

SHOOTING THE CANON: The Role of the *Ekranizatsiia* in Stalinist Culture*

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The iconoclasts considered embodying divine authority in sensuous form to be sacrilegious.¹ Yet, as Terry Eagleton points out: 'Only by coming to feel affection for the law will we obey it, which means that we need tangible images. If power does not infiltrate our hearts in this way, it is likely to prove alarmingly fragile'.² Eagleton's precept informs Lenin's claim that, for Bolshevism, cinema is 'the most important of all the arts'. This paper considers one aspect of Soviet (primarily Stalinist) cinema - the role of the screen adaptation of literature, which resonates with Eagleton's insight in three ways. First, the making visual of literature mirrors the process of making ideology sensual.³ Secondly, in a totalitarian society with a prominent

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¹ The dispute between the iconoclasts, who bitterly opposed the depiction of images of divine beings, and the iconodules, who defended it, raged throughout the 8th and 9th centuries and was eventually decided in favour of the latter group, on the strength of St Ireneas's formula that 'the Father is that which is invisible about the Son, the Son is that which is visible about the father', quoted in J. P e l i k a n, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, University of Chicago Press: London and Chicago 1971, p. 229.

² See T. E a g l e t o n, *Signs, Sense and Sentiment*, „The Times Higher Educational Supplement” April 27, 2001, p. 26.

³ Theories of the genre of film adaptation have altogether ignored its mirroring of the general problematic of ideological embodiment, tending instead to focus on formal and technical matters such as the difficulties involved in translating from a verbal medium into a visual language, and on the issue of 'fidelity' to the textual

literary tradition, yet relatively high illiteracy, the mass-distribution *ekranizatsiia* has much to contribute to that process. Thirdly, individual adaptations illustrate the problems encountered in translating ideological abstractions into visual form.⁴

The *ekranizatsiia* will be considered first in relationship to the Stalinist literary canon. Canons are tools by which cultural consensus is imposed. In a totalitarian society where consensus is at a premium, the *ekranizatsiia* reinforces the literary canon, but also shapes and alters it. In addition to the canon itself, we must consider two sub-canons: classical Russian fiction appropriated to furnish a 'pre-history' of the prevailing socialist realist canon, and newly canonised foreign texts. In each case, film's institutional centrality ensured its allegiance with canon-forming forces. Later, we focus on film versions of specific works from each of the three categories to illustrate how the *ekranizatsiia*'s transformative work reflects its dependence upon key formal differences between film and literature and, in so doing, underscores the difficulties entailed in embodying ideological word as cinematic image.

Many pre-revolutionary Russian films were literary adaptations – a function of the medium's role in promulgating Russian selfhood. But cinema was struggling simultaneously to establish its own aesthetic status. The fact that amongst 40 films produced between 1909 and 1917, 20 were adaptations is also an indication of the extent to which cinema invoked

source. The classic study in this mode is B. M c F a r l a n e, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, Clarendon Press: Oxford 1996. More recently, however, some scholars have begun tentatively examining the genre in terms of its implications for national identity in the global era, and for the changing relationship between mass and 'high' culture. For the latter, see in particular *The Classic Novel: From Page to Screen*, eds. R. Giddings, E. Sheen, University of Manchester Press: Manchester 2000, and *Adaptation: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, eds. D. Cartmell, I. Whelehan, Routledge: London, 1999.

⁴ The film adaptation, straddling, as it does, the border dividing verbal from visual discourse, can usefully be placed under the auspices of W. J. T. Mitchell's iconology according to which the 'word/image threshold', together with the 'ideology/nature' boundary that it encompasses, invariably acts as the site of culture's 'fundamental conflicts and contradictions'. See W. J. T. M i t c h e l l, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London 1986, p. 44.

literature to raise its standing.⁵ A medium capable of envisioning *War and Peace* (1915 saw two versions of the novel) is worth taking seriously. Soon, the same drive to invoke literature in the interests of consolidating cinema's status was to affect the shape of the cinematic canon itself. When *ekranizatsii* of the early 1920s dealt with topics reflected in other films of the same period, they confer on those films by association the literary seal of approval, confirming their place in the film repertoire. For example, *ekranizatsii* of the year 1924 include as recurrent themes both depictions of struggle against political enemies (*kulaks*, Fascist regimes, religious figures) and approval of political causes (education or opposing drinking).⁶ The same topics are repeatedly echoed in films not based on literary works.

Paradoxically, the drive for specificity was spurred by literary Formalism. Just as literature was to be liberated from the position of 'handmaiden' to psychology, so cinema was to be freed from its subordination to theatre.⁷ Despite cinema's natural syncretism and affinity with popular culture, the same 'enstrangement' devices illustrating literary specificity emerge in formalist film theory.⁸ The most lasting legacy of formalism's impact on cinema is attributable to the numerous film scenarios fur-

⁵ The very first Russian feature film was an adaptation of a Lermontov poem. For a catalogue of Russian film adaptations of literature from 1900 to the present, see <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/LIS/LVMG/Catalogue.html>.

