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## **PHILOSOPHER AND FILM DIRECTOR OLEKSANDR GAVRONSKIY: RETURN OF THE FORGOTTEN FIGURES OF EUROPEAN SCIENCE AND CULTURE**

In this article investigational scientific, creative and cinema-pedagogical activity of the forgotten figure of European science and culture: philosopher-Neo-Kantian of the Marburg School, mathematician, film and theatre director, pedagogue of the B.V. Tchaikovsky Acting School and the Department of Arts of Kyiv State Institute of Cinematography, a very erudite and intelligent person, an artist who had Doctor's degree in philosophy – Oleksandr Iosipovych Gavronskiy (1888–1958). The author named him the basic scientific studies (monographs of 'The Logic of Numbers' and 'Methodological Principles of Natural Science'), all his full-length feature films: 'The Circle' (1927, other name 'Duty and Love'), 'Krivoy Rog' (1928), 'Bridge over Vyp' (1928, 'Blizzard'), 'Dark Kingdom' (1929, 'Tinkling'), 'Real life' (1930, 'The act of Komsomol Member Vira', 'Life'), 'Love' (1933).

**Key words:** Oleksandr Gavronskiy, Herman Cohen, Boris Pasternak, philosophy, theatre, cinema, pedagogics of the CRT arts.

Philosopher-Neo-Kantian of the Marburg School, mathematician, film and theatre director, pedagogue of the B.V. Tchaikovsky Acting School and the Department of Arts of Kyiv State Institute of Cinematography (KSIC), a very erudite and intelligent person, an artist who had Doctor's degree in philosophy – Oleksandr Iosipovych Gavronskiy (1888–1958). Soviet secret police falsely accused him of 'Trotskyism' in the so-called Kirov Flow. 25 years of imprisonment was the reason why his name in the days of the USSR was mentioned in a negative context, and he was avoided even after his rehabilitation.

Oleksandr Gavronskiy was born on June 11 (23, according to the new style), 1888 in Moscow in a wealthy family of a tea vendor. Boris Pasternak often visited the house of D. Vysotskiy, whose cousin was Oleksandr Gavronskiy, he made a marriage proposal to Ida Vysotska, but she refused. B.L. Pasternak, as well as O. I. Gavronskiy, studied philosophy at the University of Marburg (Germany) from the head of Neo-Kantian School, Professor Herman Cohen.

Perhaps, just for this reason Oleksandr Iosipovych Gavronskiy became a prototype of two characters in the works of Boris Pasternak: Shchultz in 'Three Chapters of the Story' (1922) and Oleksandr Baltz in the novel in verse 'Spektorskiy' (1925–1931). Moreover, Anatoliy Anatoliyovych Vaneyev wrote that O.I. Gavronskiy 'was mentioned in one of Blok's poems'<sup>1</sup>, but didn't specify the poem.

Oleksandr Gavronskiy got an excellent European education, graduated from the Department of Philosophy of Marburg University and the University of Geneva and the J.-J. Rousseau Institute. O.I. Gavronskiy was a very gifted man, because already at a young age he wrote scholarly monographs 'The Logic of Numbers' and 'Methodological Principles of Natural Science.'

In 1915, Oleksandr Gavronskiy became interested in art: he was working as a film director in Zurich theatre and a main film director of Geneva theatre. After the overthrow of the autocracy in the Russian Empire, O. Gavronskiy gave up his secure life in Europe and came back home. In Russia torn by the revolution, and then by the civil war, the film director of the European level headed the Nezlobinskiy theatre, worked with A. Lunacharskiy, then became a film director in charge of the State Theatre Studio named after Fyodor Chaliapin.

In 1924, Oleksandr Gavronskiy left the theater, and became infatuated with cinematography, which the leader of the proletarian revolution declared the most important of the arts. But first, he was cinematography pedagogue. The former student of the cinema acting school Raisa Yesipova recalled that 'he appeared in our movie studio after the death of its leader – Boris Vitaliyovych Tchaikovsky.

<sup>1</sup> Ванеев, А. *Два года в Абези*. Музей Національної кіностудії художніх фільмів ім. Олександра Довженка, 1.

Tchaikovsky died unexpectedly. One day after classes, before entering his house he died on the way. We lost our teacher and were very confused'<sup>1</sup>.

Boris Vitaliyovich Tchaikovsky (1888–1924) was a film director and a script writer of cinema companies led by O. Drankov, O. Taldykin, O. Khanzhonkov and other studios at which until 1918 he made about fifty films ('The Living Corpse', 1911; 'The Deserter', 1919; 'The Chapel of St. John', 1923, etc.); many cinema editions were publishing his articles, he was the author of the book 'Movie-Sitters and Film Actors', in 1918 he founded the School Studio for movie stars, which was headed by him until his early death on November 5, 1924.

