

## Science Fiction in Ukraine: 1920–2020

*part one*

The variability in the genre of Ukrainian science fiction (SF) has always been determined by the requirements of the time and the political situation. That is why the fiction of the 1920s promoted the ideology of naive techno-communism, but during the next forty years it became obvious that the Soviet project had reached a dead end, and its positivist component had not brought the desired results. Ukrainian SF writers then turned to mysticism and denial of a rational view of the world.

**Keywords:** *Ukraine, science fiction, soviet, communism, mysticism, ideology*

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## 1. Introduction

When we talk about science fiction (SF) in Ukraine, it is first worth defining certain boundaries of the definition. The first fantastic work written in the territory of modern Ukraine, so-called because it features descriptions of otherworldly creatures, is *The Paterik of the Kievan Caves Monastery* (Heppell 1989)—a collection of stories from the thirteenth century about the foundation of the Kyiv-Pechersk Monastery and the everyday lives of its first inhabitants. Some works of Peter Mohyla of the seventeenth century are defined as fantastic as well. The *Cossack Chronicles* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries contain stories about folklore creatures; some researchers refer to these as the predecessors of Ukrainian horror literature. Feofan Prokopovich's ([1705] 1961) tragicomedy *Volodymyr1*, created at the beginning of the eighteenth century, contains fantastical elements. All this, of course, is no Ukrainian SF for two reasons:

1) SF literature appeared as a certain reaction to positivism, that is, to the conviction that neither theological nor metaphysical thinking will bring humanity the desired results; both ways of thinking are, in fact, illusions and self-deception. Positivism convincingly proved that only scientific and technological progress has tangible, useful results.

This view is pure illusion, and at the end of the twentieth century there was what I call the “collapse of positivism,” which even gave rise to a new SF genre that we call “cyberpunk.” But you can get an idea of the popularity of these views if you read the letters of well-known Ukrainian intellectual Ivan Franko (1856–1916) to translator Olga Roshkevich (Franko [1878] 1986):

*I am convinced that a great, worldwide revolution will slowly destroy the current order and establish a new one. By the word[s] “world revolution” I do not mean a worldwide revolt of the poor against the rich, a worldwide massacre; this can be understood as a revolution only by the world’s policemen, who do not know that the invention of steam engines, telegraphs, phonographs, microphones, electric machines, etc., introduces a revolution in the world almost as big as the entire bloody French revolution.*

Franko speaks here as a typical positivist. He hopes that electric machinery will not only change people’s lives for the better but also make people better.

Walter Smyrniw (2013) tried to define SF literature in his work *Ukrainian Science Fiction: Historical and Thematic Perspectives*, but he never managed to do it. And in my opinion, it is very simple: **Science fiction literature is an artistic reaction to the spread and the collapse of positivism.**

In total, there are three types of knowledge about reality: theological, metaphysical, and positivist. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it became clear to the most progressive people of this time that theological and metaphysical ways of

<sup>1</sup>The tragicomedy *Vladimir* was written in 1705 and performed July 3, 1705. It was first published in Tikhonravov, N. S., *Russian Dramatic Works 1672–1725*, vol. 2, 280–344. Spb., 1874.

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knowing reality are unproductive. You cannot build a locomotive or an airplane by praying or reading Kant's works; it requires science and technology. Hence the idea that science and technology are not only an ideal way of knowing reality but will also quickly bring maximum positive (or practical) results. Such an idea in literature led to the appearance of SF.

But at the end of the twentieth century, it became clear that, although science and technology are quite productive, they bring not only positive but also negative results. We can call this understanding “**the collapse of positivism.**” But, apart from positivism, no other productive ideas were found, which caused a feeling of frustration and hopelessness about the future. This feeling became the impetus for the revival of initially various forms of mysticism (if technology does not bring happiness, then one must open the third eye and go into the astral) and cyberpunk, which depicts a society that has reached a dead end due to positivism.

2) Literary Ukrainian language appeared at the end of the eighteenth century after the publication of Ivan Kotlyarevsky's (2004) *Aeneid*, a burlesque-travesty poem based on the plot of the classic poem of the same name by Roman poet Virgil.

Using these two reasons as filters, we can say that Ukrainian SF did not exist until the beginning of the twentieth century. After all, although Kotlyarevsky's *Aeneid* has fantastic elements, all of them are far from the instructions of positivism. Likewise, Jan Potocki's fantasy-philosophical novel *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* (Potocki [1815] 2015) is often called the first Ukrainian fantasy novel, but Potocki, although he lived in the territory of modern Ukraine, was a Pole, and wrote his novel in French. The same applies to Mykola Gogol: although he was born in Ukraine, all his works were written in Russian and also had nothing to do with positivism.