⁶ The former is illustrated by the film *Krasnyi gaz* (based on Zazubrin's novel *Dva mira*) which deals with the struggle of Red partisans against Kolchak and by *Pro-pavshie sokrovishcha* (based on Morskii's novel), about the acquisition of a treasure for the benefit of the Soviet regime (a theme which is later to be developed in Vainshtok's 1937 *Ostrov sokrovishch*, discussed later in this article). The latter is exemplified in the film *Kak Petiunka ezdil k Il'ichu* (based on Dorokhov's short story of the same name) in which Lenin is presented as a role model for Soviet children.

⁷ The notion of literature as 'handmaiden' to other disciplines is attributable to Shklovskii. Dziga Vertov, the radical avant-garde film theorist and director, articulated similar objections to cinema's subordination to literature and theatre: 'Every motion picture is a mere literary skeleton covered with a film skin ... we have no film objects. We have the cohabitation of film-illustrations with theatre, literature, with music ... at any price' - *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. A. Michelson, University of California Press: Los Angeles 1984, p. 36.

⁸ Even Eisenstein's montage theory, the defining essence of cinema as a unique artistic medium, was illustrated with examples from Pushkin's poetry.

nished by the movement.⁹ Indeed, the closeness of mainstream directors like Room to Formalism ensured the presence of formalist influences at the heart of the Soviet film canon, despite the ramifications of the nationalisation of the Russian literary classics by official decree in 1919.¹⁰

Formalist adaptations were, unlike pre-revolutionary *ekranizatsii*, conscious transformations of their sources. The transformative ethic influenced the work of directors who cut their teeth in the private cinema industry, as in Protozanov's 1924 adaptation of *Aelita* in which A. Tolstoy's science fictional account of a workers' revolution on Mars is relocated inside the imagination of the main character, Los'. Moreover, Tolstoy's passing reference to Martian communication *ekrany* is expanded into a motif depicting Martians watching developments in NEP-era Russia on an interplanetary cinematic screen. In Tolstoy's original the action takes place on Mars, but in the film the focus becomes a torrid, earthly melodrama offering a wry commentary on NEP society and enabling us, like the Martians, to witness on our *ekrany*, authentic NEP-era *byt*. By blending science fiction and popular melodrama in a subversion of the literary origin, Protozanov stresses the versatility of film which deals not in allegorical revolution but in everyday revolutionary reality, yet also highlights film's ability to project inner consciousness onto public screens.

But in the newly repressive atmosphere of the early Stalin years, cinematic versatility was harnessed to the task of 'commandeering' Russian classics for the Stalinist national identity project. During the late 20s, for example, Georgian State Cinema adapted three separate parts of Lermontov's *Geroi nashego vremeni* all of which were readapted in the 1950s.

⁹ For example, Shklovskii contributed to an adaptation of Dostoevskii's *House of the Dead* in 1932, and Tynianov provided the scenario for the film *Lieutenant Kizhe* in 1933. The dearth of scenarists and the call to involve writers and critics is one of the abiding themes of early Soviet cinema. In a Party Cinema Conference in 1928, a resolution referred specifically to a 'script crisis' and recommended the following: As a younger art form, cinema can utilise all the best achievements of literature and enrich them with its own specific resources ... With the aim of greater productivity in creative cinema work we must maintain a much closer link between the writer, the scriptwriter and the director. See R. Taylor, I. Christie, *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, Routledge: London and New York 1988, pp. 212-213.

¹⁰ Amongst the writers 'taken into public ownership' in 1918 were Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gogol, Pushkin and Nekrasov.

National canons claim universal value which, when enacted via photographic images, are incarnated in ethnically specific detail. Hence, versions of Pushkin's and Lermontov's Caucasian tales are replete with local scenery and ritual. The literary adaptation serves as the mediating glue binding Russia and the republics; the republics gain a voice by adapting works set in their region, while Russia assimilates the revolutionary struggle of non-Russian cultures to its own texts. After the Second World War, this practice was widened to include Eastern European countries under Soviet hegemony, as in the 1959 Soviet-Bulgarian co-production of the film *Nakanune*, based on Turgenev's eponymous novel about a Bulgarian revolutionary who aims to develop Russian-Bulgarian connections in aid of the liberation of his homeland. The film gained added authenticity through the choice of a Russian-speaking Bulgarian actor to play the leading role.

From the mid 30s, adaptations of classical and modern literature were parcelled out primarily between the Soiuzdetfilm studio and Mezhrabpromfilm, whose remit encompassed the screening of foreign literature.¹¹ Far from reflecting the destruction of cinema's hardwon autonomy, these trends point to the articulation of a cinematic metacommentary on the established canon from which the new medium is now sufficiently separate to be able to recategorize it according to its own needs. A related development is the selection of several works by one writer for combination into a single film. Tynianov's creative synthesis of *Shinel* and *Nevskii prospekt* in the 1926 film *Shinel*, set the pattern.¹² This practice paralleled the splitting of single works into separate films (as in the *Geroi nashego vremeni* series). Soviet cinema thus manifested a growing disrespect for the unity of the individual work on which the sanctity of the canon depends.

