

**“WHITE BIRD WITH A BLACK SIGN”
AND “ZAKHAR BERKUT” IN THE PERIODICALS
OF THE UKRAINIAN DIASPORA IN THE USA
(PERIOD 1964–1979)**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-204-3-14>

Films of the poetic wave "White Bird with a Black Sign" (1971) directed by Yuri Illyenko, and "Zakhar Berkut" (1971) by director Leonid Osyka were the ones the Ukrainian diaspora could not see, but which nevertheless were carefully scrutinized in its newspaper *Svoboda*.

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The film "White Bird with a Black Sign" was first mentioned in the August 12, 1971 issue of the *Svoboda* diaspora newspaper. The article "*Moscow Celebrates Film Against Ukrainian Bourgeois Nationalists*" was dedicated to the 1971 International Moscow Film Festival, which was attended by foreign journalists and film critics [2]. According to *Svoboda* editorial, Western journalists found out that the film "White Bird with a Black Sign", shot by the Kyiv Film Studio, shared the first prize with three other Soviet films. The film starred Ivan Mykolaychuk, and the director was Yuri Illyenko, a cameraman of "The Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors" (1964). The diaspora's newspaper reports that Ukrainians in the emigration learned about the film before the film festival, thanks to Kyiv Radio for Migrants. The article also states that the film tells about the reunification of the lands of Ukraine within the USSR. The author of the article gives a brief description of the film, using sarcastic clarifications and comments on the plot and the idea in general, and focuses on showing Bukovina during the "boyars" and the conflict between two brothers, one of whom became a Soviet guerrilla during the occupation of Bukovina by Nazi troops:

"A film against Ukrainian" bourgeois nationalists "was marked in Moscow. (...) "Went the way of betrayal" ... inwardly devastated and already powerless, like that wolf in a siege, in dense forests and high mountains lurking in shelters with their nationalist shortcoming – Bandera, and circling the mountain trails... " [2].

Besides, *Svoboda* comments the review of a London journalist of the *Daily Telegraph*, who was present at the Moscow International Film Festival, which was published on August 3, 1971. It was noted that the film "White Bird with Black Wings" was very popular on the eve of the screening. According to the British correspondent, the film does not have a coherent plot and is based on a visual basis, which is full of impressive but meaningless pictures, like a fusion of logs and dancing. He concludes that the film came out "gray and vulgar", like all the others presented at the Moscow festival in 1971. In his opinion, the jury should

not have awarded anyone the first prize, which was won by four films of that year, and among which was "White Bird..." by Yuri Illyenko [2].

In the last paragraphs of the article, *Svoboda* asks whether such a film could win a gold medal. According to it, this was due to the idea of a film against Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists and the exchange of polite courtesies between two members of the jury – the USSR representative, director Grigory Kozintsev, and the British representative, writer James Aldridge. Finally, the newspaper sarcastically expresses its interest in the film and hopes to see this film, which won a gold medal, in the West.

For the second and last time during the wave of Ukrainian poetic cinema, the title of the film "White Bird with a Black Sign" appeared in the August 25, 1971 issue. The article "*The main role in the film*" tells about the award of the film at the Moscow Film Festival and its theme, which, according to the newspaper, is an anti-Ukrainian depiction of Bukovina during World War II. It is also emphasized that the main role is played by the wife of director Illyenko Larisa Kadochnikova, who was Russian, but in Parajanov's film "Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors" played the Ukrainian Marichka.

The movie "Zakhar Berkut", directed by Leonid Osyka, was released in 1971 [1]. The diaspora learned about this film a year before its premiere, as it is evidenced by a note in the August 18, 1970 issue of *Svoboda*. It says that the studio of O. Dovzhenko started shooting a film based on Ivan Franko's novel *Zakhar Berkut* in the village of Tukhlya. The note provides a brief description of the story and the names of the director's team.

In 1971, "Zakhar Berkut" by Osyka was mentioned three times by the newspaper. In the September 28, 1971 issue, a report was released stating that the film had been released. The note gives a brief description of the plot and emphasizes that all the villagers died in the struggle at the hands of the Mongols, but not in captivity. Also, *Svoboda* writes that the authors of the film held a meeting with journalists, as it learned from the Soviet newspaper *Culture and Life* on September 16. It was

emphasized that the Soviet newspaper did not evaluate the film, but translated it on the shoulders of the audience.

In the issue of December 4, 1971 there is a short note about the film "Zakhar Berkut". It contains the names of the director, screenwriter, actors and a brief description of the plot. In addition, the diaspora author writes that the Soviet newspaper *Moskovskie Izvestia* reports about the release of the film, but not provides an assessment of the film.

In an issue of December 28, 1971, the famous art critic, artist and journalist Bohdan Pevny devoted an article to the fine arts of the USSR. He talks about contemporary artists, in particular Georgy Yakutovich. According to the article, he is known for the artistic design of films and was the artist of the film "Zakhar Berkut".

The last time the film was mentioned during the wave of Ukrainian poetic cinema was in the September 11, 1976 issue. In particular, the article describes the new growth of interest in Poland to the works of Ivan Franko after the release of the film "Zakhar Berkut" in the country's cinemas, the broadcast of which was due to the writer's popularity among Polish citizens. It is noted that almost 100,000 books by the author have been sold in the country.

Thus, thanks to the foreign and Soviet press, the diaspora was able to learn about two most important films from the poetic wave of Ukrainian cinema. Although the diaspora didn't see them during this period, it formed its own ideas and judgments about them thanks to the description of the content and idea of the plot, the director's team and the reviews of journalists.

The films "White Bird with a Black Sign" and "Zakhar Berkut" were presented at major film festivals of the USSR, and it led to appearance of their titles in the foreign press and the diaspora newspaper [1, p. 459–461].

"White Bird with a Black Sign" was criticized in absentia for its plot and idea, while "Zakhar Berkut" was perceived neutrally and in a positive way, because it was shot according to the classic that meant for

the contemporaries that in that case it was difficult to shoot incorrectly or propagandistically.

References:

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2. U Moskvi vidznacheno fil'm proty ukrayins'kykh «burzhuaznykh natsionalistiv» [A film against Ukrainian "bourgeois nationalists" was marked in Moscow]. *Svoboda*. 1971. Vol. 147. New Jersey. (in Ukrainian)