## **2. The 1920s: Sandro Kasianyuk and “Red Roaring Twenties” Positivism**

In search of the first Ukrainian SF, it is worth paying attention to the authors of the 1920s. In the first two issues of the literary magazine *Ways of Art* for 1922, two short stories were published that were later combined into a cycle called *Machining Humanity* by amateur writer Sandro Kasianyuk. This author's real name was Oleksandr, but he shortened it according to the “modernist” fashion of the time. He was not professionally engaged in writing; in everyday life he was a simple worker at the Kharkiv “Electrosila” plant. Literary critic Oleksandr Biletsky believed that Kasianyuk could very well become the “Ukrainian Wells with proletarian ideology” (Biletsky 1926,122). Kasianyuk is also mentioned in the work of Volodymyr (Walter) Smyrniw (2013).

The dream of flying, becoming a train driver, learning to be a locksmith, a mechanic, an engineer in order to serve the people – this is the pathos of Kasianyuk's works. Man and machine, according to the author, are true friends: “And look how kindly they treat each other”; they have “common interests.” Promoting the advantages of the wireless telegraph, Kasianyuk tells about a telegraph-radio operator who “lives in a huge thousands of millions space” thanks to the discoveries of

science. The story “New Utopia” glorifies the greatness of technical reconstruction in the seaport, machines and cranes, electric plows and a “farming school” brought to “higher degrees” on some unknown island (Kasianyuk 1926).

Kasianyuk’s works are full of naïve socialist utopianism; they glorify machines and technology. The man of the future in Kasianyuk’s works is “only a pointer, only a guide” (Biletsky 1926, 123) for this technique. Kasianyuk’s heroes are inspired by ideas for a better life in a socialist society.

The plot of the novel *Atom in Harness* (Blum and Rosen [1929] 2017) is very indicative of that weird cocktail of Russian imperialist and communist propaganda that shaped the consciousness of Ukrainian authors of those times. The novel was written by an unknown writer under the pseudonym Blum and Rosen. The novel takes place in 1939. Humanity is divided between the bloc of Soviet (communist) countries (USSR, China, India, and Germany) and the capitalist bloc (the rest of the world). Capitalist countries formed a kind of federation and parliament in the city of Wellington (the capital of New Zealand). The world capitalist government is called “the Cabinet of Military Affairs and Espionage” (Blum and Rosen [1929] 2017) and also sits in Wellington. This government considers the creation of a radio curtain from the radio transmitters of the USSR to be its main task. The transmitters are obviously broadcasting political propaganda from Moscow for the establishment of a world revolution, as Leo Trotsky dreamed about it. For this purpose, on the borders with the Soviet Union, large balloons with powerful radio stations, which broadcast jazz around the clock, are installed at different heights in the air. This creates a noise wall at the borders, which does not allow radio signals from the USSR to capitalist countries.

The Soviet party leadership perfectly understands that Western liberal culture can create the impression among the youth of the countries occupied by the Moscow invaders that life outside the USSR is not as terrible and hopeless as Soviet propaganda portrays it. For this purpose, a whole campaign of opposition to Western culture is organized, banning certain artists and styles of music, even clothing: a famous story recounts two businessmen in Moscow being executed for trying to sell jeans. For some reason, jazz music causes special hatred among the Soviet authorities. The propagandists even come up with a poetic slogan: “Today you play jazz, and tomorrow you will sell the Motherland.” The Soviet people should have remembered that jazz is very dangerous because it can distract from the struggle against capitalism.

The novel begins with the attempt of a young Moscow scientist Zhuravlyov to cross the Black Sea in a hot air balloon; he wants to get to the capitalist federation so that he can improve his invention—the first nuclear reactor. The travelers manage to cross the border and fly to Italy, where they land and are arrested by the local police. Later, Zhuravlyov and his boyfriend manage to escape from the police and hide underground with local communists. At the same time, an intelligence group of agents of the capitalist federation infiltrates Moscow, steals Zhuravlyov’s nuclear reactor, and uses it to destroy the building of the former British embassy, at the same time kidnapping a young Komsomol girl, Lyudmila Chudnovska. Lyudmila manages to escape, get the necessary materials for Zhuravlyov, and even prevent the execution of the leader of the pro-communist rebellion in Madagascar. Zhuravlyov,

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having stolen inventions from the capitalists, manages to complete his apparatus, with the help of which he destroys most of the military equipment and weapons of the capitalist federation, as well as the seat of the world capitalist government. After that, with the help of Italian and New Zealand communists, Zhuravlyov returns to Moscow, where he speaks to a wide audience with a detailed description of his invention and the prospects for a future communist economy, related to the use of Zhuravlyov's device and atomic energy in general. After the destruction of the military equipment and the headquarters of the world capitalist government, a workers' uprising begins in the capitalist countries. The novel ends with the common singing of "The Internationale."