So, Oleksandr Gavronskiy was heading the cinema acting school from 1924 to 1925. The second teacher was the school film director, actor, script writer, artist Vsevolod Illarionovich Pudovkin (1893–1953), who at that time was finishing studies in the workshop of L. Kuleshov, in whose films 'Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Country of Bolsheviks' (1924) and 'The Death Ray' (1925) he was performing the distinguishing roles; he also was a co-writer and an artist. Vsevolod Pudovkin, according to Raisa Yesipova, appeared infrequently in the cinema acting school, and Oleksandr Gavronskiy was the main teacher who 'was consecrating us in cinema secrets, he was teaching very clearly and in detail'<sup>2</sup>.

After closing the cinema acting school O. Gavronskiy moved to Leningrad, where at the studio 'Derzhvoyenkino' ('Gosvoyenkino' in Russian) with Iu. Rayzman he directed his first film 'The Circle' (1927, another name – 'Duty and Love', in 7 parts). Script writers: S. Yermolynskiy, V. Shershenevich; operator: L. Kosmatov; artist: V. Komardentov. Cast: A. Ktorov (Vladimir Polyansky, a Soviet official from the province), V. Popova (Maria, his wife), A. Zhylynskiy (Boris Berseneyev, assistant prosecutor), B. Chernova (Vera, his wife), S. Getz (Vovka, their son). Unfortunately, the film remained incomplete, and therefore, one can realize its artistic level only from contemporary publications.

In the film, two directors-debutants showed the conflict between a public duty and a personal feeling, that could be resolved in a new manner in the Soviet reality.

The years of the New economic policy. Boris Berseneyev, assistant prosecutor, overload with official duties, was paying little attention to his wife Vera, who was not pleased to play a role of the 'room lapdog.' The family 'idyll' was shaky and destroyed at the first ordeal. Zhuyir Polyansky appeared in Berseneyev's house, and fell in love with Vera, who was exhausted from idleness. Her lover appeared to be a prodigal of public funds, and this is why Berseneyev got him. Berseneyev, assistant prosecutor, found out that his wife Vera was an accomplice of the crime. But in Polyansky, he recognized a lawyer who gave him shelter when he was pursued by the king's agents. After much deliberation, Berseneyev decided to give the case a legal move. The prodigal was given to the court. Communist Berseneyev took his child and left his wife forever.

The following year O. Gavronskiy, at the same studio, already independently shoots a drama 'Krivoy Rog' (1928, Derzhvoyenkino, in 6 parts). Writer: S. Yermolynskiy; operator» I. Gelein; artist: V. Komardentov. Cast: I. Chuvelyev (Andriy), N. Chertyakova (Katerina, his wife), E. Tokmakov (Father Paisius), I. Strauch (Stepan), V. Rundaltsev (Ilka, their son), D. Vasiliev (city reporter), E. Malolyetnova, E. Melnikova, Iu. Chernyshova, A. Zhilinsky, I. Moskvina.

Gavronskiy appealed to the subject of cultural work in the countryside during the 'dispossession'. The story by writer S. Yermolynskiy was not different from similar propaganda films and became fully suitable for stamps and schemes of that time. Soldier Andrey during the leave came from the Red Army to his native village Krivoy Rog. Brought up by the Red Army, he couldn't remain an indifferent observer of the struggle for a new life that took place there. By his initiative, a military group of rural youth was organized. Backward villagers led by Father Paisius were armed against Andrey. Getting accustomed to new life conditions, Paisius tries to oppose his 'Cultural enlightenment' to Andrey's team. Supported by village activists, Andrey wanted to make independent of the priest influence, who was hiding skillfully, not only youth, but also the village adults. During the feast drunk kulaks (rich peasants) staged a drunken brawl aimed at Andrey and other initiators of closing churches. In the house of drunk Stepan, the leader of the kulaks, the fire emerged. Andrey mobilized village scouts, members of his group, defended neighboring houses from fire and saved the only Stepan's son. The touched kulak gave his gun, hidden just in case, to Andrey's team. Then Father Paisius, finding no more support from the villagers, left Krivoy Rog forever.

<sup>1</sup> Есипова, Р. *Воспоминания о А. И. Гавронском*. Музей Національної кіностудії художніх фільмів ім. Олександра Довженка, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Есипова, Р. *Воспоминания о А. И. Гавронском*. Музей Національної кіностудії художніх фільмів ім. Олександра Довженка, 2.

