

## Melodramatic Masculinity, National Identity, and the Stalinist Past in Postsoviet Cinema

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In the winter of 1996-97, Liubov' Arkus, the editor of the film journal *Seans*, convened a panel of prominent Russian critics and posed the following question:

Why is it that our national cinema, ten years after the lifting of all prohibitions, has yet to offer a treatment of the Stalin theme comparable to the treatment of this theme in literature, and why are all such attempts doomed to varying degrees of failure? Why was this theme developed first in genre films, while "auteurs" addressed it only after having armed themselves with the irony for which they are notorious, never forgetting to bare the conventionality of the device? (96)

For the purposes of this essay, the answers to this question are less significant than the assumptions underlying it, assumptions shared by the assembled experts. In the ensuing discussion, all of the critics approached the question as having primarily to do with the need to achieve an "accurate" cinematic portrait of the Stalinist past that might equal the literary accomplishments of authors like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Varlaam Shalamov. Such a goal, these critics assumed, necessarily excludes the genre film as a medium. As Sergei Dobrotvorskii insisted, "Genre elements are not only incompatible with historical accuracy, they are inimical to it" (Arkus et al. 100). Most of the critics agreed that the Stalinist past is no longer interesting or relevant to contemporary Russian film audiences, and all of them ignored the ways in which "historically inaccurate" genre films on Stalinist themes might, in fact, reflect contemporary Russian dilemmas.<sup>1</sup>

These critics' dismissal of contemporary films on Stalinist themes as irrelevant, inadequate, and insignificant because of their "generic" plots is understandable in the Russian context, in which "genre film" is usually a pejorative term connoting lowbrow tastes and commercial ambitions. Contemporary Russian film critics also like to argue that Russian filmmakers are almost congenitally incapable of making a decent genre film, since Soviet-era taboos on "bourgeois" genres like melodrama, horror, and gangster films discouraged them from working in these forms.<sup>2</sup> They also cite the long, prestigious tradition of Russian "art cinema" as a factor in many talented Russian directors' reluctance to make genre films. While Postsoviet critics now argue for the necessity of making genre films in order to return Russian audiences to the movie theaters, most of them remain convinced that popularity is incompatible with seriousness. For all of these reasons, Russian critics have tended to ignore the question that this essay takes as its subject: why have Postsoviet filmmakers so frequently chosen the convoluted narrative strategies and stylistic excesses of melodrama when they turned to Stalinist themes? Rather than dismissing melodrama as irrelevant, I propose to take it seriously.<sup>3</sup>

In what follows I argue that Postsoviet melodramas set in the Stalin period, despite their alleged artistic inadequacies and historical inaccuracies, articulate a powerful version of contemporary Russian culture's troubled relationship to its past, precisely because melodramatic conventions enable the expression of anxieties and ambitions that more "realistic" narratives cannot encompass. Melodramatic films on Stalinist themes are not simply commercial attempts to capitalize on sensational material or uneven attempts to demonstrate the filmmaker's mastery of postmodern pastiche and irony. Rather, these films' exploitation of melodramatic conventions is driven by the quest for moral clarity that Peter Brooks has identified as the originary moment of the "melodramatic imagination" in the late eighteenth century. Melodrama, in fact, makes perfect sense as the Postsoviet form of choice for exploring the cultural and psychological legacies of the Stalin era.<sup>4</sup>

Brooks's discussion of the emergence of melodrama during the cataclysmic social changes accompanying the French Revolution offers a useful analogy for the emergence of Postsoviet melodrama during similar changes accompanying the collapse of communism.

For Brooks, "Melodrama starts from and expresses the anxiety

brought by a frightening new world in which the traditional patterns of moral order no longer provide the necessary social glue. . . . It demonstrates over and over that the signs of ethical forces can be discovered and can be made legible" (20). "Classical" melodrama, in Brooks's description, relies on the polarization of ethical opposites in order to achieve a "remarkable, public, spectacular homage to virtue, a demonstration of its power and effect" (25). He argues that melodrama's characteristic resort to stylistic, emotional, and narrative "excess" is driven by a compulsion to confirm and restore the values of "the old society of innocence" (32).

Late Soviet and Postsoviet melodramas on Stalinist themes are similarly obsessed with the need to make ethical forces legible, but this project is complicated by their historical and cultural situation, which denies the possibility of depicting the Stalin era as either "innocent" or "virtuous," while it yearns for the unequivocally heroic myths and role models of this now discredited past. Such contradictory impulses often underlie the convoluted plots and extravagant *mises-en-scène* of melodrama, in which, as Christine Gledhill observes, "an ideological meets a psychic need, needs that are not necessarily identical" (29). The conflict between the "restorative" impulse of melodrama and the political imperative to renounce the Stalinist past as the most patently "evil" moment in Soviet history often leads to strained and historically improbable delineations of virtue and vice in Postsoviet cinema along the lines of sexual, rather than political, difference.

Brooks has argued that melodrama tends to "personalize" good and evil, but many Postsoviet melodramas on Stalinist themes not only personalize moral qualities, they *sexualize* them in often unwieldy attempts to construct both a Postsoviet history and a Postsoviet cinema that can rival the grandeurs of the Stalinist past, while renouncing its political legacy. Melodrama, as many critics have argued, is bound to the past by its "search for something lost, inadmissible, repressed" (Gledhill 32). In the case of Postsoviet historical melodrama, the repressed lament for the loss of a "formerly" heroic past is displaced into plots that mourn the loss of men's honor, moral authority, and, in many instances, sexual potency. For this reason, the persecuted innocents in most of these films are male, but their virtue almost never triumphs. Thus such films typically end with the death—by suicide or execution—of their male heroes.

This transformation of the victimized, and therefore virtuous, melodramatic heroine into the victimized, and therefore virtuous, melodramatic hero is a response to the identity crisis in which Russia finds itself after the collapse of Communist rule. This crisis derives in large part from the difficulty of separating what it means to be Russian from what it meant to be Soviet and, therefore, implicated in what are now regarded as the crimes of the Soviet regime. The other former Soviet republics and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe can more easily disavow the legacy of communist rule as imposed from "outside." Russia, as one scholar noted recently, "does not enjoy this luxury" (Urban 733). For this reason, many recent Russian critiques of Postsoviet society invoke sexual difference as a metaphor that displaces and sometimes replaces other, more slippery distinctions, such as that between "Russian" and "Soviet," for example, or "victim" and "villain." Most Russians, regardless of their sex, class, or political affiliation, regard sexual difference as biologically determined and thus both "natural" and fixed, rather than constructed and, therefore, both "unnatural" and unstable. In a period of tremendous political and social upheaval the perceived fixity of sexual difference makes it a comforting and convenient surrogate for other, less immediately apparent—and therefore, less suitably melodramatic—distinctions.<sup>5</sup>