As can be seen from the plot of this novel, the Ukrainian writer dreamed that Russian communists would destroy Western liberal-democratic society with the help of nuclear weapons stolen from it and then establish a world communist dictatorship centered in Moscow. It seems that Moscow's wishes have not changed over the past hundred years.

In general, it is worth noting that the 1920s were a time of illusory fascination with the communist utopia. It seemed to the authors of fantastic works that machines plus communism (or, as leader of the Russian communists Vladimir Lenin said, "socialism plus electrification of the whole country") would immediately lead to the goal of positivism. To this end, it was proposed to concentrate all efforts on industrial production, to push all theology out of life, and to leave from metaphysics only Marxism-Leninism. Some ten years later, such a view led Ukraine to the first catastrophe in the confrontation with Russian imperialism, which arranged the Holodomor and eliminated the Ukrainian intellectuals. This was the Ukrainian "roaring twenties"; these times literally roared with engines, factories, and plants. It is no coincidence that Volodymyr Vynnychenko's SF novel, published in 1924, was called *Solar Machine* (Vynnychenko 1928).

Vynnychenko was in opposition to the government of Ukraine, which was later captured by the Russian communists. For a short period in 1918, he headed the government of the Ukrainian People's Republic, but Vynnychenko quickly quarreled with opponents of the conservative political camp because he was a committed socialist. As soon as the Russian-Ukrainian war began in 1918, he left politics and emigrated to Austria, where he wrote his memoirs and his SF novel. The oppositionist and emigrant *Solar Machine* was an unheard-of success among readers and had three reprints in Soviet Ukraine from 1928 to 1930. But after 1930, the elimination of Ukrainian national deviations began and Vynnychenko was banned.

In *Solar Machine*, princess Elise agrees to marry capitalist tycoon Mertens in order to later avenge the death of her bankrupt father. The far-left INVARAC (International Vanguard of Revolutionary Action) is gathering at the tycoon's estate, to which Elise swears allegiance in order to take revenge on Mertens.

Inventor Rudolf Stor is convinced that man is burdened by the need for food, and that he would become truly free if he were fed directly by the sun's rays. In search of a way to do this, he discovered the "solar mineral" helionite, which is capable of turning any organic matter into a nutrient under the influence of light—"solar bread."

With the help of the mineral, he builds a “solar machine” in which it is enough to put grass or leaves in, sprinkle with sweat, and let the sunlight through, to get free food.

INVARAC is interested in the “solar machine.” The organization spreads the invention around the world, thereby liberating people from the oppression of capitalists. People no longer need to work for a piece of bread, so factory workers are leaving their jobs. In addition, “solar bread” causes a feeling of euphoria. At first it seems like a good thing, but soon civilization itself collapses—power plants stop working without workers; water pipes and communications fail. People begin to fight for the remnants of the property of their exploiters and against those who do not accept “solar bread.” Mertens prepares to clear Berlin of rebels, while enemies are advancing on Germany. Seeing the collapse of all hopes for the further development of humanity, with people reduced to an animal state, Stor gathers the Free Union of Creative Work, which restores the life of the cities. After winter, the desire for work awakens in people, but it is now voluntary, and not forced.

As can be seen from the text of the novel, Vynnychenko was also caught up in the modern illusions of technocratic positivism. It seemed to him that technological inventions would lead to a revolution and the victory of the ideas of socialism. The communist occupation of Ukraine and Moscow’s political terror taught him nothing.

## The 1930s: Hard Fiction and Futurism

The 1930s saw the start of hard fiction and futurism. These were characterized by the fact that the former fascination with positivist machinery began to be felt as an anachronism and turned from a goal, an *idée fixe*, into a beautiful decoration. A fantasy novel from the 1930s has been transformed from an intrusive piece of communist propaganda into something that had a quintessential text of liberal pop-culture as a sample to follow.