¹¹ As Evgenii Dobrenko points out, literature played a key role in the Stalinist school syllabus. He describes the systematic way in which the literary classics were exploited in fragmentary form to 'structure children's reading' according to key Marxist-Leninist categories – 'the oppressive conditions on the country estate', 'the impoverished working class' etc – and that literature under Stalin acquired the function of 'normative center' in the entire education system. See E. Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader*, Princeton University Press: Princeton NJ 1999, pp. 147-148.

¹² In 1927 Sovkino released a film called *Ania* based on two stories by S. Grigoriev and Mezhrabpromfilm released in 1928 *Chiny i liudi*, directed by Protozanov and based on three separate Chekhov stories.

In what became a complex dialectic, literature exacted revenge with the arrival of socialist realism, whose master texts all derived from fiction. But socialist realism needed film to ground itself in organic tradition. For this reason, prototypes were identified in minor novels with relevant attributes, such as Lilian Voynich's novel about the 19th-century Italian democratic movement, *Ovod*, whose status as a standard Stalinist text was reinforced by adaptations made at either end of the Stalin era.¹³ The *ekranizatsiia* situates socialist realism in progressive culture the world over. Many of the books adapted treat past revolutions, Russian and foreign. *Kapitanskaia dochka*, based on the Pugachev uprising, and adapted three times in the Soviet era, emerged as a canonic text for Russian cinema, and self-identity.¹⁴ Adaptations of works set during foreign uprisings enabled Soviet cinema to naturalise socialist realism in both the spatial sense (its roots stretch across the world) and the temporal sense (they reach into the depths of history). The dilemma of how to render 'the tomorrow in the today' is overcome by concretising in camera images literature set in a past with a direct line into the revolutionary present.

With its combination of centripetal qualities (as an industry requiring central resources it embraces the values of the centre) and centrifugal qualities (its reliance on photographic truth means that it must situate itself in the local and concrete) cinema was ideally suited to implementing the abstract Stalinist project.¹⁵ Soviet cinematic specificity resides not

¹³ Georgian State Cinema produced a version in 1928, and Mosfilm followed suit in 1953.

¹⁴ For example, other than Pudovkin's *Mat*, the Andreev film *Belyi Orel*, together with a version of his *Raskaz o semi poveshennykh* (1920) both treat the 1905 revolution, as does *Beleet parus odinokii* (1937). The fact that a recent film version of Pushkin's *Kapitanskaia dochka* was released in 2000 under the title *Russkii bunt* testifies to that text's continuing resonance for Russian national identity in the post-communist era, yet with an altogether different emphasis. In the post-Soviet film the Pugachev revolt does not signify the glorification of revolutionary tendencies, but the horror of revolutionary anarchy, hinted at in the title (which refers to Pushkin's *Russkii bunt, bessmyslenyi i bezposhadnyi*).

¹⁵ As an example of the immense centralising capacity enjoyed by Stalinist cinema we might cite the claim made by a 1934 „Pravda” editorial following the release of the monumentally successful *Chapaev* that, in the words of its title, *The Whole Country is Watching 'Chapaev'* – a claim that, owing to the way in which films were distributed in the Soviet Union, was more or less literally true, quoted in R. Taylor, I. Christie, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

just in doing Stalin's bidding more effectively than other media, but in an internal logic foregrounded by the screen adaptation. Any adaptation must indicate difference from its source (an adaptation that merely 'repeats' is pointless).¹⁶ A 1939 version of Chekhov's *Chelovek v futliare* which we will deal with in more detail later reveals how the *ekranizatsiia* clearly signposts the time in which it is made, simultaneously, and self-consciously, exploiting the camera's ability to capture contingent detail. Made during a period of heightened anti-religious activity, it expands Chekhov's critique of pedagogic formalism into a sensuously visual expose of religious repression. Equally, cinema at large must consolidate its right to patronage by emphasising its discreteness from other cultural forms. Like cinema in general, the *ekranizatsiia* acquired its own normative texts. Aside from the repeat screenings of key classics; the 1930s witnessed the emergence of adaptations by minor writers. Gaidar's *Timur i ego komanda* (1940) enjoyed such popularity that in 1942 Gaidar wrote a scenario for the sequel, *Kliatva Timura*.¹⁷ Cinema developed a self-propagating culture to which literature merely provided support, reversing the hierarchy between the media.¹⁸

Simultaneously, and paradoxically, Stalinist culture became more conservative and verbal in orientation. Adaptations were now invariably framed by shots of the title pages of their sources. A new wave of reverential Gogol adaptations which began with the centenary of the author's death

¹⁶ Adaptation theory has only recently taken stock of the fact that the relationship between classical text and film version is necessarily one of 'constant negotiations and contestations within any social order'. See W. U r i c c h i o and R. P e a r s o n, *Reframing Culture: The Case of the Vitagraph Quality Films*, Princeton University Press: Princeton 1993, p. 8.

¹⁷ Lev Kassil', a minor Ukrainian writer, was a particularly popular source for film adaptations. A 1938 version of his story *Vratar* was to become one of the comedy classics of the Stalin era.