Such claims may appear preposterous given the historical exclusion of Russian women from positions of power in Soviet politics and culture, but Postsoviet melodramas set in the Stalin era are, almost inevitably, far less concerned with historical accuracy than with recasting the visual evidence of that history in forms that respond to the psychosocial imperatives of the present.<sup>6</sup> A substantial chunk of that visual evidence is cinematic: Soviet films from the 1930s and 1940s remain popular with Postsoviet audiences, as the impassioned viewer response to a series of televised screenings of Stalinist film classics in 1992 attests.<sup>7</sup> Many of the most popular older films present compelling portraits of women as model Soviet citizens, models that contemporary films on historical themes often invoke as products of fact, rather than fiction.<sup>8</sup>

The still familiar repertoire of Stalinist iconography and popular song also offers rich material for film melodrama, which typically relies on music and *mise-en-scène* to intensify emotion and to serve as a surrogate for psychic material that cannot be expressed directly in the dialogue or actions of the characters (Nowell-Smith

73). The visual and musical symbols of the Stalin era retain a rhetorical power that invite melodramatization because they are simultaneously so familiar and so very *spectacular*. The excesses of the Stalin era—from its monumental architecture, public festivals, and musical film extravaganzas to its show trials and mass arrests—are ideal material for the requirements of a film genre often defined precisely in terms of its stylistic and emotional excess (Williams 703).

The “problem” with Postsoviet spectacles of the Stalin era is the near-impossibility of separating the heroic claims of that era’s cultural mythologies from the monstrosity of its crimes against its citizens. For all its alleged historical “inaccuracies,” Postsoviet cinema’s melodramatic accounts of Stalinist history offer remarkably consistent psychological portraits of a deeply conflicted contemporary nostalgia for the vanished glories of the past. This nostalgia is compounded by equally powerful anxieties about the diminished significance of Russian political and cultural authority in the present. The tension between the ideological compulsion to shatter the old icons and the psychic need to retain, if not restore, their grandeur is one reason that so many recent films tend to view the Stalinist past in terms of sexual rather than political plots and identities. The films discussed below all deploy radically different stylistic registers, but their common obsession with the trials and tribulations of Stalinist masculinity indicates the pervasive influence of something like castration anxiety as a powerful, if repressed, undercurrent in contemporary Russian debates about national identity. In characterizing these films as melodramas, I am not arguing that they are simply emotionally overwrought, moralistic fables about the Stalin era, crude variations on a single theme. Rather, they are the product of a distinctively Postsoviet melodramatic imagination that has emerged in response to the historical and social conundrums of Postsoviet culture.

The remainder of this essay explores the intersections of national, historical, and sexual identities in three distinctive Russian films from the 1990s, each enlisting melodramatic conventions to identify heroic Russian masculinity as the principal victim of Stalinist evil. These three very different films—Petr Todorovskii’s *Ankor, eshche ankor!* (*Encore, Again, Encore!*, 1992), Ivan Dykhovichnyi’s *Prorva* (*Moscow Parade*, 1992), and Sergei Livnev’s *Serp i molot* (*Hammer and Sickle*, 1994)—are further

linked by their consistent figuration of women as the principal agents and symbolic representatives of Stalinist power.<sup>9</sup>

These three films are significant indicators of the broad appeal of the melodramatic imagination in contemporary Russian culture in part because they represent the work of directors from three different generations: Todorovskii was born in 1922, Dykhovichnyi in 1947, and Livnev in 1964. They also rank among the most celebrated films of the Postsoviet period. In 1992 *Encore, Again, Encore!* was named Best Film of the Year at both the Sochi Film Festival, the most important Russian competition, and the Nika Awards (the Russian "Oscars"). That same year, *Moscow Parade* won the Nika for Best Cinematography, and the Russian Guild of Film Critics voted it "Best Film of the Year" and the "Film That Defined the Film Style of the Year." *Hammer and Sickle* won prizes from juries of Russian film distributors at both the 1994 Kino-Shock and 1995 Sochi Film Festivals, as well as prizes for Best Director, Best Actor, and a special mention for the composer at Kino-Shock.

### Encore, Again, Encore!<sup>10</sup>

Todorovskii's film takes its title from a famous painting by Pavel Fedotov (1815-1852) that depicts a disheveled officer training a pet dog, to whom the words "encore, again, encore!" are presumably addressed. As one critic notes, the standard Soviet interpretation of this painting is that it reflects the "moral degradation of the [tsarist] Russian military" (Lavrent'ev 20). On the one hand, the title seems apt, since the film is set on a snow-covered army base just after the end of World War II. On the other hand, the phrase "encore, again, encore!" would not be out of place in either the choir rehearsals that frame the film or the bedroom scenes that punctuate it.

The title also signals the repetitive quality of the film's narrative, which continually rehearses variations on a single theme, the "moral degradation" not of army life, but of sexual entanglements. Moreover, in literally *melodramatic* fashion, these entanglements are set in motion by the introduction of women into the local military choir. This innovation has disastrous consequences for the film's heroes, each of whom runs afoul of the Soviet authorities as the result of some woman's sexual treachery. What sets this film's portrait of faithless women and helpless men apart, however, is its association of female characters with the most unsavory aspects of

Soviet power. The link between women and Stalinism is made explicit in the first meeting between the base commander, Colonel Vinogradov, and the choir's accompanist, young Lieutenant Poletaev, who has come to request permission for the women on the base to join the choir. Poletaev explains to Vinogradov:

When the choir gets to the line: "The people compose wonderful songs about Stalin so wise, beloved, and dear," you have to understand that the people, that's not just men, but women, too, and so it turns out that we only have half the people singing, not the whole people.<sup>11</sup>

Poletaev breaks into song as he gets to the line about Stalin, but only in order to demonstrate the need for women's voices to hit the high notes that men's voices can't reach, thus justifying his claim that, "Without [women], the song about Comrade Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin sounds all wrong." "Without them," replies Vinogradov, "nothing in life sounds right." Something else sounds wrong in this scene, however. The only time Stalin is mentioned in the film is here and at the end of the first "co-ed" rehearsal, when the conductor shouts out in ecstasy at the song's conclusion, "Glory to Great Stalin!" In fact, the film never shows the choir singing the one verse of this song that mentions Stalin.<sup>12</sup> With this emphatic and contrived link between Stalin and the choir's female members, the film nudges its audience to make the connection between feminine and Stalinist "nature." (See Fig. III.1.)