One of the most striking examples of this is Yuri Smolych’s trilogy *Beautiful Disasters* (Smolych [1929–34] 1965). It depicts the mad Romanian scientist Dr. Galvanescu, who uses surgical operations to transform people into robots. This plot clearly imitates *The Island of Dr. Moreau* by Herbert Wells. Smolich does not suggest outright communist propaganda and does not call for a world revolution controlled from Moscow. He simply writes an exciting adventure novel in a “western style.” The ideological confrontation in it is more like a domestic quarrel. When Komsomol member and pretty girl Yulia Sakhno tries to find out about the doctor’s experiments, she talks to his employee. He is afraid.

– *Shut up. You say you came from Germany?*

– *So.*

– *But you are Ukrainian?*

– *Of course.*

– *An emigrant?*

– *You see, I studied in Germany and stayed at the department for scientific work.*

*After that I have to go home...*

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- So you are... a Soviet citizen? ... - The stranger backed away from the window and slammed the frame with a curse.

Sakhno could still hear how he huddled near the pinhole, cursing himself and the Soviet government. Stunned and confused, Sakhno stood under the window, not knowing what to do. She would have stood there for a long time, but the window opened once more and the head of the indignant stranger stuck out for a moment.

"If you don't get out of here, you bloody communist bitch, I'll call Dr. Galvanescu immediately!" (Smolych ([1929–34] 1965, 54)

Pavlo Beilin, author of the afterword to Smolich's novels, writes that "the main idea of the book is not to prove that the collapse of the ideas of bourgeois society is beneficial to us. The writer, comparing bourgeois and Soviet medicine, wanted to reveal the misanthropic essence of bourgeois ideology and the humanity and progressiveness of Soviet and socialist science" (Smolych ([1929–34] 1965, 223).

So, in ten years, the desire to seize capitalist countries and forcibly introduce Russian communism there turned into banal envy. Smolych himself was a devoted communist; for many years he cooperated with the Soviet secret police and wrote reports on his colleagues—writers and film directors. These denunciations were so detailed and refined that the history of Ukrainian literature can be studied by them.

Volodymyr Vladko is also a prominent figure in this direction. He created several truly noticeable novels. For example, *The Argonauts of the Universe* (Vladko 1935) was published several times in Japan and Croatia. It also was the first work in Ukrainian literature about flight into space. Interestingly, two Russians and one Chinese go on a space trip to Venus, and a Ukrainian, a student of the Polytechnic Institute, Galina Ryzhko sneaks on board illegally. In the first editions of the novel, instead of the girl-student there was a boy-student Vasyl Ryzhko, but the author received 1500 letters from readers with various tips and realized that the girl would be much better to save from the attacks of the Venus monsters because it would look very sexy. According to the genre, it is a typical novel of hard SF that any American author could have written. Of the Soviet features, it only has a flag of the USSR, which the heroes set on Venus. Interestingly, the author rewrote his novel many times, in each edition changing some essential details there to adjust his text to the requirements of the time. For example, in the versions of the 1950s, Vladko wrote about the leading science of the countries of the socialist camp—Hungary, Bulgaria, and the German Democratic Republic. Of course, in 1935, when the first edition of this novel was published, the mentioned countries were still bourgeois, and Vladko could not write about the leading science in these countries, so as not to have conflicts with communists carrying out surveillance of the literature.

Fiction writers of the so-called socialist camp, which was the zone of military-political influence of the mutation of the former Russian Empire—the USSR—perfectly understood the power of the influence of communist propaganda through the works of SF and exploited this power in every way, until some of them realized its perniciousness. One of the first of such writers was Stanislaw Lem. Lem banned the translation of his first novel, *The Magellanic Cloud*, into Japanese, citing the following reasoning: "Japan has never known a communist regime, and if my novel inclines even one Japanese person to communism, I will burn in hell" (Lem 2005, 12).

Unfortunately, most Ukrainian Soviet fiction writers who survived the collapse of the USSR remained loyal communists and even Russian imperialists. They did not see in this any danger for their country, and, as we see now, they miscalculated cruelly.