¹⁸ This culture of self-propagation is also reflected in the development of individual visual motifs repeated and 'cited' from adaptation to adaptation – stock images which serve as the genre's means of identifying itself to the Stalinist viewer. Examples include sweeping, wide-angle shots of the Volga river (repeated from *Chapaev* to the Gorkii trilogy and beyond), and romantically framed vignettes of prototypical revolutionary heroes like Insarov of Turgenev's *Nakanune* and the Italian heroes of *Ovod* staring out across vast expanses of nature to the glorious future that lies beyond their deaths.

featured an actor with the familiar Gogolian moustaches playing the role of the *skaz* narrator, commenting on the action, ironically undermining the point of *skaz* which is to turn the narration into an object of satire.¹⁹ During the same period key adaptations helped to shore up the post-war Eastern bloc, as we saw with *Nakanune*, the first Soviet version of Turgenyev. In 1953 the second adaptation of *Ovod* railed against the collusion of the Catholic church and imperialist forces in early 19th century Italy, synthesising the religious and international themes.

Let us now trace some of these phenomena in individual films, beginning with one from the category of adaptations of foreign classics. The 1937 film *Ostrov sokrovishch*, directed by Vladimir Vainshtuk, opens with the frontispiece of a leather-bound copy of Stevenson's novel, signalling its claim to being an authentic enactment of a master-text. But in 1937, Stalin's version of class warfare barely accorded with Stevenson's retrograde classic whose heroes are seeking their private fortunes. The next frames highlight the *ekranizatsiia's* capacity for negotiating this dual allegiance, transposing the action to an 18th century Irish rebellion against British oppression. The familiar heroes, Jim Hawkins (the narrator) and Dr Livesey are presented as affiliates of the liberation movement. The search for the treasure, meanwhile, is motivated by the desire to aid the movement.²⁰ Smollett is portrayed as a captain in the class-obsessed English army and when he joins the treasure hunt, his rivalry with Livesey is not personal (as in the novel), but that of an opposing political force. The third group of treasure-seekers, the pirates, difficult to locate within the Marxist class paradigm, but who in the novel occupy the centre of attention, be-

¹⁹ Writing of the role of the 1952 celebrations of the centenary of Gogol's death in Stalinist culture, Steven Moller-Sally comments: 'In the epoch of High Stalinism the classical author ... performs the function of a cultural hero who embodies the spirit of the people ... Gogol corresponded perfectly to the main direction taken by post-war ideology ... In these conditions the Ukrainian tales of Gogol took on special significance'. See S. M o l l e r – S a l l y, *Klassicheskoe nasledie v epokhu sotsrealizma, ili pokhozhdnenia Gogolia v strane Bolshevikov*, in *Sot-srealisticheskii kanon*, eds. E. Dobrenko, H. Günther, Moscow 2000, pp. 508-522, 514, 516.

²⁰ This is at clear variance with Stevenson's original in which Jim Hawkins tells us at the end of the adventure: 'All of us had an ample share of the treasure, and used it wisely or foolishly, according to our natures', in R. L. S t e v e n s o n, *Treasure Island*, Everyman: London 1962.

come an inconvenient hindrance to ideological clarity, retained nonetheless for their entertainment value. The Irish background domesticates the novel for the context in which it is made, whilst maintaining the authenticity derived from showing prototypical socialism in a specific international context. Meanwhile, Livesey's leadership skills and political wisdom assimilate him to the role of class-conscious commissar. The film not only changes the historical setting of Stevenson's novel, but also transports it to a different genre. The adventure novel becomes in its Soviet version a musical with songs and dances. The Stalinist musical is a central genre in Soviet film, used both for its entertainment value, and for the ease with which it can be bent to Stalinism's ideological axioms. Stalin's famous statement 'Zhit' stalo luchshe, zhit' stalo veselee' reflects the status of the Stalinist musical as a means of simultaneously commenting on, and creating the 'happy life' invoked. Thus the idea of a happier life under Stalinism is represented within musicals of the period, which also function as an index of that happier life through their very existence. A musical made the year after *Ostrov sokrovishch*, the famous *Volga, Volga* by Aleksandrov, ends with a song stating that laughter is a means for defeating enemies. The choice of the musical form for *Ostrov sokrovishch* thus denotes its membership of a category of films asserting the Soviet Union's ideological victory over its class enemies.

Vainshtuk's most radical means of assimilating the adventure novel to the socialist realist model is openly to flaunt the difference between novel and film by portraying Stevenson's hero as not Jim but Jenny Hawkins in disguise! Rather than being stitched back into the verbal original, the film's repackaging of Stevenson's novel is openly celebrated via two provocative gestures: the rendering of an English classic in a mass cultural form and of the male hero as a female.²¹

The girl who dresses as a boy to remain with the unsuspecting man she admires is a music-hall cliché. So when Jenny sings of the *podrug*'s need to protect her *drug*, she gives abstract Marxist camaraderie gende-

²¹ The gender transformation is likewise a bold and deliberate distortion of Stevenson's express and self-avowed intention to write a story for boys in which there would be 'no need of psychology or fine writing ... [and] women would be excluded' - M. R. R i d l e y' s introduction to R. L. S t e v e n s o n, *op. cit.*, p. vi (quoting from Stevenson's article in the „Idler” August 1894).

red, bodily form. But the gender change also enables Vainshtuk to foreground Marxism's feminist abstractions. Livesey says of Jenny's actions: 'Ty dokazala, chto molodye patriotki umeiut vpolniat' svoj dolg pered rodinoi'. That the viewer, unlike the characters, is always aware of Jenny's ruse accords with the superior class consciousness of the latterday Stalinist proletariat.²² Yet the fact that the film transforms this classic into a slapstick musical with sexual undertones also marks the attempt to popularize Marxist ideology. In a single paradoxical gesture, *Ostrov sokrovishch* performs a political correction of its original which weakens its visceral appeal, and an earthy, 'enfleshment' of the ideology behind the correction. Appropriately, this contradiction is represented in the ambiguous form of the cross-dresser.