*Encore* is quintessentially melodramatic in its radical "polarization" of the conflict between good and evil along the lines of victimized men and oversexed women. The only remotely positive female characters in the film are two betrayed wives, both portrayed primarily as mothers and, therefore, emphatically *not* sexual. The film insists that motherhood is an alternative to—not a consequence of—sexual activity. The split is clearest in Colonel Vinogradov's torn loyalties to his two "wives": the voluptuous Lieutenant Liuba Antipova, who shares his quarters and whom the entire base calls his wife, and the homely Tamara, his long-suffering legal wife, who lives *incognito* in a rundown barracks with their two daughters. A secondary character, Major Dovgilo, bounces between the bed of his subordinate's wife, the nefarious Mrs. Kriukov, and the embraces of his own childlike and very pregnant wife, whose name, "Vera," means "Faith."



Fig. III.1. *Encore, Again, Encore!*—choir rehearsal with Lieut. Poletaev (Evgenii Mironov) on the accordion. Mrs. Kriukov (Elena Iakovleva) stands behind him on the left, and Liuba (Irina Rozanova) on the right.

Apart from Vera and Tamara, all the other women in the film pose threats of some sort to their husbands' and lovers' respective lives, liberties, and happiness. The film is not subtle in its implementation of this formula: the chief villainess of the piece, Mrs. Kriukov, bears a name derived from the Russian word "*kriuk*" 'hook,' while the film's most "innocent" victim is Sergeant Serebriannyi, or "Sergeant Silver." As Brooks notes, melodramas strive towards a "clear nomination of the moral universe" (17), and this film insists at every turn on the intrinsic evil of women and the helpless virtue of its men. Young Sergeant Serebriannyi, for example, is a lyric tenor, devoted son, and loyal officer. When a lecherous typist from the division of the secret police known as SMERSH (abbreviation for "*Smert' shpionam*" 'Death to spies') orders him to spend the night with her "or else," Serebriannyi not only ignores her threat, but unwisely writes a letter mocking her as a "ratface" and claiming that she "raped" him one night when he was blind drunk. The homely typist, of course, intercepts the letter and weeps crocodile tears as she reads it; in the next scene a SMERSH unit arrests Serebriannyi on charges of "anti-Soviet activities." Colonel Vinogradov protests, but Serebriannyi is convicted and condemned to eight years in prison.

The typist's grotesquely lascivious pursuit of Sergeant Serebriannyi and its drastic consequences are but one variation on the film's patterning of predatory female desire as the source of its heroes' misfortunes. Another young officer, Lieutenant Poletaev, is pursued by Colonel Vinogradov's common-law wife, Liuba, who outranks Poletaev and addresses him as "Lieutenant" even when they roll around in bed together. Ultimately, Poletaev volunteers for duty in a Siberian camp for German prisoners-of-war in order to escape Liuba's importunate embraces, which, he fears, will lead to reprisals from Colonel Vinogradov. (See Fig. III.2.)

The chief victim of female plotting is actually the Colonel, who by film's end finds himself in an impossible situation: his mistress has betrayed him with the feckless Poletaev; his unloved and unlovely wife has reinstalled herself in his quarters; the vicious Mrs. Kriukov is blackmailing him to promote her undeserving husband; and he has failed to protect Sergeant Serebriannyi from an unjust prison sentence. The film presents Vinogradov as a war hero and a principled, caring superior officer, but on the domestic front he loses every battle. Each of the film's narrative lines elaborates a sexual plot, all of which intertwine at the end to bind Vinogradov in a



Fig. III.2. *Encore, Again, Encore!*—Lieut. Poletaev (Evgenii Mironov) has a man-to-man talk with Col. Vinogradov (Valentin Gaft).

position that has no honorable escape. Vinogradov puts his "affairs" in order in the only way left him: drunk and in civilian clothing, he roars through the army base, settling scores with each of his enemies, then takes a long shower, polishes his shoes, puts on his dress uniform, pins on a chestful of medals . . . and shoots himself.

As the shot echoes through Vinogradov's empty house, the film cuts away to a close-up of a painted globe with a hammer and sickle superimposed over the territory of the USSR. The camera pulls back to reveal the army choir surrounding this emblem of the state and singing the words with which the film began: "Where in the world can you find a country more beautiful than my motherland?" As the song continues ("Everywhere my land is blossoming, its fields are infinite"), the film offers concluding shots of each major character: Liuba weeping as she leaves the base; a drunken Poletaev pounding on the door of an empty house and shouting Liuba's name; the SMERSH typist leering at yet another young sergeant; and Vinogradov's wife weeping in a dark room. Just as the choir arrives at the phrase, "O free Russia, wonderful country, my Soviet land," the film cuts to a shot of the hugely pregnant Vera admiring her naked belly in the mirror. At the words "my Soviet land," the camera moves in to fill the frame with a close-up of Vera's belly. This scene mirrors the shot of the (equally spherical) globe with which this sequence opened, creating an equivalence between the pregnant Vera and that "wonderful Soviet land" exalted in the choir's song. With the first lines of the next stanza ("The enemies shall not overpower us") the film cuts away from this Soviet Madonna to a domestic brawl between Captain Kriukov and his wife, shouting and chasing each other through the snow in their underwear.<sup>13</sup> This sequence of images heightens the contrast between the song's proud rhetoric of military might and the domestic humiliations of peacetime. In contrast to the choir's swelling harmonies, these are images of discord.

The film's musical frame, as well as its title, emphasizes the circularity of its central motifs, one of which is an equation of the eternal feminine with the eternally and essentially deceitful. This version of female "nature" allows us to view sergeants like young "Silver" and colonels like Vinogradov as comparatively "innocent" victims of women like the SMERSH typist or the unprincipled Mrs. Kriukov. Left to their own devices, the film insists, its heroes would behave honorably. All their troubles start when they get tangled up with women, whose role in Todorovskii's army is that of Eve in the

biblical garden of Eden. Each of the film's male heroes—Vinogradov, Serebriannyi, and Poletaev—is, in effect, “cast out” of the army as the result of some woman's sexual treachery: Vinogradov kills himself, Serebriannyi is imprisoned, and Poletaev is discharged, with Vinogradov's assistance, in order to marry Liuba, but she leaves the base without him.

The film's narrative logic thus assigns responsibility for the crimes of the Stalinist past by transforming the sins of the helpless fathers and defenseless sons into those of the bad mothers and unfaithful wives. Todorovskii implicitly purifies—or purges—his male military heroes of the taint of their proximity to Soviet power in the Stalinist past by insisting on the primacy of sexual, rather than political, crimes and differences.