Another novel by Volodymyr Vladko, *Aero-torpedos Turn Back* (Vladko 1934), is much more ideologized. It refers to the war of drones between the capitalist countries and the USSR. According to the plot of the novel, “interested states,” the Great Saksia, Swabia, and Osteria, make a number of claims to the USSR. The conflict in a few days became the basis for closure of communist newspapers in “interested states”; the press published calls for war with the USSR. The concept of capitalists is that the blow to Moscow should be made by radio-controlled drones—aero-torpedos. But the tactics of the lightning attack did not work, as the Soviet Union also prepared for war and had its high-tech developments. Meanwhile, a Yellow Empire—Japan or China—attacks from the East. Capitalists decide to use bacteriological weapons and infect the Soviet communists with the flu virus. The flu epidemic is striking Moscow, Smolensk, and other regions of Russia. But, in the end, capitalist engineers are aware of the injustice of this war and surrender to the Soviet Army. In the capitalist countries, uprisings begin, and they become communist. At the end, everyone is happy to celebrate the victory of Russian weapons and communist ideology over the insidious world of capitalism. This book is impressive as it places the author’s childlike naïveté alongside the literal prediction of events that would soon happen.

It is also worth mentioning Vladko’s novel *Iron Rebellion* – in the first version *The Robotari Are Going*. This first Ukrainian novel about robots was published in 1929 (Vladko [1929] 2017), just nine years after *R.U.R.* by Karel Čapek (Čapek [1928] 2020). Of course, this book is an undisguised call for the overthrow of the state system in countries outside the USSR and the establishment of a communist dictatorship in them, with the governing center in Moscow. It was planned to do this with the help of advanced technologies.

The events of the novel take place in some capitalist country with a hint of the USA. Jonathan Houston is the owner of the machine-building factories that have stopped working—the workers have announced a multi-day strike and are demanding higher wages. There is a rumor that Houston’s company intends to replace live workers with wirelessly powered cybernetic robots. Houston assures that the robots only obey him and do not demand a salary or rest, so soon all workers will be replaced and this will mean the victory of capitalism over socialism.

Meanwhile, Houston’s stock is skyrocketing, and robots are cheaper to maintain than live workers. The leader of the ultra-right militants, Thomas Beers, sends the strikebreakers to the committee of strikers and demands that the strike be stopped in the morning. The committee dissolves itself, but does not give up the struggle.

A rally is being held on the square near the plant, against which armored personnel carriers and soldiers who start shooting are brought out. Under the command of the leader of the strikers, Bob Leisley, they manage to de-energize the city and seize weapons with which to fight back. But the city is surrounded by an even bigger army. Houston offers Beers any amount of money if only his factories are saved. He manages to turn on the power and leads the robots into battle. But in a few minutes,



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the inventor of the robots, engineer Jefferson, sends a signal that intercepts control. The strikebreakers turn on Houston with Beers and stomp them down. The communist revolution breaks out in the city.

The Soviet authorities liked Volodymyr Vladko so much that he was even appointed head of the Main Repertoire Committee of the Ukrainian SSR (the main Ukrainian censor). However, he did not last long in this position. Once he wrote a critical article for the newspaper *Soviet Art*, where he praised the operetta *Love of an Actress*, which was based on Maupassant's story *Boule de suif*, staged in Lviv. But other censors did not like the performance; they decided that it did not call for a communist revolution but only distracted the audience from it. The play was removed from the repertoire, and then a devastating article called "A Serious Lesson" appeared in the newspaper *Lviv Truth*. They wrote that the theater did not use "the great opportunity to turn to the Soviet theme, to show the wonderful today's revived Lviv region, the patriotic deeds of Lviv residents – Stakhanovites of factories and fields." Instead, "vulgar, vapid vaudeville" was created. Volodymyr Vladko was fired from his job after this story (Lvovska pravda 1953).

The tragic fate of the writer Dmytro Buzko is very telling: he was a staunch Stalinist, but he died because he publicly expressed doubts about Stalin's infallibility. He was immediately fired, arrested, and shot. Buzko wrote the fantastic novel *Crystal Paradise* (1935) two years before his murder by the Stalinists (Buzko [1935] 1959). According to the plot of the novel, a brilliant scientist-chemist from fascist Germany, Fritz Gruber, invents a recipe for super-strong glass, which can be used in many industries and the national economy. Due to the non-recognition of the genius in his homeland and the intrigues of the powerful bourgeoisie, the genius has to emigrate to the Soviet Union. Thanks to his invention, a utopian state is being formed in the USSR. From an artistic point of view, the novel is typical of the Soviet "production" fiction of the 1920s and 1930s. The characters are revealed superficially, represented by peculiar social labels. One of them is a "big bourgeois," another is a "little bourgeois," and the third is a "romantic scientist." Nothing is known about the inner world of the heroes. The plot is described schematically. The actions and dialogues of the heroes are often contrived and implausible. There is a lot of Stalinist propaganda in the novel. It is characteristic that tanks and fighter planes were the first to be manufactured from miracle glass on an industrial scale.