Ultimately, politics wins out. Still more allegorical than Livesey's reference to *rodina* are the *vragi* of the song that provides the finale: 'Kto ne s nami, tot i trus i vrag'. The words used in the song are heavily loaded in the context of Stalinist official culture. The quotation of Lenin's maxim 'Kto ne s nami, tot protiv nas' lies at the heart of this song. The dichotomy hinted in the Leninist paraphrase presents the struggle to find the treasure as ideologically unambiguous, like the making of the Revolution itself. This quotation, which imitates the syntactic structure of the slogan as well as using some of its lexis, frames the words *drug*, *podruga* and *vrag* in the concrete context of the central source for revolutionary meaning throughout the Stalinist period, namely the figure of Lenin, from which Stalin derives his legitimacy. Furthermore, it identifies as exotic 'others' (Irish patriots) characters who, in their embrace of political freedom, nonetheless resemble 'our own' Soviet revolutionaries, and as familiar 'selves' (the *vragi naroda* lurking in our midst) alien British army officers. Each side of the self/other paradigm slides into its opposite (Soviet self beco-

²² The Stalin-era film adaptation developed a distinct line in 'knowing winks' to the present-day viewer which identify him/her with a position of knowledge of which the characters (and often the literary author) is deprived. This remarkable autotelic tendency was developed to its subversive conclusion in the 1956 adaptation of *Kak zakalialas' stal*, where we are offered an ironically framed alternative ending to Nikolai Ostrovskii's tragic autobiographical novel in which a radiantly healthy Pavel Korcahgin addresses us in the present, speaking to camera to inform us that, of course, he did not die, and that rumours to the contrary are unfounded.

mes British/Irish other; British/Irish other becomes familiar Soviet self), demonstrating the arbitrariness of Stalinist discourse, its reliance on signs capable of inverting their meanings.²³

Let us turn as an example of the main category of *ekranizatsiia* to a work by a writer whose name is synonymous with socialist realism – Maksim Gorkii. For Mark Donskoi's version of Gorkii's *Detstvo*, released by Soiuzdetfilm in 1938 shortly after Gorkii's death, takes the process of sanctification to which socialist realism's figurehead had already begun to be subjected during his lifetime to a new level. This transformation of familiar political figure into mythical hero replaces the literary autobiography's transfiguration of Peshkov into Gorkii – the rationale behind the trilogy of which *Detstvo* is part and which, though written well before the theory of socialist realism had been formulated, conformed to many of the principles on which that theory drew and soon, like many of Gorkii's works, entered its canon.²⁴ The transformation is paralleled in the transposition of autobiographical text into third-person cinematic representation – one

²³ Mikhail Epstein has explored this phenomenon in Soviet ideological terminology, arguing that during the Stalin era 'a standard ideological device is to designate the same or similar phenomenon with opposite evaluative signs and extract ideological surplus value from the evaluative difference of their meanings'. See M. Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst 1995, pp. 162-63.

²⁴ Gorkii's novel was published in 1916 and was the first part of an autobiographical trilogy which included *V liudiakh* and *Moi universitety*. All three texts were adapted by Donskoi between 1937 and 1938. The viewing audience of Donskoi's films would all have been thoroughly familiar with the name, biographical history and outward appearance of the revolutionary figure through the numerous newsreels in which he appeared and his assured status as a member of the Soviet establishment. This already transforms the nature of the audience's perception of the autobiography which can no longer have as its main focus a revelation of how the boy Peshkov became the writer, Gorkii, since this story is already well-known. No longer able to present itself as a release in linear fashion of private facts into the public sphere, the film has no option but to adopt the mythificatory approach. A particular problem is encountered in the adaptation of *Moi universitety*, the last of the three novels, in which the actor selected is required to imitate the loping gait, hairstyle and distinctive speech traits of the writer, raising the possibility of the identification of mismatches, lacks, excesses and superfluities in the representation of the hero.

of many structural changes with ideological implications imposed upon the canonic text.

