, / На Шеделя білоколонне диво: / Живе життя, і силу ще таїть / Оця гора зелена і дрімлива, / Ця золотом цвяхована блакить

<sup>12</sup> Cyril Mango, review of *The Cathedral of St. Sophia in Kiev*, by Olexa Powstenko, *The Art Bulletin* 38, no. 4 (December 1956), 253-255. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3047673>.

<sup>13</sup> Luckyj, *Literary Politics*, 100.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>17</sup> Taras Koznarsky, "Ukrainian Literary Scholarship in Ukraine Since Independence," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 54, no. 1-2 (March-June 2012), 167-184. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41710578>.

<sup>18</sup> Marko Pavlyshyn, "Diary, Autobiography and Autobiographical Fiction: Reading Ol'ha Kobylans'ka," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 2000, 43-58. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40912273>.



For Zerov, Europe's influence was already deeply embedded in Ukraine's artistic heritage, making further stylistic orientation toward the west the best strategy for the development of Ukraine's literary tradition. While this remained a well-reasoned approach in academic circles, many members of the Kharkiv Communist Writers' Union and Ukrainian Soviet party leaders grew suspicious of the line which Zerov claimed to draw, separating his beliefs regarding culture from Soviet politics. Party officials increasingly likened Neo-Classicists such as Zerov with nationalists. Meanwhile, widened readership and reprints not only in Kharkiv but across Ukraine as well as other republics brought increased scrutiny upon Zerov's *Ad Fontes* and his early works.

### Mykola Khvylovyyi: Europe or Pros'vita?

Mykola Khvylovyyi, a Kharkivian writer and literary journal editor, began his career as a polemist by publishing *Kamo Hriadeshy* (Wither Are You Going?) in 1925. In this essay, Khvylovyyi asked whether Ukrainian literature ought to emulate Europe's classical literary canon (the ancient Greeks, the Romans, the Italian Renaissance) or *Pros'vita* (Russian folk culture and Soviet Realism). Without mincing words, Khvylovyyi argued that Ukrainian literary trends ought to "run away from Moscow as fast as possible."<sup>19</sup> Khvylovyyi was quickly labeled a nationalist sympathizer by columnists and critics affiliated with the Communist Party. At the height of the Ukrainization Movement in Kharkiv, many artists and writers became outspoken nationalists; however, for Khvylovyyi (a devout communist), this label brought increased scrutiny and suspicion from Party affiliates.

Khvylovyyi first experimented with addressing the issue of Ukrainian cultural autonomy in his 1923 short story "Redaktor Kark." This short story became the origin point for two reoccurring themes present in his later polemic essays and pamphlets: 1) establishing a Ukrainian literary tradition free of Russian influence is crucial if Ukraine is to retain its own culture and 2) in order to sustain this autonomous culture Ukrainian artists must look to Western European literary techniques and styles.<sup>20</sup> The story, related in a stream of consciousness style, follows its main character, Kark, through a series of mundane meetings and conversations that exacerbate his growing disillusionment with post-revolutionary bureaucracy, culminating in his suicide.

<sup>19</sup> Luckyj, *Literary Politics*, 97.

<sup>20</sup> Virginia Bennett, "Mykola Khvylovyyi's 'Redaktor Kark'—A Fictional Antecedent to His Pamphlets," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 31, no. 2 (Summer 1987), 158-170. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/308024>.

Through Kark's dialogue with minor characters, Khvylovyyi indicated that the russification of Ukraine during the Czarist period had, in his contemporary revolutionary times, created new problems of national identity for the Ukrainian people. One of Kark's first encounters is with Shkytz, a member of the Central Committee of the Socialist-Revolutionaries. Shkytz remarks that, "France—that's a nation. We, we are nothing but a place name, and that place is a backwater"<sup>21</sup> Kark's minimal engagement with this monologue implies his disdain for Shkytz's hypocrisy. Though he is a high-placed officer of Ukraine's post-revolutionary government, Shkytz displays little faith in the nation he purports to lead, instead regarding it as a cultural backwater. Even his name, Shkytz (Ukrainian: Шкітз), can be translated into English as 'sketch' or 'outline,' stipulating that Shkytz himself is a caricature of the post-revolutionary bureaucrat. Later in the story, Kark listens to the political musings of a local wrestler, the man says revolutionaries ought to "throw the 'R' [the 'R' standing for 'Russia'] out of RCC, and the 'U' [the 'U' standing for 'Ukraine'] out of CP(b)U, and create a united CC."<sup>22</sup> The wrestler's words, typifying the opinions of rural Ukrainian laborers, illustrate a sense of resignation or complacency toward homogenization with Russia on the part of the masses. In this way, Khvylovyyi indicated that Ukraine's crisis of cultural identity pervaded both the governing bodies and the governed.