## Moscow Parade

While *Moscow Parade* differs stylistically from *Encore* in almost every way, it, too, construes the essence of Stalinism as inherently female, but in ways more complex than seen in *Encore*, which straightforwardly presents women as mistresses of the mechanisms of Stalinist state authority. Visually, the two films could hardly be more dissimilar. *Encore* is shot in what Todorovskii calls “my own style—traditionally, without fancy tricks” (Smirnova 14), with clearly delineated causal, temporal, and spatial relationships. The critic Maia Turovskaia has described it, not unfairly, as “socialist realism with sex organs” (1993). *Moscow Parade*, in marked contrast, leaps abruptly from one convoluted narrative thread to another and revels in the visual, often anachronistic excess of Stalinist monuments and public spectacles as recreated in the virtuoso camera work of Vadim Iusov (former head of cinematography for films by Andrei Tarkovskii and Sergei Bondarchuk).<sup>14</sup>

*Moscow Parade* is widely regarded as having broken new ground in Postsoviet depictions of the Stalinist era. In 1995 Oleg Kovalov, a prominent film critic and *avant-garde* director, called *Moscow Parade* “the best and most talented film ever made about Stalinism” (86). Most of the numerous critics who agree with him (Liubarskaia, Plakhov 1992, Trofimenkov, Zorkaia, and Timofeevskii et al.) would resist my characterization of this film as melodramatic. For them, as for Dykhovichnyi, the film is too “big” in its aesthetic and historical ambitions to be reduced to the status of a genre film. Such is not my intention here. Rather, I am arguing

that many of the film's internal contradictions derive from a fundamentally melodramatic impulse to the "total articulation" of moral problems both in explicit language and, when language fails, with what Brooks calls "mute gesture used as metaphor" (56, 75).

Brooks focuses on melodrama in theater and the novel, but his analysis of the importance of nonverbal modes of expression in the melodrama is even more applicable to the melodramatic film, in which "music and *mise-en-scène* do not just heighten the emotionality of an element of the action: to some extent they substitute for it" (Nowell-Smith 73). In *Moscow Parade*, the tension between "naming" and "showing" the psychological impact of Stalinist myths produces a film that oscillates between verbal condemnations of the period's moral and sexual impotence, and visual celebrations of its seductive iconography. In its loving attention to the quintessential artifacts of High Stalinism—ornate metro stations, parades of sports enthusiasts, and the glittering Fountain of the Friendship of the Peoples—the film fetishizes the Stalinist landscape. The camera wallows in the seductive grandeur of the Stalinist landscape just as it lingers on the beauty of its heroines' faces. Spectacular shots of Moscow on the eve of the 1939 May Day parade argue, in visual terms, for the potency of an era that the film's action and dialogue consistently deny. Several critics have responded to *Moscow Parade* as a manifestation of what Svetlana Boym has termed "totalitarian nostalgia" (1994, 247; Plakhov 1992, 11; Timofeevskii et al. 53; Trofimenkov 50), but I contend that the film's "nostalgia" for the grandeurs of the Stalinist past masks an acute case of post-totalitarian castration anxiety.

In interviews, Dykhovichnyi has claimed that the principal issue addressed in *Moscow Parade* is "imperial consciousness" (1992a 19, 1992b 13), but he consistently places sexual difference at the heart of this "imperial consciousness" and its impact on the present, as evident in the following statement:

For me the catastrophe of the [Stalin] epoch and of everything that is happening with us today has nothing to do with social problems. Strange as it might seem, it [the catastrophe] is the problem of sex. The first thing that THEY destroy—is man, turning him into a slave, a half-being who falls into the most degrading positions while women watch. Then THEY change woman, destroying her specific characteristics. THEY are something murky and gray. (1992b 13-15)

In another, longer interview, Dykhovichnyi makes the link between historical “katastrofa” ‘catastrophe’ and “kastratsiia” ‘castration’ even more explicit:

When you lose your dignity, providence punishes you—it takes away your sex. Our country in that respect is a typical example of how you always have to pay for your sins—we are a sexless society. This is especially true of men. . . .

The Bolshevik idea began with the destruction of sex. Orwell understood that in theory, and we experienced it in practice. It’s amazing that our fathers’ generation preserved their masculine dignity, in spite of everything. The extent of the humiliations, insults, mockeries, deprivations, and tragedies that fell to their lot is difficult to comprehend.

I first saw my heroine in a 1938 photograph at a friend’s house. It portrayed his grandmother in her youth—a very beautiful woman, in a low-cut dress. Her glance held a challenge. The heroines of my films are women. My idol was never Pavel Korchagin. My idol was Woman. (1992a 18-19)

These two statements are remarkable in many respects, but particularly for their characteristically idiosyncratic claim that “our society is sexless,” yet the generation of “our fathers” nevertheless preserved their “male dignity.” Dykhovichnyi’s father (b. 1911) was, in fact, a peer of Pavel Korchagin, hero of Nikolai Ostrovskii’s archetypal Socialist Realist novel, *How the Steel Was Tempered* (1932-34), the character who Dykhovichnyi insists is *not* his idol. The argument that “all our men have been desexed by the communists—but not *my* father,” captures the psychic dilemma underlying many contemporary Russian films on historical themes: that is, how may one retain a sense of social, sexual, or cultural “potency” if the usual heroes—political leaders, military heroes, fathers—are the moral and historical equivalent of eunuchs?

In this context, what might it mean to oppose “Woman” (with a capital W) to Pavel Korchagin as one’s “idol”? When Dykhovichnyi claims Woman as an alternative to Pavel Korchagin, he implies that his heroines embody the potency—psychic, sexual, cultural, and, importantly for a filmmaker, visual—that, by his definition, Soviet men have lost. This particularly female potency is implicit in the “challenge” Dykhovichnyi locates in the glance of the beautiful woman whose photograph he identifies as the model for his film’s heroine. Dykhovichnyi’s remarks in these and other

interviews indicate the centrality of personal and political forms of castration anxiety to his understanding of his own work, however partial that understanding may be. As he himself concedes, "A film is always a reflection of feelings concealed from oneself" (1992a 18).

What sets *Moscow Parade*'s particular brand of cinematic fetishism apart is its *overt* obsession with missing penises and lost manhood. While most fetishistic practices work to conceal the knowledge of potential castration, Dykhovichnyi's film strives to show what isn't there—to bare the fetish as such. The film's attempts at metafetishism are clearest in the plot line that revolves around a group of NKVD officers' frantic and ultimately futile efforts to train a stallion named Rabfak (the abbreviation for "Rabochii fakul'tet" 'Worker's Faculty') to trot to parade music so that the grand marshal of the 1939 May Day parade will have an appropriately, yet not unmanageably, virile mount for the celebration. As a last, desperate resort, the officers resolve to disguise the docile mare Marseillaise, the lead horse in the previous year's parade, as the stallion Rabfak. An adjutant protests, "Do you really think that the commander can't tell the difference between a mare and a stallion?" but the officers are prepared: they have located not one, but two artificial equine penises in the prop room of the "Bolshoi" 'Big' Theater and volunteer to "attach the larger one, if you prefer, sir."<sup>15</sup> (See Fig. III.3.)