Like many Stalinist films, *Detstvo* is punctuated by motif-like shots of the Volga, an instantly recognisable intertext for 'Mother Russia'. The elision of the 'authentic, people's Russia' of the revolutionary period proper, and that of the late 19th century in which it is set, skirts the issue of Gorkii's literary critique of peasant backwardness. The elision of the exoticised folk culture represented in the film action and the film's framing 'consciousness' is reinforced by the musical backing which amplifies the numerous folk songs in orchestral mode. Donskoi's selective approach to what he includes from the novel contributes to the idealising effect he substitutes for the literary Gorkii's first-person rationalisations. Thus, the grandmother's religious tales, which for Gorkii instil a passive, ignorant attitude towards the peasants' fate, are conveniently omitted.²⁵

One of the few overt (but key) distortions of Gorkii's plot involves the pathetic figure of 'Khoroshee delo', the eccentric lodger who engages Peshkov's sympathies. In the film he is given the role of a former political prisoner who finally leaves the household in a scene accorded epic proportions and mirrored in the departure of Aleksei at the film's end.²⁶ Through this device, the film forces Gorkii's work into the straitjacket of a key socialist realist precept: the necessity for a mentor to induct a disciple into party consciousness.²⁷

²⁵ *Detstvo*, and indeed the rest of the autobiographical trilogy, is defined by the way in which the events narrated are framed constantly and openly from the position of hindsight represented by the mature Gorkii's proleptical interventions in the narrative. For example, Gorkii repeatedly points out that the hold over the young Peshkov exerted by both grandparents were a function of the boy's lack of consciousness, his inability to perceive the ignorance and prejudice fostered by their worldviews, fully to articulate the sense of rage and injustice to which the writer was later to give expression. The trilogy effectively traces the path by which the gap between the third-person Peshkov and the first-person Gorkii was closed - a strategy that the film cannot pursue.

²⁶ In the book, 'Khoroshee delo' is merely presented as a kindred spirit who adds to the development of Peshkov's character, not as an overt political model around which he bases his future life as a revolutionary writer.

²⁷ The classic account of the standard attributes, narrative models and structural requirements of the socialist realist novel is Katerina Clark's *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, Indiana University Press: Bloomington 1989.

Donskoi's film mythologizes Gorkii both as part of the folkloric backdrop to his own life and as an exceptional individual. The film must negotiate this paradox and the resulting elusiveness of its biographical object which corresponds neither to Peshkov nor the biographical Gorkii.²⁸ It does so by overlaying the folkloric mise-en-scene with anonymous third-person intertitles providing the rationalised, post-1917 interpretation, yet obscuring the organic links between Peshkov and Gorkii established by the book.²⁹

The film presents Peshkov's leadership attributes at a much earlier age than in the autobiographical account, *projecting* Gorkii back onto Peshkov, rather than *framing* Peshkov from Gorkii's *viewpoint*, exhorting viewers to perceive the revolutionary future in the pre-revolutionary past and thus, from a socialist realist angle, 'the tomorrow in the today'.³⁰ The closing scenes depict Peshkov initiating a song which first a group of accompanying boys, then the orchestral backing pick up, reconciling Gorkii's *narodnost* with his aloofness and exceptionality. There follows a series of shot-reverse shots locating the subject of vision in the group of boys as they watch Peshkov stride across the vast Russian landscape. As he disappe-

²⁸ The Gorkii that inspires Donskoi's trilogy is neither Aleksei Peshkov, nor the biographical figure who wrote the novels at a specific point in his artistic career, but rather a composite Gorkii existing outside of time and formed from pronouncements made by the writer throughout his life. In revering Gorkii as mythological hero, Donskoi thus shows a profound disrespect for the integrity of the hero's texts. As pointed out in a „Pravda” article published shortly after the release of *Detstvo*, episodes from other stories such as 'Strasti mordasti' are added to the plot action of the film. See M. K o l' t s o v, 'Detstvo' Gor'kogo, „Pravda” June 9, 1938, p. 6.

²⁹ A telling example is to be found in Donskoi's later adaptation of *Moi universitety* in which the representation of a spontaneous students' revolt is interrupted with silent intertitles characterising the uprising as 'motiveless' - a judgment that derives from official socialist realist rhetoric on *stikhiinost* rather than from the mind of the mature Gorkii.

³⁰ Moments from Gorkii's texts selected for adaptation are inevitably those which point ahead to his future status as leading man of letters in socialist realist culture. Thus, in *Moi universitety*, the camera dwells admiringly and at length on a scene of the young hero reading poetry to his fellow workers at the bakery - an episode which is rendered by Gorkii only briefly and in the imperfective past (the conversion of imperfective literary past into singular cinematic present is one of the most significant issues for any film adaptation of literature).

ars across the horizon, the boys' viewpoint merges, through an aerial long-shot, with that of the anonymous, universalising, third-person state, as Gorkii's unique first-person presence is finally expelled from view.

In the previous section we analysed examples of *ekranizatsii* of foreign literature (Stevenson) and of revolutionary writing (Gorkii). We now turn to our third category of Stalinist *ekranizatsiia* – the screening of works of Russian classical nineteenth century prose. We base our observations on the 1939 film *Chelovek v futliare*, an adaptation of Chekhov's story of the same title and directed by Isidor Annenskii. Chekhov's works have been adapted into Soviet films repeatedly and frequently, due primarily to the social criticism in their content which allows Soviet cinema to concentrate on the negative legacy of Tsarist Russia, thus providing an organically rooted pre-history to the revolutionary movement and the socialist realist movement that is its cultural hypostasis.³¹ *Chelovek v futliare* fits well into this category, with its depiction of the oppressive atmosphere created by the teacher Belikov. A review of the film in „Pravda” makes the point that while Chekhov's story concentrates on what we might call 'the banality of evil', the film turns evil into a spectacularly embodied threat.³² The protagonist, the teacher Belikov, who in the story merely infects the inhabitants of the provincial town with a vague malaise through his constant worries about propriety and decency, affects them more directly in the film by aggressively controlling their lives.