But not all Ukrainian writers of the 1930s gave their talent to fight for the victory of Russian communism. Unfortunately, the fate of those who avoided it was sad. Ukrainian writer Geo Shkurupii became the first Ukrainian writer who specialized in fantastic works within the framework of futurism. He did not write a single novel that could be called SF. There are only some fantastic episodes in his book *Doors in a Day* (Shkurupii 1931). In general, this novel is written in a bright, expressionist manner; stylistically, it is very diverse and intricate. It could rightly be called the Ukrainian *Ulysses* were it not for its very modest volume—the book has a little more than 200 pages.

Although Shkurupii was a communist, he was not as devoted a communist as, for example, Vladko. There was a lot of truth about the real world in his works, which the communist supervisors could not forgive him. That is why the writer was

arrested on December 3, 1934 on charges of belonging to the “Kyiv terrorist organization UUN” (Union of Ukrainian Nationalists). In 1937, he was executed, and his family was deprived of housing and evicted from Kyiv, as a family of “enemies of the people.” After twenty years, Shkurupii was rehabilitated and acquitted due to the absence of a crime. Of course, there was no question of any compensation from the state.

Those who study Ukrainian literature of the Soviet period of the 1920s–1990s may wonder why it looks the way it does, why the writers were so focused on political propaganda and so persistently promoted the idea of a communist revolution and the expansion of Moscow’s control over Europe. The answer to this question lies precisely in the early 1920s: during the next twenty years, the Soviet secret police found and physically eliminated most of the “wrong” writers. The total number of Ukrainian artists and intellectuals who disappeared as a result of repression exceeds 1,000. We call this phenomenon “Shot Revival.”

#### 4. The 1940s and 1950s: Short-Sighted Fiction

Throughout the 1930s, a methodical elimination of nationally conscious intellectuals took place in Ukraine; after its completion, a command came from Moscow to begin the fight against so-called Ukrainian nationalism. In these times, any manifestation of Ukrainian consciousness had become dangerous. Literature ultimately turned into service of party communist propaganda, and even fiction had to convincingly prove how exactly the Soviet people would soon implement the wild fantasies that were announced at each successive communist party congress. This genre was later called “short-sighted fiction.”

A vivid example of this genre is Mykola Trublaini’s novel *The Deep Path* (written in 1941 but published seven years later, Trublaini [1948] 2020). There are no amazing and extraordinary events in the book; all its fiction is purely utilitarian. Soviet citizens are building a deep tunnel between Moscow and the Far East for high-speed train traffic, which was of exceptional strategic importance in case of war. However, it is worth noting the peculiarity of Trublaini’s authorial manner, which allowed him to remain in the history of Ukrainian literature: his romantic heroes fall in love, dream, drink champagne, and are sure that a strong desire will allow them to defeat nature. Children liked Trublaini’s works; there is even a prize named after him in Ukraine.

Lyrical poet, polyglot, and soldier of the Ukrainian Galician Army (this is the armed force of the Western Ukrainian People’s Republic, the state that existed in 1918–20), Myroslav Kapii became famous for translating six novels by Jules Verne into Ukrainian. Although Kapii was a radical anti-communist, he hated the USSR, but he can also be included in the stream of “short-sighted fiction” because the author’s main task was to predict in detail the technical and social innovations that would appear in the near future. Kapii’s novel *The Land of Blue Orchids* (1932) envisions Ukraine in the twenty-first century in great detail. Interestingly, most of the author’s predictions came true. The territory of Ukraine, as Kapii saw it in 1932, coincides

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with the territory of modern Ukraine: the coat of arms is the trident of Prince Volodymyr, the currency is the hryvnia, the system is democratic presidential-parliamentary, and the name of the parliament is Verkhovna Rada. In addition, Kapii used the word “television” in the novel and predicted Skype communication and the existence of an automobile factory in the city of Kremenchuk. According to the plot, the first manned ship of mankind, the *Queen of Virginia*, goes to Mars, but disappears. A year later, an employee of the Ukrainian observatory, Ihor Kharitonenko, during his observations, discovers an unknown body in space approaching the Earth. It turns out that it is the *Queen of Virginia*. The ship lands near Kyiv in Boryspil, where the international airport is now located. But it was not Americans who arrived on the ship; rather, they were Martians genetically related to Ukrainians.