*Moscow Parade* would not have garnered so much attention, however, if it simply mocked the virility of Stalin's henchmen and exposed Stalinist rituals of power as theatrical artifice. The most memorable visual aspect of *Moscow Parade* is the combined stardom of its women, each of whom is presented as a uniquely Stalinist femme fatale. The film's internal contradictions are concentrated in the figures of these four women and the quintessentially Stalinist spectacles in which they perform the leading roles. The film's principal character is the former noblewoman and sultry cabaret singer Anna, the wife of the NKVD officer in charge of training the stallion Rabfak.<sup>16</sup> After her husband fails to interfere while she is raped by one of his NKVD colleagues, a babyfaced sadist and amateur crooner named Vasilii, Anna flees into the strong, silent embraces of an archetypally proletarian railway porter, Gosha, whose class origins she alternately idealizes and mocks. Anna's and Gosha's initial meeting at the train station is staged as a wordless moment of mutual recognition that locates their instant grand passion for each other squarely in the melodramatic "realm of true



Fig. III.3. *Moscow Parade*—Anna (Ute Lemper) at an NKVD yacht-  
ing party.

<https://newprairiepress.org/stcl/vol24/iss1/5>

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feeling and value, [of] unmediated, because inarticulate expression" (Brooks 75). (See Fig. III.4.)

The film also features three secondary heroines, each of whom resembles Anna in some way: an ethereal Ballerina, whose performance of the Dying Swan entrances both the innocent young Writer and the sadistic Vasilii; a visibly pregnant, lascivious, and vindictive deputy Commissar of Culture, who is married to Vasilii; and a serial murderess, Gorbachevskaja, whose crimes are forgiven after she becomes pregnant in jail. These three women have comparatively little screen time, yet Dykhovichnyi lists them first in the closing credits, right after Anna, as if to underscore their status as a collective portrait of that Woman with a capital W who is his alleged heroine.

With the exception of the Ballerina, these women are all, quite literally, deadly. Anna's passion for Gosha leads to his imprisonment and narrowly averted execution; the pregnant commissar's public denunciation of the young writer drives him to suicide; and Gorbachevskaja has "robbed, murdered, and dismembered" six men. Mary Ann Doane has characterized the femme fatale as a "figure of a certain discursive unease, a potential epistemological trauma . . . who harbors a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable, or manageable" and "an ambivalent figure because she is not the subject of power but its *carrier*" (1-2). In Doane's words, the femme fatale "seems to confound power, subjectivity, and agency with the very lack of these attributes" (3). Doane's analysis clarifies the paradoxical role of all the female characters in *Moscow Parade*, including the mare Marseillaise. As the parade mount for the commander-in-chief of the Soviet armed forces, Marseillaise literally "carries" both the phallic mark and the physical representative of Stalinist power. The substitution of Marseillaise for Rabfak is emblematic of the way the film positions its other female characters as "carriers" of Dykhovichnyi's version of "imperial consciousness."

The film's women incarnate the same "discursive unease" and "epistemological trauma" that haunt the young Writer who throughout the film searches for a synonym for the untranslatable Russian word *prorva*. "Prorva" is the title of the Writer's most recent composition, which is, he states, "about the way we live now."<sup>17</sup> The Writer wants a word that will be "translatable into any language," but rejects the most likely synonyms for *prorva*—"propast" 'chasm' and "bezдна" 'abyss'—as "not right." This mysterious "prorva," he tells Anna, is "the main thing that everyone fears," but it doesn't



Fig. III.4. *Moscow Parade*—The first meeting of Anna (Ute Lempert) and the porter Gosha (Evgenii Sidikhin).  
<https://newprairiepress.org/stcl/vol24/iss1/5>  
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exist, because it's only a 'convention'—nothing at all. But a nothing that sucks you in and destroys you, terrifies and cripples."

The impossibility of rendering *prorva*, also the title of Dykhovichnyi's film, into any other language led to the film's release abroad under the completely different title *Moscow Parade*. "Prorva" is unique in that it may refer either to a "huge quantity of something," or "someone or something capable of consuming or containing a huge quantity." The word thus characterizes the Stalin era as an *actively* "bottomless pit" or excessive appetite. This excessiveness is visible in the film's fascination with Stalinist monuments and celebrations, its extravagant plot, and, especially, in its heroines' flamboyant performances of femininity.<sup>18</sup> The Writer's inability to find any verbal equivalent for *prorva* suggests that the only possible "synonym" for this key term is not another word but the film itself.

More specifically, Dykhovichnyi's film identifies female sexuality—"Woman with a capital W"—as the essence of the "nothing that sucks you in and destroys you." The film achieves this identification primarily through careful placement of references to the murderess Gorbachevskaiia, a frequent topic of conversation among the film's male characters, but otherwise almost invisible, appearing in only two brief scenes. Gorbachevskaiia has no direct connection with any of the film's major plot lines, and the film offers no information about her victims or her reasons for killing them. Her role is purely symbolic, a necessary pretext for the stories told about her, stories that constantly reflect on the other women in the film both explicitly (in words) and implicitly (through juxtaposition of disparate story lines). A central sequence in the middle of the film, for example, cuts back and forth between the Writer's first meeting with Anna and the Lawyer's near fatal dinner date with Gorbachevskaiia. The link between Gorbachevskaiia's terrifying charms and those the Writer associates with his era emerges most clearly in a jump-cut from the Lawyer's panicked flight out of Gorbachevskaiia's apartment to the Writer's explanation of his persistent search for a thesaurus: as he tells Anna here, he is seeking a synonym for the untranslatable Russian *prorva*.

Throughout, the film presents Anna and Gorbachevskaiia as equally, albeit differently, seductive. The Lawyer tells Anna that her beauty is "dangerous," perhaps irresistible, but declares that he has now fallen "passionately, wantonly" in love with the murderess Gorbachevskaiia, whom he ecstatically describes as a "monster,"

whose "poet" he has become. In another scene the Lawyer introduces Anna to the Writer as "the most beautiful woman in Moscow," provoking the Writer to ask—as an image of the bloodstained, lingerie-clad murderess writhes silently on the screen—"More [beautiful] than Gorbachevskaja?" The Writer calls Anna "dream-like," while the Lawyer calls Gorbachevskaja "the only substance in the world," but both the ethereally beautiful Anna and the corporeally compelling Gorbachevskaja exert a fatal charm over the men they encounter. The Lawyer is willing to risk his life for a night with Gorbachevskaja, whom he compares to Cleopatra, and Anna constantly provokes the men around her to acts of violence.