While Chekhov's story is itself rather abstract, presenting Belikov's behaviour as generic and 'of a kind', the film incarnates the generic abstraction through visually concrete illustrations. Yet it is precisely this concretising urge in the Soviet *ekranizatsiia* which is responsible for the generation of universalising abstractions at another level. The opening scene of the film, absent altogether from Chekhov's original, is indicative. It depicts Belikov entering a church during a school lesson with the local priest. When Belikov enters the church he is filmed at medium range and

³¹ The early 1950s, for example saw a spate of Chekhov adaptations, including *Bezzakonie*, based on Anton Chekhov's short story *Bezzakonie*, directed by K. Iudin (1953), *Anna na shnee*, based on Anton Chekhov's short story *Anna na shnee*, directed by Isidor Annenskii (1954), and *Popryun'ia* based on Chekhov's story of that name, directed by S. Samsonov (1955).

³² A. K a p l e r, *Chelovek v futliare*, „Pravda” 5 April 1939, p. 6.

fills the space of the entrance, so that his figure is the only detail seen in the church. This reflects his central role in the plot, but also presents him as a 'larger than life' figure. But the fact that the scene takes place in church allows the filmmaker to include in its criticism of Belikov's oppression an anti-religious aspect central to Soviet ideology. The opposition between the priest's stern sermon and a viscerally repulsive close-up of a boy picking his nose ridicules the priest's authority. Meanwhile, the physical proximity of Belikov and the priest in the church setting displaces the implied audience's criticism of the priest onto Belikov himself. Thus, from the beginning, whilst Chekhov's generic Belikov de-universalised and rendered in the specific, that very particularising gesture serves to expand and re-universalise Chekhov's critique of tsarist oppression to cover all aspects of pre-revolutionary society.

Moreover, as in the case of 'Khoroshoe delo' in *Detstvo*, in *Chelovek v futliare* one of the minor characters of the story is given prominence and used to personify the revolutionary potential of the masses. Here again, a general truth generated by centripetal forces at the heart of the filmmaker's present is displaced onto a marginal character at the peripheries of Chekhov's classic text. For the brother of the young woman Varvara, Belikov's putative fiancée, who in the story is presented as resenting Belikov on personal grounds, is in the film accorded the features of a revolutionary figure, which confers on his hatred of Belikov an ideological dimension. His dress, long hair and body language are all typical of the way revolutionary characters are presented in Soviet films and thus form a sort of visual intertext cited from the repertory of an autonomous Soviet cinematic canon.³³ The film also elaborates extensively on Varvara and her brother's alienation from the provincial town to which they had arrived from the Ukraine – a barely mentioned detail in Chekhov's original. The scene of their departure from the town, which in the story is summarised

³³ *Ostrov sokrovishch*, *Ovod* and *Nakanune*, mentioned earlier, all portray revolutionary figures (from Ireland, Italy and Bulgaria respectively) according to this single romanticised stereotype, suggesting that the Soviet *ekranizatsiia* domesticated foreign progressive traditions, even as it attempted to ground its own homegrown, guiding ideology in the exotic difference these traditions represented. For example, Livesey and his Irish revolutionary comrades in *Ostrov sokrovishch* are all depicted as debonair figures with flowing hair and loose-fitting clothes in stark contrast with the prim, corseted English army officers.

briefly, is given more weight in the film, which includes a moment when Varvara and her brother discuss the stifling atmosphere of the town as the reason for their return to the Ukraine. Thus Chekhov's emphasis on the townsfolk's submission is modified by the film's inclusion of opposition to Belikov. Such a modification hints at a progressive, optimistic future emblematised in the closing shot of the distant horizon opening up before their departing carriage, a future in which Tsarist oppression and its agents are no longer feared and submitted to, but despised and resisted. This resoundingly revolutionary generalisation extrapolated from Chekhov's story, however, is achieved at the expense of a centrifugal dispersion of meaning onto the peripheries of an already peripheral text; Chekhov's gentle provincial satire is hardly the harbinger of revolutionary fervour, yet it must be assimilated to the socialist realist heritage

To conclude, the problem of integrating cinematic particularity with ideological universality which underlies Stalinist film is compounded in the *ekranizatsiia* with its introduction of a secondary, literary word to be embodied. In *Chelovek v futliare*, we encounter a complex and contradictory three-way interplay between socialist realism's universal truths, Chekhov's own literary abstraction in which Belikov is portrayed as a generic type, and cinema's inherent impulse to concretise and particularise. In *Ostrov sokrovishch*, the authentication of a socialist abstraction in a foreign revolutionary tradition conflicts with the need to domesticate that tradition and with the fact that it is superimposed upon a classic adventure story. In *Detstvo*, the portrayal of the legendary writer as a representative of the common people coexists uneasily with the book's account of the hero's alienation, and with its differentiation of narrated object (Peshkov) from narrating subject (Gorkii). Subject and object in the film are conflated into a composite, subordinated to a universalising site of authority located in the Stalinist present. To sum up these paradoxes we might return to Terry Eagleton who acknowledges that 'Reason can be brought to bear on our sensibilities only with difficulty'.³⁴

³⁴ Eagleton argues that, if the only authority that will convince us is the one we can palpably feel, then '[t]his demands sensuous mediation, which in turn places a limit on the universality of reason. Reason, to preserve its august authority, must give the slip to all fleshly representation, and so can be brought to bear on our sensibilities only with difficulty' (T. E a g l e t o n, *op. cit.*, p. 26).