By using a metaphor about nightingales to define the artistic obligations of Ukrainian writers, Khvylovyyi touched upon the first of the two major themes that would preoccupy his literary career: the importance of establishing a Ukrainian literary tradition free of Russian influence. Khvylovyyi wrote, "Listen closely, each nightingale sings in its own way. Each tune among them is unique, some Mozarts, others Beethovens or Lysenkos. Simply repeating others' tunes is not to sing, not to create—it is but imitation."<sup>23</sup> Here Khvylovyyi indirectly chastises Ukrainian writers for imitating Russian literary styles rather than developing their own. For Khvylovyyi, the primary obligation of an artist is to experiment; only through experimentation can Ukrainian literature develop an identity distinct from that of the Russian. This sentiment is evident in Khvylovyyi's own work: "Redaktor Kark" is replete with unconventional, at times disorienting narrative styles such as metalepsis (breaking the fourth wall), stream of consciousness, and alternating narrators.

<sup>21</sup> Lavrinenko, *Executed Renaissance*, 410.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 413.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 409.

Khvył'ovyi's second theme (that to sustain an autonomous culture, Ukrainian artists must look to Western Europe) is represented by a long-forgotten Byzantine statue that catches Kark's eye. Standing in his apartment, Kark "glanced for a moment at the statuette by the door—a bust of some Roman general. He'd brought it home from his editorial office: a true antique. Kark gazed at the statuette with renewed interest. His office once housed a great seventeenth century newspaper. Its circulation spanned all of Ukraine...well, only the statuette remains."<sup>24</sup> Khvył'ovyi's words imply that the statue had remained in the editorial office since the 1600s; during this century, regarded as the peak of Ukrainian Baroque, Ukraine was more strongly tied with Western Europe than with Russia. Though the Russian Empire's nineteenth century policies of russification targeted these ties, Kark's observation that "the statuette remains" hints that, however faintly, Ukraine's cultural identity remains tethered to Europe. Kark's "renewed interest" in the statuette implies that, according to Khvył'ovyi, it is the artist's obligation to explore those latent ties.

Khvył'ovyi saw the Soviet political climate of the 1920s as a cultural crossroads at which Ukraine must choose between the European and the Russian artistic styles. In his work *Kamo Hriadeshy*, Khvył'ovyi recognized alignment with Europe as an essential element of the 1917 revolution's most successful endeavors. For instance, he found merit in comparing Lenin with Peter the Great, according to him, "both belonged to the same ideal type of man given to us [Soviet republics] by Europe."<sup>25</sup> He believed that, by orienting itself toward 'the force of psychological Europe,' Ukraine would improve upon the Russian Empire's literary golden age of the nineteenth century.

Khvył'ovyi used the term 'psychological Europe' to distinguish European cultural (artistic or philological) pursuits from their political policies. He advocated that this force would "lead [Ukraine's] young art onto the broad and happy path to the world goal."<sup>26</sup> For Khvył'ovyi, this 'world goal' was to create a Ukrainian literary heritage worthy of international renown. He believed that, by following this ideal, he and his fellow artists-communists "shall climb the Helicon and place there the beacon of a Renaissance."<sup>27</sup> Khvył'ovyi's words reveal that he was foremost concerned with the construction of a new Ukrainian cultural identity, one whose literary tradition was rooted in European (particularly classical Greek and Roman) motifs. This is especially evident by his reference to

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 410.

<sup>25</sup> Luckyj, *Literary Politics*, 94.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 95.