Gorbachevskaja is no Cleopatra, however. When finally presented "in the flesh," Gorbachevskaja is neither exotic nor majestic, but a banally female, violent, and sexual embodiment of the "nothing that sucks you in and destroys you, terrifies and cripples." To the Lawyer's chagrin, Gorbachevskaja has never heard of Cleopatra, never read Pushkin's *Egyptian Nights*, and isn't even sure who Pushkin is. The Lawyer expects to become her seventh victim, but she falls asleep, a razor open in her hand, too fatigued to slit his throat. As the Lawyer flees her apartment, he has a series of three equally narrow escapes: a falling brick nearly hits his head, a criminal threatens him with a knife, and an NKVD officer, worn out from working "night and day," almost runs over him because the officer, like Gorbachevskaja, has fallen asleep . . . at the wheel of his car. This rapid sequence of potentially fatal accidents underscores Gorbachevskaja's role as an incarnation of the violence that permeates the capital.

Unlike Anna and the Ballerina, Gorbachevskaja lacks beauty; in the Lawyer's words, she "resembles a skinny Russian doll" who "embodies a particular kind of lust" that he defines as "Soviet." The Russian doll to which the lawyer refers is a "matryoshka" 'mother doll,' which contains within itself a series of identical nesting dolls, each one smaller than the last. The film's four heroines constitute a single such "Russian doll," variations on the same dangerous theme, each containing elements of the others within her.

The reference to the matryoshka is also significant given the role that pregnancy plays in the film. Both Gorbachevskaja and the Deputy Commissar of Culture use their pregnancies to, in effect, "get away with murder." The murder charges against Gorbachevskaja are dismissed, for example, because she gets pregnant on the leaves of a tree and with his assistance, and the Deputy

Commissar of Culture uses her pregnancy to strengthen her fatal public denunciation of the Writer before a tribunal of his colleagues. "If I were three times a mother, three times a woman," she proclaims, "I would still demand that he be shot." As she repeats these words, the film undresses her (literally) as it cuts back and forth between the Writer's face and quick shots of the completely naked pregnant Commissar, who continues to demand that the Writer be shot. This weird sequence registers the Writer's astonished recognition that his most vituperative accuser is, in fact, both a woman and a mother.<sup>19</sup> Like Gorbachevskiaia, the Commissar, too, is a murderess, since it is her denunciation that provokes the Writer to commit suicide by leaping from his upper-story window into space (yet another form of *prorva*) onto the pavement below. The pregnancy of these two literal femmes fatales further strengthens the series of associations linking femininity with the mysterious force that sucks everything in and destroys it. The Commissar further resembles Gorbachevskiaia in her lascivious behavior toward the Lawyer: as the latter explains his plan to obtain a pardon for Gorbachevskiaia on the grounds of her pregnancy, the Commissar massages the Lawyer's crotch beneath the table, while her husband and his NKVD colleagues listen. As the Lawyer's male companions in this scene remark, they could never "get away with murder," as Gorbachevskiaia does, because "[they] can't get pregnant." Since they all work in the NKVD, of course, this is bitterly ironic: in 1939 men like these were getting away with murder on a daily basis. See Fig. III.5.)

In contrast to the film's vivid female characters, most of the men are colorless and weak. Anna calls all the NKVD officers "sexless," and while straddling her husband Sania's prone form and boxing his ears, she accuses him of "not being able to do anything" sexually. Even the film's most "innocent" victim, the Writer, is fundamentally passive. Though not immune to feminine charm, the Writer "does not make passes at beautiful women," as the Lawyer notes. Instead, he "takes joy from them." One might explain the various forms of male sexlessness presented in the film as a result of the oppressive Stalinist regime—Dykhovichny's stance in his interview. But when the Ballerina tells a story about her neighbor, Uncle Kolia, who began to speak about himself using feminine grammatical endings after he was robbed by two women he met at the train station, it seems clear that "Uncle Kolia" became "Aunt



Fig. III.5. *Moscow Parade*—The Deputy Commissar of Culture (Alena Antonovna-Rival'), as seen by the Writer at the public denunciation of his work.

<https://newprairiepress.org/stcl/vol24/iss1/5>

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Kolia" as a result of his/her encounter with everyday female criminality, not as a result of any specifically political causes.

The only "real men" in the film are the stallion Rabfak and the railroad porter Gosha, whom Anna's husband describes as an "ordinary male animal" in a phrase that equates the man with the horse: both are defined by their recalcitrant masculinity, their refusal to cooperate with the authorities, and their "working class" origins. The version of the film distributed in France and the United States opens with an apparently authorial statement that in 1939 "only women and horses resisted the NKVD," the internal police whom the film characterizes as the "instrument" of Stalin's "absolute power."<sup>20</sup> In fact, the film shows the opposite: Rabfak and Gosha refuse to march to the tune of the NKVD in shots that are intercut with scenes of Anna tapdancing with NKVD officers and the Ballerina accepting their applause.

Despite Dykhovichnyi's proclamations that his heroine is "Woman," his film casts its female characters as seductive embodiments of the Stalinist cultural landscape, which the film presents as casting a fatal, emasculating spell over its male characters. This is a view that Russian critics recognize and support. Film critic Neia Zorkaia compliments the actress who plays the Deputy Commissar of Culture for creating "an all-embracing, comprehensive, recognizable portrait of a female Party member in charge of art, one of those who ruled us from top to bottom . . . a combination of aplomb, ignorance, phoniness, hypocrisy, and femininity" (8). Similarly, psychiatrist A. Nemtsov defends the film's psychosexual verisimilitude, asserting: "Totalitarianism is a purely male creation, . . . but [Woman] is more capable than men of adapting to this unnatural order of things" (15). Nemtsov further claims that the film develops "the fundamental plots of female sexual fantasies" (13). In fact, however, the film represents not a female sexual, but a male *historical*, fantasy that attributes the historic roots of the tragic events during the Stalin era to the triumph of a "particularly Soviet lust" for power presented as essentially female and fatally sexual.

