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FILM ADAPTATION AND CULTURAL POLITICS: THE RUSSIAN APPROACH TO SCREENING LITERATURE

The adaptation of works of literature has been a staple part of film production in all countries of the world. Western theories of adaptation have focused on the relationship of the film to the original text, and the vision of the director. Essentially these theories can be reduced to one question: who owns the film version: the author or the director? In Russia, the relationship between authors and director is further complicated by time, as the genre of literary adaptation has much in common with the historical film: both tell us as much about the times in which these films were made, as about the source material. Russian film adaptations of literature have consistently referred to the source text with great respect but also with an eye to their contemporary relevance. The Russian classical and Soviet literary heritage provides a rich repository of cultural values that can be celebrated in any era, but which can also comment on the mores of that era, sometimes to satirical effect. What distinguishes the Russian approach to literary adaptation is its espousal of periodization, wherein a film adaptation may reveal more about the time in which it was produced than develop the actual literary original itself.

Key words: film adaptation theory; genre; Russian literature; cultural politics; periodization.

Introduction

The history of Russian film has always been interconnected with cultural politics. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Russian historical film, where ‘history’ is explored, interpreted and presented not so much in the past, as in the time when the film was made [1, 2]. Thus, Sergei Eisenstein’s 1938 film *Alexander Nevskii* foregrounds the heroism of Russian soldiers in defeating the Teutonic Knights in the thirteenth century under the command of the wise and charismatic Prince Nevskii. But there is another narrative embedded, one that provides a contemporary resonance given the threat to Europe and the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Even more obvious is the dual narrative of Eisenstein’s next film, *Ivan the Terrible* (Parts One and Two, 1944–45), an explicit apologia for the use of terror as a form of government, and therefore viewed and received very much as an allegory of Stalin’s rule. Other historical films made under Stalin were ‘an attempt to use historical references to justify and compare Stalin’s dictatorship with other historical periods’ [3. P. 97].

A similar paradigm can be seen in the Russian approach to screening its literary heritage. In Western film criticism the issue of literary adaptation focuses on the ‘fidelity’ of the film to its literary predecessor, and to what degree of ‘reverence’ the director holds for the source material [4; 5. P. 8]. Whereas in Russia the fundamental question ‘Who does the film belong to, the director or the author?’ has always also been valid, other concerns have predominated, in particular periodization. Just as with the historical film, the Russian literary adaptation tells us more about the times in which it was made, and the cultural politics defining those times, than actually telling a story. In short, both the Russian historical film and the literary adaptation were fundamentally concerned with reinterpreting the past from the point of view of ‘today’ [6, 7].

Adaptation as Film Genre

The early years of Russian cinema were marked by films that appealed to the box-office, with themes revolving around sex, murder, suicide, and as such were criticised in the press and by the Orthodox Church. Film ad-

aptations of the Russian literary heritage were viewed by producers and entrepreneurs as giving this relatively new art form ‘respectability’ [5. P. 63], and between 1910 and 1917 film versions of works by Alexander Pushkin, Lev Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolai Gogol all appeared [8]. The Russian literary heritage, therefore, helped the new art form of cinema achieve a degree of prestige among a public that had long regarded theatre, opera and ballet as the purest art forms.

The 1920s are commonly referred to as the ‘Golden Age’ of Soviet cinema, with the emergence of key directors such as Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Dziga Vertov, Lev Kuleshov, Alexander Dovzhenko, Abram Room, Fridrikh Ermler and Boris Barnet, the return from emigration of Yakov Protazanov, and the development of ‘montage’ for both entertainment and educational purposes. Gogol’s *The Overcoat* was filmed by the Leningrad-based FEKS group in 1926, the grotesqueness and absurdity of the story emphasised by the eccentricity of the acting and unsettling photography for which FEKS was renowned [3. P. 60]. Perhaps the most famous literary adaptation of the ‘Golden Age’ was Pudovkin’s 1926 film version of Maxim Gorky’s 1908 novel *The Mother*. Pudovkin’s adaptation is bold and innovative, making the ending of the film much more tragic than in the original novel, and therefore emphasising the revolutionary credentials of both the book and the film. The film, moreover, allows Pudovkin to develop his approach to ‘montage’, and to show how this technique of editing and assembling frames and shots can be used in a fundamentally different way from the violent and shocking images of Eisenstein. Instead, *The Mother* contains metaphors and symbols based on Russian literary traditions that Russian viewers would instinctively recognise, created not through Eisenstein’s ‘collision of images’ [Ibid. P. 56] but through continuity and the juxtaposition of man and the natural world.