In Vasyl Berezhny's novel *To the Starry Worlds* (1956), the first Soviet space expedition is sent to study the Moon. The purpose is to find minerals that can be used for the needs of mankind. A rocket with American astronauts lands on the moon secretly from the Soviet cosmonauts. The novel, as one might expect, is full of Soviet propaganda. Before the flight, the head of the Government Committee for the Organization of the Earth-Moon Flight says in his speech: “We want to make the Moon an outpost of advanced science, not a military base, as the imperialist tycoons are planning!” (Berezhny 1956, 34). The whole exciting trip to the moon turned out to be just a convenient backdrop for casually feeding the reader communist propaganda. The book contains many disputes between American and Soviet astronauts, such as:

- The essence of life is not to create material values, said an American astronaut. The point is to use these material values! Don't deny it: I know what you're going to say. “Exploitation of man by man! Extortion” and other similar loud words. But if you seriously thought about the history of mankind, you would see that all of it is a struggle for the redistribution of material goods. Take all the rebellions, revolutions and wars since the Roman Empire. Didn't the slaves rebel to seize wealth? And the French revolution, did it have other ideals? And what does your communist bible say? — “The proletariat has nothing to lose, but it can acquire everything.” Acquire!
- You, as I see it, are a theorist!, a Soviet cosmonaut interrupted. It's just a pity that your “philosophy” is wolfish. *Homo homini lupus est* is your credo. And how can you understand Marxism and the ideals of the socialist revolution, which does not replace one exploiter with another, but destroys all exploitation!
- Ah, what do you communists say, it is better to be rich than poor! Patricians, plebeians, and slaves all died, but the patricians ate from silver and gold dishes and bathed in marble pools, while the plebeians and slaves bent under the heavy burden of life” (Berezhny 1956, 46).

The fate of the writer Mykola Dashkiev vividly testifies to why the works of old Ukrainian fiction writers seem so down-to-earth, such timid, “short-sighted fiction.” To explain the conditions in which the writers of that time worked, one eloquent fact can be cited: the building “Slovo” (The Word), where the young writer Dashkiev was given a room in 1948, in those days in Kharkiv was called HPD (House of Pretrial Detention) because many of its residents in the Stalinist times disappeared behind

bars and were executed. This led to unprecedented restrictions. While preparing his novel *The Celebration of Life* (1952) for publication, Dashkiev had to attach to the manuscript a certificate from a leading expert in the field of biology confirming that the scientific plot of the work was quite possible. The novel *Dragon's Teeth* (Dashkiev 1957) tells about the struggle of Soviet and Indian biological scientists with English spies for the right to possess the secrets of “Food of the Gods” and “Dragon's Teeth”—unique biological catalysts, with the help of which it would be possible to solve the primordial problem of hunger throughout the world or perform unique organ transplant operations.

## 5. The 1960s: Sixtiers and Hippie-Cosmist Oles Berdnyk

In the 1960s, a political thaw began. The USSR liberalized. This led to the emergence of the so-called sixtiers movement. These people—public figures and artists—did not see confrontation with Western countries and the victory of communism as soon as possible at any cost as their goal. The sixtiers were liberal communists. This, among other things, was manifested in the fact that they for the first time abandoned the idea of positivism in its Soviet sense, that is, the idea that scientific progress would help the USSR to quickly establish communism throughout the Earth. Instead, the sixtiers turned to religious mysticism and naive utopianism. Oles Berdnyk, one of the main Ukrainian sixtiers, a writer, was also called a “hippie-cosmist.” He was a theoretician and founder of the Ukrainian Spiritual Republic (USR); he believed that a nation is not a random combination of relatives and families but a powerful collective spirit that has its own unique purpose in the evolution of the universe. He saw no division into believers and non-believers; for him, the presence of the spiritual unity of Ukrainians made it possible to eliminate political parties, and ideological and confessional contradictions. If Ukraine chose the path of harmonization, spiritualization of all spheres of life, consolidation of the forces of culture, science, and spirituality, then other nations would follow, and the Brotherhood of the Spiritual Republics of the Earth would be formed. The USR held congresses that were essentially mystical happenings.