### Hammer and Sickle

Like *Moscow Parade*, Sergei Livnev's *Hammer and Sickle* is set in Moscow in the late 1930s and offers a portrait of the Stalin era in which the central explanatory metaphor is that of sexual difference, or, more precisely, the blurring of those differences: it takes

as its starting point a sex-change operation that transforms a "simple country girl," Evdokiia Kuznetsova, into the model worker and party functionary Evdokim Kuznetsov. The sex-change operation is the first in a series of analogous operations that shape Evdokim's new life just as the doctors reshaped his originally female flesh. Although Evdokiia, shown only in a single, brief flashback, resists the operation, once Evdokim emerges from his bandages he embarks with childlike enthusiasm on a course of physical, intellectual, and sexual exercises that transform him virtually overnight into an archetypal Soviet hero. The middle section of the film shows Evdokim starring in a newsreel about his exemplary life as a builder of the Moscow metro, husband of an equally exemplary tractor driver, adoptive father of a Spanish war orphan, and, ultimately, as the model with his wife for Vera Mukhina's monumental statue of 1937, "The Factory Worker and the Collective Farmer." In marked contrast to *Moscow Parade*, *Hammer and Sickle* insists on the artifice involved in the production of *all* of Stalinist culture, from the masculinity of its poster boy Evdokim to Mukhina's famous monument.

This summary of the film's initial, preposterous events should indicate the extent to which *Hammer and Sickle* has its tongue lodged firmly in its transgendered cheek. Unlike *Moscow Parade*, which, as critic Andrei Shemiakin noted, suffers from a "catastrophic" lack of ironic distance from its subjects (Arkus et al. 98), *Hammer and Sickle*'s pastiche of Stalinist cultural clichés is clad with irony. Melodrama might seem entirely alien to a film so relentless in its insistence on the inauthenticity of the world it portrays. Most of the time the film evokes heightened emotions only in order to deflate them, but it does not do so consistently. When Evdokim tries (unsuccessfully) to abandon his privileged life as a Stalinist hero to find "true" love with his former nurse, Vera Raevskaia (whose name could be translated as "Faith Paradise"), the film shifts into melodramatic mode with its quest for a lost state of "original" innocence.

In what follows, I maintain that *Hammer and Sickle* manufactures Evdokim's masculinity not once, but twice: first, in the Frankensteinian operation that the film portrays as an act of explicitly *monstrous* creation, and, secondly, in Evdokim's implicitly *melodramatic* struggle to return to something like his "origins" and to recover a form of unmediated emotional authenticity. My equivocal language here is deliberate: *Hammer and Sickle* is a *tour de*

authentic emotion in either public or private life, with one exception—that of its suffering hero. The shift into melodrama infuses Evdokim's identity crisis with “authentically” *cinematic* pathos, a pathos that has nothing to do with Evdokim's loss of his original femininity, and everything to do with symbolic attacks on his masculine autonomy to, as he protests, “live and love as I want.”

As *Hammer and Sickle* lurches deeper into the territory of romantic melodrama, its sexual politics become increasingly schizophrenic. On the one hand, as Livnev indicated in an interview, the sex-change operation serves as a metaphor for the unnatural impact of Stalinist ideals and practices on the Soviet man and woman in the street *circa* 1936. On the other hand, although masculinity was forced upon Evdokim, he makes a very “natural” man, especially in contrast to the many “unnaturally” masculine women who play central roles in his transformation. As the film progresses, it increasingly identifies masculinized women and girls with the violent and controlling (that is, the most villainous) aspects of Stalinist power, while it casts Evdokim, the only forcibly masculinized woman in the film, as their chief victim.

Women are, in fact, the principal agents of the state power that claims Evdokim's body as its symbol and prevents him from living as he chooses. The scientist who masterminds the sex-change operation is a woman of sinister and androgynous appearance who assumes a godlike or Frankensteinian responsibility for his transformation. Her imperative “You *will* live Evdokim Kuznetsov!” opens the post-operative Evdokim's eyes for the first time, symbolically bringing him to life. The hospital scenes invoke tropes characteristic of the horror film, but with such self-conscious excessiveness that it is impossible to take them “seriously.” The hospital is a monastery that has been turned into a prison camp, complete with guard dogs, barbed wire, and watch towers. The doctor is herself a prisoner, but has far more of the mad scientist than the martyr about her when she proclaims to the still-unconscious Evdokim that he is her “creation and the meaning of [her] whole life.” The many scenes shot through cagelike partitions and their barred shadows constantly remind the viewer of the prison setting, while the medical staff resemble unholy acolytes in their long, gray, high-necked robes. The ominous atmosphere of these scenes is further heightened by the eerie score and the fantastic apparatus, mysterious vials, retorts, and bubbling liquids that clutter the *mise-en-scène*.

Linda Williams, among others, has argued that “[h]orror is the genre that seems to endlessly repeat the trauma of castration as if to ‘explain,’ by repetitious mastery, the originary problem of sexual difference” (712). Here, however, the “problem of sexual difference” is underwhelmed by its reduction to the size of the small, albeit erect prosthetic penis that rolls by on a tray among the other surgical tools. The incongruity between the sensational *mise-en-scène* and the film’s matter-of-fact display of such a blatantly fake organ keeps the sex-change operation firmly in the realm of the *mock-horrific*, deflecting attention from the physical body at the core of its plot.

Once the woman doctor has fabricated Evdokim’s new body, two women artists (a soft-spoken filmmaker and an imperious sculptor) mold the images of his new life for public consumption. The film makes its point about the inauthenticity of Stalinist cultural values most brilliantly in a sequence of scenes that move seamlessly from grainy black-and-white newsreel-like footage of Evdokim dancing with his wife, Elizaveta, to a room in which the sculptress Vera Mukhina and the filmmaker screen this footage on an editing table. As Evdokim and Elizaveta skip forward, flinging their arms before them, Mukhina has the filmmaker manipulate the image until she “freezes” the heroic pose she is seeking for her “life-affirming” image of Soviet reality. The film then cuts to still more black-and-white footage of Evdokim and Elizaveta posing in Mukhina’s studio, a hammer and sickle in their outstretched hands. Solemn music and an omniscient, celebratory voiceover accompany shots of the fictional Mukhina at work in this newsreel, which purports to tell the “true” story of the models for her famous statue. Further confounding the relationship between fact and fiction, the phony newsreel combines shots of the fictional Evdokim and Elizaveta with historical footage showing the assembly of Mukhina’s statue at the 1937 World Expo in Paris and the arrival of Spanish Civil War orphans on Russian soil. This latter segment of the newsreel is broken up with shots of Evdokim, Elizaveta, and their own adopted daughter, Dolores, in a movie theater, watching themselves on screen. The editing in this sequence continually blurs the boundaries between the diegetic newsreel—itself a composite in which the “fake” and the “historical” are indistinguishable—and the larger film, which interrupts the newsreel only to foreground the scene of its fabrication and the extent to which Evdokim, Elizaveta, and Dolores have been transformed into spectators of their own lives.