The arrival of sound cinema in the 1930s rendered the importance of ‘montage’ in silent film essentially redundant, and the adoption of socialist realism as the ‘basic method’ of Soviet art defined all areas of artistic and cultural production. Consequently, through reinterpretation and visual representation, the classical corpus becomes

'integrated into socialist realism' [9. P. 115]. Political priorities in the 1930s and 1940s were very different from those of the 1920s, and the literary heritage had to play its part: 'Screen adaptations in the Stalin era were unique in that their goal was never to reproduce the literary source-text or the writer's artistic world, but to use the text solely with the aim of creating images of the past, to bring a visual perspective on history' [Ibid.].

Given that the Russian classics were expected to make their ideological contribution to Stalinist historiography, it is not surprising that so many adaptations were made under Stalin. Particular favourites were Anton Chekhov, with noted adaptations of *The Man in a Case* (1939), and *The Wedding* (1944), both directed by Isidor Annenskii with some of the leading actors of the day, and Alexander Ostrovsky, whose plays about the venality of the nineteenth-century merchant class and the hopelessness of the 'little man' (and woman) are reflected in adaptations of *Without a Dowry* (1937), directed by Protazanov, *The Storm* (1943), and *Guilty Without Blame* (1945), the latter two directed by Vladimir Petrov. In 1936 Alexander Ivanovskii gave Pushkin's unfinished novella *Dubrovsky* a revolutionary ending by showing the peasant masses preparing for all-out rebellion. All of these films were given an ideological dimension obviously missing from the literary original, but were nevertheless used to legitimize Stalinist culture and cultural history.

Adaptations of Soviet literature were also prominent in the 1930s. Films such as *Chapaev* (1934), directed by the Vasilev brothers and based on a 1923 Civil War novel by Dmitrii Furmanov, was the first Soviet 'blockbuster' and promoted by the Party itself as a model to be emulated in other films as showing the socialist realist development of the 'heroic' biography. Similarly, Mark Donskoy's trilogy of the life of Maxim Gorky (*Childhood, My Apprenticeship, My Universities*, 1938–1939), based on Gorky's own autobiography, was to serve as the official 'hagiography' of the 'father of socialist realism' and the 'forefather of Soviet literature' [Ibid. P 149–150].

The post-Stalin period is also characterized by the recruitment of the classical literary text into cultural politics, only this time de-Stalinization and the return of 'humanist' values. Chekhov's short stories remained popular, with adaptations of *Anna around the Neck* (1954), directed by Annenskii, *The Grasshopper* (1955) directed by Samson Samsonov, and most notably *The Lady with the Lapdog* (1960), directed by Iosif Kheifits and winner of a special prize at the 1960 Cannes Film Festival. These years also saw ambitious adaptations of some of the 'heavyweight' Russian classics, such as Ivan Pyrev's version of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (1958), Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, directed by Adolf Bergunker and Natalia Rashevskaya in 1958, and Mikhail Schweitzer's adaptation of Lev Tolstoy's *Resurrection* (two parts, 1960, 1962) [2, 10]. Schweitzer sees the Tolstoy text about social injustice and the corruption of the Tsarist judicial system as a means for exploring the recent Soviet past of mass arrests and arbitrary imprisonment, to the extent of adding text to Tolstoy's original on the expediency of political repression to make the analogy clear to a contemporary audience. In the *glasnost*' years Shveitser's adaptation of another Tolstoy's work, *The Kreutzer Sonata*

(1987), was notable for its contribution to the increasing cultural freedoms becoming available at the time, in particular its use of 'frank' language (the first time in a Russian film an obscenity was clearly spoken) and a remarkably open and honest discussion of homosexuality.

The 1960s saw the literary heritage given the 'epic' treatment, no more so than in Sergei Bondarchuk's 6-hour version of *War and Peace* (1965–1967) [11]. The film is not only grandiose in terms of its scale (with over 120,000 extras, and the Battle of Borodino lasts one and a half hours, almost a film in itself), but also in its patriotic message. Russian troops are filmed against the backdrop of a church, with choral and orchestral music in the background, Natasha Rostova's dance shows that she is at one of the common people, Moscow is the 'holy' capital and Russia is invaded not by France but the 'forces of Western Europe'.