The particular difficulty for the Stalinist *ekranizatsiia* is that it is driven by a dual movement. On one hand, its purpose is to root socialist realism in the soil of the literary classics, authenticating the 'truths' of the Stalinist self in concrete camera images of other realities. On the other hand, that very authenticating action transforms the literary work into a self-declared product of its time, giving the *ekranizatsiia* a corrective function whose logic demanded the assertion of difference between text and image. This is responsible for the metatextuality we identified in the *ekranizatsiia* as a genre and in specific examples. Such metatextuality is not that of the autonomous artwork, but rather what Pierre Bourdieu describes as the function of a 'field of production' which has accumulated sufficient 'symbolic capital' to secure, even extend its borders.³⁵ In this light, it is hardly surprising that the distance between cinematic image and source text asserted in the interests of supporting the ruling ideology should eventually blur into the assertion of distance between cinematic image and ideology itself. Eventually this manifested itself in subversive films of the Brezhnev era such as the adaptation of Eric von Raspe's *The Adventures of Baron von Munchausen* (*Tot samyi Miunkhauzen*) which develops the allegorical tendency implicit in the class politics of *Ostrov sokrovishch* into a tool of covert political subversion (the authorities' willingness to deny visual truth to suppress dissidence is clearly transposed from the film's seventeenth Century German setting onto Soviet Russia).³⁶ The failure to integrate particular and universal as a problem of

³⁵ For the concepts of 'field of production' and 'symbolic capital', see P. B o u r d i e u, *The Field of Cultural Production*, Columbia University Press: New York 1993. The acquisition of symbolic capital by the Soviet film industry and its establishment as an autonomous field of production accounts for the apparent anomaly that the most acanonical selections of texts for cinematic adaptation were often made by the nost canonically sound of directors. For example, Ivan Pyr'iev, one of the pillars of the Soviet film establishment, produced the very first Soviet adaptation of Dostoevskii (his 1958 version of *Idiot*).

³⁶ The 1973 rendition of Eric Von Raspe's minor classic, which attained almost cult status in late Soviet culture, was the third Soviet film based around the novel, confirming its place at the heart of the Soviet cinematic canon. The 1973 film's title *Tot samyi Munkhausen - That Same Munkhausen* - appears self-consciously to acknowledge this. The fact that the novel deals specifically with the disjunctions and coincidences between word (what a character claims to be the truth) and image (what we see to be the case with our own eyes) clearly

artistic meaning dovetails with the incipient disintegration of Stalinist society. A canon shot is ultimately a canon dead.

Rola ekranizacji w kulturze stalinowskiej

Artykuł omawia rolę adaptacji filmowej we wzmacnianiu, kształtowaniu i zmienianiu kanonu literackiego realizmu socjalistycznego. Rozróżniamy dwie podkategorie kanonu: klasyczną beletrystykę rosyjską, służącą wyposażeniu programu realizmu socjalistycznego w jego „prehistorię”, i nowo kanonizowane teksty zagraniczne. Po zwróceniu uwagi na instytucjonalną centralizację oraz posłuszeństwo filmu wobec sił formujących kanon, szkic skupia się na filmowych wersjach konkretnych utworów, z każdej z trzech kategorii, unaczyniających, jak podstawowe różnice formalne między filmem a literaturą problematyzują sposób ucieleśnienia ideologicznego słowa w filmowym obrazie. Analiza adaptacji z lat 30., tj. *Dzieciństwa* Gorkiego, *Wyspy skarbów* Stevensona i *Człowieka w futerale* Czechowa, pokazuje, że szczególna trudność, z jaką borykały się stalinowskie ekranizacje, bierze się z godzenia dwu tendencji. Cel adaptacji to, z jednej strony, nadanie realizmowi socjalistycznemu autentyczności, przez zakorzenienie go w glebie literackiej klasyki. Z drugiej, samo to „uautentycznienie” przekształca dzieło literackie w wytwór swoich czasów, nadając ekranizacji funkcję korekcyjną, której logika wymagała potwierdzenia różnicy między tekstem a obrazem. Ta luka między słowem a obrazem jest odpowiedzialna za formę metatekstualności, jaka wyłania się w ekranizacji, a która miała w końcu rozwinąć się w poststalinowskiej wersji gatunku w zaprzeczenie zarówno kanonu, jak i wspierającej go ideologii.

lends it to the ideological role foisted upon it at very different points in Soviet history.