Mount Helicon (known in Greek myths as a site sacred to the Muses) together with his characterization of Ukraine's artists as the 'beacon'—the source, the beginning—of a new Renaissance.

In the years following the 1917 revolution, Khvył'ovyi welcomed Ukraine's transition into a Soviet Republic, wrote favorably about Leninist political reforms, exhibited his support by becoming a member of the Communist Party as well as a local official of the Bohudinov VChK, and (after moving to Kharkiv) formed VAPLITE, an organization for proletarian writers. In a pamphlet issued by VAPLITE in 1926, Khvył'ovyi wrote, "one must not confuse our political union with [a union of] literature."<sup>28</sup> Though he enthusiastically promoted the incorporation of Soviet policies in Ukraine, Khvył'ovyi felt quite strongly that Ukrainian "poetry must run away as fast as possible from Russian literature and its styles [...] if we try to feed our young art with it, we shall impede its development."<sup>29</sup> Like Zerov, he argued that Ukrainian cultural pursuits be treated as separate from Soviet politics.

Similar to Zerov, Khvył'ovyi maintained that Ukraine owed its literary heritage not to ideologies born in the Russian Empire or Soviet Union but rather to ones developed in Europe. Referring to the influences of Karl Marx's theories on Leninist civic policies and Socialist Realism, Khvył'ovyi wrote, "Proletarian ideas did not reach us through Muscovite art."<sup>30</sup> Unlike Zerov, whose promotion of Neo-Classicism was restricted to making changes within Ukraine, Khvył'ovyi's views held international ramifications. For Khvył'ovyi, these views held deep implications for the cultural identity he wished to forge in the newly created Soviet Republic of Ukraine. Writing for VAPLITE, Khvył'ovyi asserted that "we, a young nation, can better apprehend these [Western European] ideas and recreate them in proper images," thus "from Ukraine [these ideas] must spread to all parts of the world."<sup>31</sup> These theories made Khvył'ovyi all the more threatening in the eyes of Party leaders.

### Intra-Party Conflicts: A Prelude to Counter-Ukrainization

By 1925, opposition was forming against the intellectual unification with Europe proposed by both Zerov and Khvył'ovyi. The two sides soon began participating in ideological debates over the cultural role of literature in Ukraine. The debates were curated by leading academic institutions and publishing houses such

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 97

as the Kharkiv Institute of Public Education and the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. These literary discussions quickly grew contentious; Zerov and Khvylovyyi's opponents resorted to attacking the authors' loyalty to the Party, their political motives, and their character. Why then, while Zerov and Khvylovyyi remained so hopeful in building a distinction between Ukrainian culture and Soviet politics, did their contemporaries so strenuously oppose it?

Both sides held conflicting visions for the development of Ukraine's cultural identity. Zerov, Khvylovyyi, and their opponents recognized that Ukraine's transformation into a Soviet republic made redefining elements of its culture (such as language and literature) necessary. However, where Zerov and Khvylovyyi looked to revive Ukraine's cultural origins (particularly those that connected it to Europe), their opponents advocated for Realism; these academics believed that the content, style, and structure of both prose and poetry must reflect the life of a proletarian. They distrusted the distinction between politics and culture drawn by both Zerov and Khvylovyyi; they called it a façade, a ploy to steep Ukrainian literature in bourgeois ideals. In their eyes, the stylistic flourishes of Zerov's "Kyiv from the Left Bank," the experimental prose structure of Khvylovyyi's "Redaktor Kark," and the Western allusions present in both threatened to reintroduce into Ukraine a class struggle reminiscent of its days under the Russian Empire. For instance, during a discussion hosted by the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences on May 24th, 1925, Zerov and Khvylovyyi's vision for Ukrainian literature was critiqued as "bourgeois, philistine, and hostile to the goals of Communism."

Proponents of this critique believed that only by cutting all ties to its European cultural roots and by embracing purely Soviet culture could Ukrainians develop a literary tradition free of oppressive influences. One of these proponents, Andrii Khvyliia (as director of Ukraine's Communist Party Press Section), argued vocally against popularizing Western literary techniques in Ukrainian literature. At a public discussion in 1926, he asserted that "the literary front is the most sensitive of all; it reflects all contemporary moods, all political tendencies."<sup>32</sup> Khvyliia and other opponents of Zerov and Khvylovyyi opposed the idea of developing distinctions between Soviet politics and literary culture because, in their eyes, in order to redefine Ukrainian cultural identity without impeding the Soviet vision, the two must be inextricably linked.