The 1960s and 1970s were also a period in Soviet cultural history that saw a rise in Russian nationalist sentiment, especially in literature and film. 'Village prose' celebrated the virtues of living and working on the land, its heroes usually men and women of the older generation who had lived by simple and honest values that were seen as intrinsic to the Russian village. The films of Vasily Shukshin, such as *Pots and Pans* (1972) and *Red Guelder Tree* (1973), were adaptations of his own stories, and were of great social relevance at the time as they revealed the countryside not so much as idyllic as fundamentally separate from the town, thus revealing the social dichotomy of those years.

The nationalist sentiment inherent in these adaptations was also evident in the 'big-screen' treatment given to other great works of literature. *The Brothers Karamazov* was adapted by Ivan Pyrev in 1968, *Anna Karenina* [8] was directed by Alexander Zarkhi in 1967, and Lev Kulidzhanov adapted *Crime and Punishment* in 1970. All these adaptations, including *War and Peace*, starred the leading actors of the day, and so were clear signs of the confidence of the Soviet film industry, and the pride it had in the Russian literary heritage.

In this context the films of Nikita Mikhalkov are of particular interest. In one of his first films as director, *Unfinished Piece for Mechanical Piano* (1977), Mikhalkov showed great innovation in synthesizing Chekhov's play *Platonov* and several short stories to produce a picture of Russian middle-class spiritual malaise in the nineteenth century, shot against a backdrop of the peace and quiet of the Russian countryside. *A Few Days in the Life of I.I. Oblomov* (1979) is another 'loose' adaptation, this time of Goncharov's 1859 novel *Oblomov*. The titular character is indeed indolent, unfocused and lethargic, but his childlike simplicity and seeming innocence are favourably contrasted with the drive and energy of his neighbour Stolz, of German extraction. The novel reflected the debate between the Slavophiles and Westerners in the mid-nineteenth century as to where Russia's future lays, and the film 'updates' that debate as the camera lovingly lingers over the green fields, woods, rivers and valleys of the Russian countryside, a real celebration of Mother Russia [3. P. 177].

Also relevant here are the literary adaptations of Mikhalkov's elder brother Andrei Konchalovsky, whose

themes are diametrically opposed. In *A Nest of Gentlefolk* (1969), based on the Turgenev novel, and his adaptation of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* (1970) he shows a *fin-de-siècle* world of doomed aspirations and fallen hopes, with a clear analogy with the morally compromised intelligentsia of the 1960s.

Literary adaptations of the glasnost period and early post-Soviet years reflected the new freedoms allowed in art and culture, with Roman Balayan's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (1989) fully expressing the latent eroticism of Nikolay Leskov's 1865 novella, and Yuri Grymov's *Mu-Mu* (1995) reimagines Turgenev's story as a tale of a sado-masochistic relationship between a serf and his land-owning mistress. Other adaptations to exploit the newfound permissiveness and display on screen sex and violence, were *Horses Carry Me* (1996), an adaptation of Chekhov's *The Duel*, Alexander Proshkin's *Russian Rebellion* (1999), an adaptation of Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*, and Valery Todorovsky's adaptation of the same Leskov story, this time entitled *Katya Izmailova* (1995). Todorovsky's film, however, deserves some discussion because it updates the setting to post-Soviet Russia, incorporates elements from other literary works (in particular, *Crime and Punishment*) as well as aspects from Western *film noir*. Todorovsky's film is notable in its embrace of the new cultural freedoms available since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also in its affirmation that the nineteenth-century literary canon can have relevance for the modern world. In particular, Todorovsky uses Leskov's text and themes to subject the venality and spiritual corruption of the 'new Russians' to satire and scorn.

Another bold and innovative approach to the classical heritage was demonstrated by Sergey Bodrov in his film *A Prisoner of the Caucasus* (1996). The literary antecedent is Lev Tolstoy's 1872 short story of that name, though it also bears the same name of poems by Alexander Pushkin (1822) and Mikhail Lermontov (1828). Both poems focus on the relationship between a Russian officer and a local girl, whereas Tolstoy's story explores the difference in cultures between the 'European' Russian army officers Zhilin and Kostylin, and the 'primitive' mountain tribesmen of the Caucasus. Bodrov takes Tolstoy's subject and characters, but sets his story in the modern period, most specifically the Chechen War of the mid-1990s.

Bodrov's adaptation is a bold and innovative one, showing the Russian military as a brutal occupying force with little respect for local people or customs; moreover, the Chechens are more humane and 'civilized' at the end of the film. Bodrov's was one of several films of the post-Soviet period that explored Russia's relations with its non-Christian neighbours (for instance, Ivan Khotinenko's *The Muslim*, 1995, and Andrei Konchalovsky's *House of Fools*, 2002), and showed that the Tolstoyan text can be adapted and remoulded to articulate contemporary anxieties.