Most likely, the film wasn't really successful because O. Gavronskiy was working on his next film as an assistant director, and his third film was shot in collaboration again. Oleksandr Gavronskiy, who received an excellent foreign education, continued training though all his life, when he felt the deficit of experience in some areas. Thus, simultaneously with shooting 'Krivoy Rog', Gavronskiy worked as an assistant film director to Ie. Chervyakov in the film 'My Son' ('Son', 'The Old Doesn't Let You Go') at the Leningrad [movie] factory 'Radkino' (Russian: 'Sovkino').

O. Gavronskiy shot his third film 'Bridge over Vyp' (also called 'Blizzard', Derzhvoyenkin, 5 parts) in 1928 with the film director N. Verkhovskiy. The film tells about the heroism of the Red Army fighter, who continued fulfilling his revolutionary duty to the end. Writer: A. Medvedkin; operator: Ia. Tolchan; artist: V. Komardentov. Cast: I. Chuvelev (Semen Pyrsa, soldier), N. Kostromsky (railroad watchman), A. Norvylo (watchman's wife), V. Uralskiy (Kurilov), L. Roksanova (his wife), P. Ilyin (their son). The Years of the civil war. The White Army suddenly broke through the front, took the bridge over the river Vyp and captured the Red Army guards. One of them, Semen Pyrsa, managed to escape. The railroad watchman sheltered Semen by telling that he was his nephew. The young Red Army soldier learned of the death of his comrades from the watchman. Semen accidentally met the villager Kurilov, whose son was mobilized to the White Army by force. They decided to blow up the railway bridge in order to stop the advance of the Whites. The villager managed to steal the Whites' blasting bombs while his son was guarding the warehouse. Semen blew up the bridge over Vyp, but the Whites caught and shot him. The film didn't survive.

Then there was the practice to 'send' film directors, who fell short of the management trust, from the center (which, of course, was Leningrad) to the provincial Odessa. However, in this case the situation was different: a picture of Oleksandr Gavronskiy decorated a magazine article about the Leningrad film studio 'Belgoskino' and the thematic plan of the film studio had two launches: 'Woman – a hero of the Civil War.' The film task was to show the active role of women (peasants, party members, workers) in the Civil War. The principle of construction – three stories united not by plot but by the thought unity. Script: A. Osynskaya, film director: Oleksandr Gavronskiy, operator: I. Gelein...

'Cooperation and Defence of the USSR.' The value of cooperation in the case of strengthening the Red Army and the country defensive capacity. Script: Kaponikin, dir. O. Gavronskiy<sup>1</sup>.

So, Gavronskiy was respected in Leningrad. However, he went to Odessa film studio of the All-Ukrainian Administration of Cinema and Photography. Most likely, Gavronskiy lacked creative freedom. The director Pavlo Neches was a very visionary man then, and so he tried to pick the best film directors.

In Odessa, Oleksandr Gavronskiy met Olga Ulitskaya who was his assistant in the first film 'Dark Kingdom' ('Tinkling'). Later, Olga Ulitskaya became his wife and a co-director of the last movie 'Love.'

O. Gavronskiy wrote the script of 'Dark Kingdom' with S. Yermolynsky, and a co-director (in modern terminology, the second film director) was Isidor Vinokurov. Cast: Oleksandr Chistyakov, Leonid Barbe, Bella Chernova, Nina Alisova, Maria Parshina, Vladimir Uralskiy, Mykola Palnikov. The film tells about the cruel customs of the provincial bourgeoisie in old Russia. The graduate student of Odessa State College of Cinematography Georgiy Avenarius was starring in the film (a high official).

In the small town of pre-revolutionary Russia, once there lived a butcher's family. The butcher was a bestial man, despotic and dull, brought his wife to death with endless hits, and his son turned into a miserable, suppressed creature. At the wife's funeral, the butcher fell in love with cobbler's beautiful granddaughter – his son's bride, a shy and humble girl. The butcher pushed his son aside arrogantly and rudely and married her instead of him. The son left home and became a vagabond and a drunk. But the son's fate didn't make the butcher worry.

The official premiere took place on December 30, 1929. In the magazine 'Cinema and Life', B. Alpers published a long article in which he accused the film director that his film will be understood only by a narrow circle of educated intellectuals, not the proletariat masses, 'It (the film by O. Gavronskiy – O. B.) may appear interesting only to the small groups of aesthetically prepared spectators who, not without pleasure, will reread together with O. Gavronskiy several literature works of the past and will manage to evaluate the art taste of the director and the script writer. But for wide audience, 'Dark Kingdom' will rightly remain a dead piece of art'<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> А.Ш. Редкое исключение (1929). *Советский экран*, вып. 1, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Алперс, Б. Темное царство (1930). *Кино и жизнь*, вып.1, 4.