These academic discussions among the Ukrainian literary intelligencia soon led to the political repression of Zerov, Khvylovyyi, and their ideological

allies. By 1926, transcripts from these discussions and pamphlets distributed by both sides had reached Moscow, attracted the attention of Josef Stalin, and prompted him to communicate directly with Kaganovich of the CC CP(b)U. In a letter sent to Kaganovich on April 26th, 1926, Stalin expressed concerns over the upsurge of aggressive Ukrainization. Citing Zerov and Khvylovyyi's distinction between culture and politics as "ridiculous and non-Marxist," Stalin asserted that "only by fighting the extremism of Khvylovyyi can we retain control over this new movement for Ukraine's culture [...] only in the fight against such extremes can the rising Ukrainian culture and Ukrainian public be turned into a Soviet culture and public."<sup>33</sup> Thus, Zerov and Khvylovyyi's ideas were termed 'aggressive Ukrainization.' As a result, threatened by the potential policy ramifications of promoting closer orientation to European literature in Ukraine, between 1926 and 1927, the CC CP(b)U began censoring the publication of Neo-Classist views.

By the end of 1926, the attention given by Moscow to this literary schism between Socialist Realists and Neo-Classists prompted Kharkiv's Bolshevik Communist Party to declare Neo-Classist ideas anti-proletarian; this was among the first of a series of political repressions targeting writers who shared Zerov and Khvylovyyi's sentiments. In June of 1927, a plenum called by the CC CP(b)U prohibited the publication of Neo-Classist literature and criticism. As a result, literary journals such as Khvylovyyi's VAPLITE were forced to either halt publications or shift toward publishing works of Socialist Realism. Zerov, as a career academic and university professor, was obliged to switch from creating original work to translating foreign literature. Between 1927 and 1928, in response to the Party's criticism of Neo-Classicism and Khvylovyyi-ism (a pejorative that had gained popularity as a reference to the division of politics and literature promoted by Khvylovyyi in VAPLITE's polemic essays), Khvylovyyi issued public retractions and began using Socialist Realist structural styles in his literary publications.<sup>34</sup> Though, by the end of 1928, Ukrainian Neo-Classists were forced into either silence or conformism, extensive proliferation of Zerov and Khvylovyyi's views had sparked suspicions among the Party leadership, setting the groundwork for further intrusions by the CC CP(b)U and NKVD into the authors' lives and their home, Budynok Slovo.

33 J. Stalin, "Letter to L.M. Kaganovich, Secretary of the Central Committee, Concerning Ukraine," April 26, 1926, РГАСПИ. Ф. 558. Оп. 1. Д. 2774. (Фотокопия с подлинника).

34 Ukrainian Central Committee, "Resolution on the Nationalist Attitudes of T. Shuisky," 16 May 1927, РГАСПИ. Ф. 82. Оп. 2. Д. 154. Л. 167-178. Копия. Машинопись.

32 Ibid., 103.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, in answer to the question, ‘Why did Soviet authorities in Ukraine begin repressing the intellectual ideas expressed by the Slova authors?’ it can be concluded that Communist Party authorities feared that the cultural nationalism would grow into a broader desire for political autonomy. Having recently mounted a revolution and fought a civil war, central governing agencies, at best, elicited tenuous loyalty from their constituents. In their eyes, Zerov and Khvylovyi’s literary pursuits only further isolated the Ukrainian SSR’s public, both culturally and politically, from the central apparatus in Moscow.

While this essay has aimed to highlight some of the key motivating factors for the repression of Kharkivian authors during the 1920s, this is not an exhaustive study. Of the more than sixty individuals residing in Budynok Slovo in the 1920s and 1930s, this essay has merely examined the ideological platforms of two. In order to fully understand the reasons behind the censorship and arrests of Slova authors and for the broader Counter-Ukrainization Movement, more research must be conducted into the lives and works of Budynok Slovo’s other residents.

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