The twenty-first century shows no let-up in filmmakers' desire to make the literary canon relevant to a modern audience. Recent adaptations include Kira Muratova's *Chekhovian Motifs* (2002), which draws together two narratives from various Chekhov texts (rather like Mikhalkov did in *Unfinished Piece for Mechanical Pi-*

ano), to satirize the coldness and cynicism of the 'new' Russians and their relationships [12. P. 102]. Alexander Proshkin's *Live and Remember* (2008) candidly and quite graphically expresses the dilemma of an army deserter returning to his Siberian home, based on a 1974 novella by Valentin Rasputin, exploiting freedoms that were not available to directors when Rasputin wrote what many critics still regard as his finest work. Karen Shakhnazarov's *Ward No. 6* (2010) updates Chekhov's short story to the modern world to show that world perilously close to descending into insanity. Vladimir Bortko's *Taras Bulba* (2009) gave Nikolai Gogol's novel the full Hollywood 'epic' treatment, thus showing a domestic audience that Russian cinema can equal its American rival in the blockbuster department [7]. Bortko has also been responsible for the TV serial adaptations of Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* (2005) and Dostoevskii's *The Idiot* (2003), and Alexander Proshkin directed the TV serial adaptation of Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (2006). These TV adaptations in particular show reflect the confidence in the Russian cultural media of being able to bring large projects to the screen, and attract a modern audience by making the classics relevant to modern life, and reminding that audience of the greatness of its literary culture.

Science Fiction and Adaptation

One of the first Soviet full-length feature films was an adaptation of a work of science fiction. Yakov Protazanov filmed Alexey Tolstoy's novel *Aelita* in 1924, focusing on an imaginary journey to Mars, and provided the Soviet viewer with an astonishing array of visuals in the sets and costumes designed by the Constructivist artist Alexandra Ekster, thus celebrating the possibilities of what was still a relatively new art form, and which became 'the most famous Russian film of that period' [13. P. 46].

A film that was also very much of its time was *The Amphibious Man*, directed in 1961 by Gennady Kazansky and Vladimir Chebotarev and based on a 1928 novel by Alexander Belyaev. Filmed in colour and with exotic and sensuous visuals, and starring the stunningly beautiful teenager Anastasiya Vertinskaya, the film provided the Soviet viewing public that had largely never travelled abroad with glimpses of exotic lands, replete with sunshine, rugged coastlines and impressive seascapes. In its portrayal of a scientist trying to improve the lot of mankind by developing underwater breathing apparatus, moreover, it also hinted at individual inner freedom and personal choice at a time when Stalin's legacy was still being publicly debated [Ibid. P. 48]. Another of Belyaev's novels, *The Head of Professor Dowell*, written in 1925, was adapted in 1984 by the director Leonid Menaker (as *The Testament of Professor Dowell*), and fully chimes with the anti-imperialist rhetoric of the Cold War at its height.

The most popular and enduring Russian writers of science fiction whose works have been adapted for the screen are the Strugatsky Brothers (Arkady and Boris). Russia's greatest *auteur* Andrey Tarkovsky adapted their 1972 novel *Roadside Picnic* as *Stalker* in 1979, with a screenplay written by them. The film, however, most certainly 'belongs' to Tarkovsky and not the Strugatsky Brothers, as the adaptation features only the bare bones of the original plot (and

relocates it in Russia), but focuses much more on Tarkovsky's perennial themes of family, love and faith: the fate of 'man in the world of a dead God' [14].

Tarkovsky's film was an important statement at a time when Soviet society was at the officially-trumpeted stage of 'advanced socialism', and a bold assertion in an atheistic society that man's materialist progress is doomed if it is not accompanied by his spiritual and moral development (also the central theme of Tarkovsky's earlier foray into science fiction, his adaptation of the Polish author Stanislaw Lem's 1961 novel *Solaris*, released in 1972). In all his films Tarkovsky consistently challenged the ethos of his times, and would assert the primacy of the individual artistic consciousness over totalitarian priorities, but *Stalker* was to be the last film Tarkovsky directed in his homeland.