Like most movies by Gavronskiy, 'Dark Kingdom' didn't survive, but there were many publications in the contemporary press.

After shooting for a while, Gavronskiy returned to Leningrad, where in 1930 he shot a drama about the personal and social life of the Soviet people 'in reality' ('The act of Komsomol Member Vira', 'Life' 6 parts) at the studio 'Belgoskino' with his new wife Ulitskaya. Writer: L. Zalkind; operators: D. Schlugleit, N. Sokolov, artist: M. Litvak, assistant directors: R. Prokopyev, P. Mikhailov.

A Komsomol member Vira works at a match factory. As young people surrounding her, she is involved in social work, and enjoys it. But at the factory, there is a young man – a journalist Kostya. He falls in love with Vera, and becomes her husband shortly. Kostya assures his sweetheart that the true sense of life is a quiet family comfort. Under husband's influence, she gives up the factory when the whole staff is fighting for the elimination of 'breakthrough.' This term meant failure to perform the plan before the revolutionary holidays, reduced production rates, etc. Comrades see Komsomol girl dismissal at these harsh times as desertion and insist on her return. Having tasted the fruits of 'family comfort, Vera starts realizing that real life is possible only at work, so she returns to the factory. The film remained without parts No. 2, 4 and 6.

In summer 1931, Gavronskiy returned to Ukraine – to start work on the film 'Love' at the Kyiv Film Factory 'Ukrayinfilm' and to read lectures at the Department of Art (Creative Department) of Kyiv State Institute of Cinematography.

During filming 'Love', Gavronskiy managed to organize a wonderful atmosphere of creativity which 'didn't disappear for a moment. And the atmosphere created by Oleksandr Iosipovych was full of creativity and conversations about life, loved by the enchanted Oleksandr Iosipovych. He believed that every human being is given much, much more than he can value, and he should learn how to use it, and you, added he with laughter, still have to learn this. Here, was place for wit, laughter, and they usually ended our gatherings, leaving no room for dissatisfaction, doubt and even something like this'<sup>1</sup>.

The feature film 'Love' can be characterized as a psychological drama. A director of the state farm 'Gigant' (Vasyl Zaichikov) falls in love with a journalist (Raisa Yesypova). A main female character's friend (Tamara Adelheim) is against this romance. The main female character requires complete dedication from her man in love, but he cannot pay her enough attention because he is completely devoted to his business. The film was completed in the draft form.

The script of 'Love' was written by Vasyl Tymofiyevych Likot (1899–1937), famous for his script for the film 'Girl in a Hurry for a Date' (1936). The operator was Ivan Ivanovych Shekker, whom Gavronskiy, apparently, met at the Odessa Movie Factory. Shekker was a graduate of OSCC Department of Operator's Work, and Gavronskiy was a film director of the film 'Dark Kingdom'.

Together with Ivan Shekker, after the failure with 'Love', Oleksandr Dovzhenko started to shoot 'Shchors', but in autumn 1937 he replaced him with Georgiy Yekelchuk. I.I. Shekker was famous as the director of photography for 'I Love' (1936), 'Great Life', 1st episode (1939), 'Taras Shevchenko' (1951) and others.

The art director of the film 'Love' was then a debutant Moritz Umansky, who worked later on another prohibited Ukrainian film 'Strict Young Man' (1936), Dovzhenko's 'Schors' (1939), 'The Undefeated' (1945) 'The Scout's Feat' (1947).

'Love' was filmed with difficulty, party management in Ukraine, unlike, for example, their colleagues in Leningrad feared that artists would study the characters' inner state, so 'the script was modified many times'<sup>2</sup>.

Despite all the difficulties, Gavronskiy not only completed the film 'Love', but had future plans concerning the Kyiv Movies Factory. On August 17, 1933 in the thematic plan of the Kyiv Film Studio for 1933–1934 provided to run O. Gavronskiy with the film 'My' under Yadin's script: '... on the collective farm, the collective farm worker re-education process'<sup>3</sup>.

But an obstacle for these plans became so-called 'combing-outs' swept across the Soviet Union. They did not pass the Kyiv Film Studio, whose management demanded immediate provision of a film from its director who had the 'hostile class' aristocratic social origin: 'By order of the Factory director, film director Gavronskiy must submit his film 'Love' on September, 5'<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Есипова, Р. *Воспоминания о А. И. Гавронском*. Музей Національної кіностудії художніх фільмів ім. Олександра Довженка, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Григорьев, Г. На Киевской «Украинфильм» (1932). *Киногазета*, 16 июня.