Berdnyk served five years behind bars for saying at a theater meeting in 1949 that “Stalin may be a genius for some, but a fool for others.” He was sentenced to ten years for alleged treason, but after five years he was pardoned after repentance, which was strange (in the 1930s, he would have been immediately shot for these words). As mentioned, a political thaw was approaching. Liberalization had reached the point where Berdnyk was accepted into the Union of Writers of Ukraine two years after his release from prison. It is worth knowing that the Union of Writers of Ukraine was a special organization where writers verified by communists and the politically loyal were engaged in propaganda in the form of literature. Throughout his life, Berdnyk wrote about twenty novels that were far from communist propaganda. He was also one of the founders of the human rights focused “Ukrainian Helsinki Group.” For his activities in this group, Berdnyk was imprisoned again for five years in 1979. But the USSR had already begun to collapse, and Berdnyk repented

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again, saying that he was ordered to create the Ukrainian Helsinki Group by the US Central Intelligence Agency.

Berdnyk's novel *The Star Corsair* was written in the 1960s (Berdnyk 1971) and became a real bestseller of those times. It was translated into twenty-six languages, although it caused many scandals. The main reason for this was the unheard-of mystical Ukrainian nationalism of the author, which caused misunderstanding among the surrounding Soviet people. For example, Berdnyk wrote about the fact that in 2082, before the flight, the cosmonauts climbed to the top of the highest mountain in Ukraine, Hoverla, where they saw decorations in the traditions of Ukrainian folklore. Berdnyk's nationalism was so amazing that it caused a shock reaction. After the publication of the novel, the author was expelled from the Writers' Union of Ukraine.

According to the plot of the novel, a young scientist, Serhiy Gorenysia, wants to invent a time machine. While thinking, he sees the image of a Cossack-Charakternik (a warrior of the ancient Ukrainian state who possessed magical abilities). The Charakternik possessed the Black Gramota—a magical manuscript that allowed changing the flow of time. With the help of hypnosis, the scientist enters the consciousness of the Cossack-magician and learns that the Black Gramota was extracted from the grave of Alexander the Great and buried in Mount Divich. The scientist conducts excavations, extracts the Black Gramota, and, with its help, establishes contact with the Black Papyrus—a mystical being who tells the scientist that the **collapse of positivism**, with which this article about SF began, has taken place, that is, no technological inventions and scientific discoveries will bring positive results. Instead, the Black Papyrus offers a mystical solution: knowing the world through love and mutual understanding. It's just a set of words that don't mean anything, but that's how mysticism works.

Black Papyrus shows the scientist a story about the journey of the Ukrainian spacecraft *Lyubov* to another star system. During the trip, all crew members die from radiation; only two children, who are being raised by a robot, survive. The children become adults and arrive on another planet, where they come into contact with high-tech intelligent flowers. After this, the travelers fly to another planet, where they find a civilization destroyed by positivism: technological advances have finally led to the degradation of civilization from excessive hedonism. On the whole planet there is only one woman, Iswari, who has kept her common sense. She asks the boys to take her with them to Earth and falls in love with a robot on the way. The robot also loves an alien woman, but cannot have sex with her. To overcome this obstacle, the robot creates a body for himself from the remains of the astronauts who died from radiation.

After hearing the story of the Black Papyrus, the scientist is convinced that positivism is really a dead end. Berdnyk offers an alternative to scientific and technical progress in the second part of the novel. One of his characters, an inmate in a psychiatric hospital, Aeras, claims to have attained a level of cosmic consciousness that allows him to go outside his body, levitate, and pass through walls. Together with his accomplices, Aeras escapes to the Asteroid of Freedom, where he finds a colony of dissidents who oppose the society of positivism. The positivists want to destroy the

colonists, but they go to another dimension that is inaccessible to logic and physics. At the end of the novel, the scientist learns that he is actually the leader of the Horikorin group of cosmocrats from the plane of Ara, and his main goal is to unite the people of Earth and the thinking beings of the noosphere.

Through this story, the repression against the dissidents, whom the Soviet authorities sent to psychiatric hospitals in the 1960s, as well as the desire of these dissidents to get out of the power of the communist positivists from Moscow, can be seen quite clearly. Berdnyk's revolutionary mysticism was a kind of protest against Soviet totalitarianism and formed a certain pair with it: time has shown that they cannot exist without each other. As a hypothetical idea for the 1960s, it sounded interesting, but in practice, going beyond the limits of the body and reaching the level of cosmic consciousness turned out to be absolutely impossible, so the impressive body of Berdnyk's work remained in its time. From the standpoint of today, it looks like a vivid dissident happening, but nothing more. It never became an alternative to positivism.

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