It can be argued that thematically the most significant literary adaptations in the post-Soviet period have been of works by the Strugatsky Brothers. *Roadside Picnic* may have provided Andrey Tarkovsky with an intellectual broadside against the prevailing relativist ethos of his times, but their 1969 novel *Prisoners of Power* became a 2008–09 cinematic blockbuster intended to put Russian cinema back on the filmgoer's map. Renamed *The Inhabited Island* in a direct reference to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and directed by Fyodor Bondarchuk, it con-

tained state-of-the-art special effects that would not look out of place in a Hollywood sci-fi spectacular. With its themes of totalitarianism, political repression and rebellion, however, the film can be seen as a subversive call to arms. Alexei German's adaptation of their 1964 novella *Hard to be a God* (2013), a satire on Soviet aspirations towards social perfection, foregrounds physical and material detritus as it explores a dystopian future of failed hopes and distorted ambitions, leaving the viewer with an unambiguous misanthropic vision of human endeavour and potential.

Conclusion

Russian film adaptations of literature have consistently referred to the source text with great respect but also with an eye to their contemporary relevance. The Russian classical and Soviet literary heritage provides a rich repository of cultural values that can be celebrated in any era, but which can also comment on the *mores* of that era, sometimes to satirical effect. What distinguishes the Russian approach to literary adaptation is its espousal of periodization, wherein a film adaptation may reveal more about the time in which it was produced than develop the actual literary original itself.

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**ЭКРАНИЗАЦИЯ ЛИТЕРАТУРНЫХ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЙ И ПОЛИТИКА В ОБЛАСТИ КУЛЬТУРЫ:
РУССКИЙ ПОДХОД К ЭКРАНИЗАЦИИ ЛИТЕРАТУРНОГО МАТЕРИАЛА**
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Издание подготовлено в рамках научного проекта НИР 8.1.38.2015 «Когнитивные, социолингвистические и pragmatische аспекты иноязычного дискурса в теоретических и прикладных исследованиях в обучении иностранным языкам».

Экранизация русской литературы всегда достоверно отражает темы, мотивы и персонажи литературного оригинала. Однако они также имеют непосредственное отношение к современному периоду. Русская и советская литература представляет собой богатейшее наследие духовных ценностей, которые могут быть воспроизведены в различных культурных воплощениях в любые времена. Фильмы, снятые по мотивам литературных произведений, также могут затрагивать социально-политические процессы соответствующего периода и показать эти времена с оттенками сатиры. К тому же русский подход к экранизации литературного материала существенно отличается от англоязычного подхода, поскольку он воспроизводит и освещает не только само литературное произведение, но и социально-политический контекст того времени. Следовательно, в дореволюционном русском кино особое значение в популяризации этой «новой» формы визуального искусства имеет экранизация произведений Александра Пушкина, Льва Толстого, Николая Гоголя, Федора Достоевского. Экранизация в советском кинематографе вносит весомый вклад в становление и развитие «Золотого века» советского кино в 1920-е гг., причем фильмы «Аэлита» (1924 г.), «Шинель» (1926 г.), «Мать» (1926 г.) выделяются как шедевры киноискусства мирового масштаба. В 1930-е и 1940-е гг. в экранизациях классических литературных произведений, в частности пьес Александра Островского, литературные героини XIX в. были «завербованы» в ряды положительных героев социалистического реализма. В период хрущевской «коттепели» такие фильмы, как «Дама с собачкой» (1960 г.) и «Воскресение» (1960–1962 гг.), освещали нормы общечеловеческих ценностей и нравственности, которые особо подчеркивались в постсталинский период. В 1960-е и 1970-е гг. экранизации остались по-прежнему популярными и получали положительные критические отклики, но и показали, что советские кинорежиссеры могут воплотить на экране шедевры классической русской литературы («Война и мир», 1965–1967 гг., «Братья Карамазовы», 1968 г., «Анна Каренина», 1968 г., «Преступление и наказание», 1969 г.) так же крупномасштабно и качественно, как их голливудские коллеги. Экранизации постсоветского периода вполне отражают новые свободы тех времен, особенно в области интимных человеческих отношений, и многосерийные телевизионные экранизации последних лет («Идиот», 2003 г.; «Мастер и Маргарита», 2005 г.; «Доктор Живаго», 2006 г.) делают русское литературное наследие доступным молодому поколению. Особое место в истории и типологии русского отношения к экранизации имеет научная фантастика. Такие фильмы, как «Человек-амфибия» (1961 г.) и «Завещание Профессора Доуэля» (1984 г.), продвигают понятия советских научных инноваций, так же как «Солярис» (1972 г.) и «Сталкер» (1979 г.) Андрея Тарковского представляют собой наглядное пророческое предупреждение о пагубных последствиях для человеческой цивилизации безбожного мира, мира, где отсутствует любовь к ближнему.

Ключевые слова: теория экранизации; жанры; русская литература; политика; периодизация.

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