<sup>3</sup> Дмитерко, А. Основа основ – це висока ідейна якість (1933). *За більшовицький фільм*, 17 серпня.

<sup>4</sup> Ф.–Г.–К. Фільми «Любов», «Молодість», «Степові пісні» – здати вчасно (1933). *За більшовицький фільм*, 2 вересня.

Gavronskiy not only delayed the film submission but did not start repenting at the ‘combing-out’, as angrily reported in an editorial of the factory newspaper, ‘condemn the film director Gavronskiy who hides the real causes of his mistakes in the film ‘Love’, ‘A reply of Gavronskiy and co-director Ulitskaya provided here unchanged, cannot satisfy the factory wide public. Gavronskiy doesn’t provide even a brief analysis of his mistakes, trying not to reveal the shortcomings of the film ‘Love’. Moreover, Gavronskiy tries to shove the blame for the fallacy of ‘Love’ in our reality, which, according to him, is growing too rapidly’<sup>1</sup>.

Broken Oleksandr Gavronskiy in the newspaper of the Kyiv Film Studio ‘For the Bolshevik Film’ was forced to make excuses for the film ‘Love’: ‘We have failed to show how a person subjects to the social aspects, and didn’t reveal the class basis of the characters’ relationships. Instead of a vibrant picture of fight and victory in front of the country socialist reconstruction, we gave something resembling a psychological study... We chose the novel by Avdiyenko – ‘I Love’ ... Just having reviewed the work properly from all sides, on workers’ audiences, we’ll start filming it’<sup>2</sup>.

After rework in late 1933, the film ‘Love’ was completed, showed to the management of the Kyiv Movies Studio. Finally, the film must have been approved in Kharkiv, which was then the capital of Ukraine. However, the highest party USSR management saw counterrevolution in ‘Love’. The result is that on the night of January 3 to 4, 1934, Oleksandr Gavronskiy was arrested.

A few days before the leading actress Yesipova, who went to Moscow for New Year’s holidays, was visited by an assistant to Gavronskiy Isidor Vinokurov and said that the beloved film director had been arrested, the film completely washed away, and everything taken away, ‘I and Isidor were sitting totally confused, not understanding, stunned and desperate’<sup>3</sup>.

Under unfair accusations, Oleksandr Gavronskiy spent almost twenty five years in the Soviet camps. This undermined his health but failed to break his spirit, which, according to Vaneyev, who was also imprisoned in the camp Abez, located near the northern polar circle in the autonomous republic of Komi, ‘Among patients in half-inpatient department, they were also treating Gavronskiy, a very neat gray-eyed old man. Earlier, he was a philosopher – Non-Kantian of the Marburg school, Cohen’s student’<sup>4</sup>. Even in prison, Gavronskiy continued creative activity, headed a drama circle and theater and pop collective in the camp on Kniazhyi Pogost where he led the performances: ‘Anniversary’ by Anton Chekhov, ‘The Lower Depths’ by M. Gorky, ‘Heaven and Hell’ by P. Mérimée, etc.

When Oleksandr Iosipovych Gavronskiy was set free, he was going to travel to Odessa to see his wife Olga Ulitskaya. However, immediately after the release, he fell ill and was hospitalized. Olga Ulitskaya received a letter that her husband was released, but was very ill in a hospital, and with a question whether she wanted to take him with her? Ulitskaya brought the ill man to his native city, Chisinau, and nursed.

In the last days of his life, Oleksandr Iosipovych Gavronskiy was visited by many people, so ‘he died as he lived, surrounded by people’<sup>5</sup>. Oleksandr Iosipovych Gavronskiy died in Chisinau on August 17, 1958, but the scientific, artistic and pedagogical legacy of this extraordinary man hasn’t been properly evaluated still. Despite the fact that, due to the efforts of his wife and film assistant Olga Ulitskaya, shortly before his death, he was completely rehabilitated.

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<sup>3</sup> Есипова, Р. *Воспоминания о А. И. Гавронском*. Музей Національної кіностудії художніх фільмів ім. Олександра Довженка, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ванеев, А. *Два года в Абези*. Музей Національної кіностудії художніх фільмів ім. Олександра Довженка, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Есипова, Р. *Воспоминания о А. И. Гавронском*. Музей Національної кіностудії художніх фільмів ім. Олександра Довженка, 11.

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