Fig. III.6. *Hammer and Sickle*—Evdokim Kuznetsov (Aleksei Serebriakov) as a successful Party functionary at home.

These characters don't have identities—they have likenesses.<sup>21</sup> Evdokim eventually rebels against the system that fabricated his body and his life, but Elizaveta embraces it. Unlike Evdokim, who clings to the illusion of being “master of his own life,” Elizaveta metamorphoses from an apparently naive tractor driver into a totalitarian dominatrix. Her knowing complicity in the production of Evdokim's and her own mythical biographies is signaled by her increasingly masculine attire and diction, markers of her incorporation into the state bureaucracy. The melodramatic opposition between Evdokim as victim and Elizaveta as villainess crystallizes in the film's final scenes, in the museum that enshrines Evdokim's immobilized and speechless, but still breathing body as its central exhibit. Shot and paralyzed while trying to strangle Stalin, Evdokim is forcibly returned to his hero's pedestal, since the museum purports to chronicle his heroic act of self-sacrifice in *defense* of Stalin. The museum is thus but another prison that compels Evdokim to submit to the ideological requirements of the state and the sexual demands of his wife, who, as the museum's chief curator and Evdokim's self-appointed spokeswoman, is also his chief jailer. In its penultimate sequence the film emphasizes Elizaveta's total domination of her husband's mute and motionless existence, as she converses “for” him with a group of German writers, then straddles him after their departure and rocks herself to orgasm atop his unresponsive body while tears slowly roll down his face. (See Fig. III.7.)

The film concludes with Evdokim's death at the hand of his gun-crazy daughter, Dolores, while she is “playing Evdokim”—or, pretending to “be” her father. The film's displacement of the negative qualities of the stereotypical Stalinist hero onto its female characters is clearest in this scene, in which Dolores, dressed and coiffed like a young boy, acts out the fabricated story of Evdokim's life, casting herself in his hero's role and her father as the “enemy of the people.” Evdokim's death is doubly melodramatic, combining murder and suicide: Dolores shoots her father, but only because he signals her to remove “his” gun from the museum case and fire it, still loaded with a single poisoned bullet. Only at the moment of his death does Evdokim bridge, if not reconcile, the contradictions inherent in his dual role as both mock hero and melodramatic victim of Stalinist cultural mythologies. Evdokim's impossible role embodies the paradox that lies at the heart of contemporary Russian



Fig. III.7. *Hammer and Sickle*—The paralyzed Evdokim (Alekssei Serebriakov) as the central exhibit in the museum devoted to his life, with his wife, Elizaveta (Alla Kiuka).

ideally suited to resolve. When Evdokim gives his daughter “his” gun, he transforms her make-believe game into one with “real” consequences, thereby rejecting the world of heroic Stalinist simulacra, in favor of the melodramatic hero’s choice of suffering as the ultimate proof of his authenticity. Among the film’s greatest, if unintentional, ironies is the fact that, despite its masterful dismantling of the mechanisms that produced heroes like Evdokim, it concludes with an image of the hero-as-victim that is all the more powerful precisely because it is embodied in a character who conforms so completely to the image of the Stalinist male ideal.

*Hammer and Sickle* thus offers two very different takes on the issue of women who become men. While the film initially uses the sex-change to caricature the mechanisms that produced model Soviet heroes like Evdokim, the iconographic and moral markers of that heroic ideal remain attached to his character throughout the film. As played by blond, blue-eyed, and square-jawed Aleksei Serebriakov, Evdokim both looks and acts like the stereotypical Soviet hero, whose good looks confirm his moral superiority to everyone around him.<sup>22</sup> He is a thoroughly masculine character in the best Soviet cinematic tradition: handsome, hardworking, politically educated, “cultured,” a good father, and (at least, initially) a faithful husband. The film represents these qualities as inextricably connected with Evdokim’s surgically produced masculinity, a quality that travels with the penis Evdokiia acquires in the operation that erases her femininity.

In a break from the ironic distance it maintains toward most of its subjects, *Hammer and Sickle* endows Evdokim with a pathos that is most visible when he becomes the victim of the markedly “unnatural” masculinity of his wife and daughter. Once the emotional imperatives of melodrama take control of the plot, Evdokim becomes a thoroughly tragic *hero*—neither a tragic *heroine*, nor a Frankensteinian tragic *hybrid*. While the film clearly intends Evdokiia’s “loss” of her femininity as an allegory for the psychic and spiritual “losses” of the average Soviet citizen during Stalinism, the masculinization of Evdokim’s wife and daughter is not coded as a “loss,” but rather as the result of their active support for the Stalinist cultural mythologies of which Evdokim is the film’s principal victim. Rather than blurring, subverting, or bending gender distinctions, *Hammer and Sickle*, almost in spite of itself, reinscribes these distinctions as fixed points by which to navigate the shadowy, yet not incompletely charted Soviet past. Like *Encore* and *Mos-*

*cow Parade, Hammer and Sickle* must be viewed as a contemporary fairy tale about the past, one which, like these earlier films, continues to map distinctions between heroism and villainy along the faultlines of sex.

## Notes

1. I am grateful to Nancy Condee, Gregory Freidin, Helena Goscilo, Vladimir Padunov, and Vanessa Schwartz for their moral support and thoughtful comments on earlier drafts of this essay. I also thank the Committee on Research of the Academic Senate, University of California, San Diego, for travel grants that enabled completion of research for this article. I owe a special debt to the organizers of the International Film Festival in Sochi, The St. Petersburg Festival of Festivals, and the Moscow International Film Festival for their gracious hospitality in the summers of 1994-1997.

Despite critics' insistence on the irrelevance and the inadequacy of recent Russian films on the Stalin theme, since the inauguration in 1987 of the Nika awards (the Russian "Oscars"), four of the eleven awards for Best Film of the Year were given to works that deal explicitly with the legacy of Stalinism: Tengiz Abuladze's *Repentance* (1984-86); Aleksandr Proshkin's *Cold Summer of 1953*; Petr Todorovskii's *Encore, Again, Encore* (1992); and Pavel Chukhrai's *Thief* (1997). Nikita Mikhalkov's *Burnt by the Sun* (1994), also set in the Stalin era, might have appeared in this list had he not refused the Nika nomination, perhaps because he was already content with having won a Grand Jury Prize at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival and the Oscar for Best Foreign-Language Film of 1994. Of these five films, the only one that resists classification as melodrama is *Repentance*, a surreal tragedy about an anti-Antigone on trial for repeatedly exhuming the body of the Stalinesque dictator who ordered her parents' arrest and execution.

2. For a brief overview of Soviet attitudes to film melodrama, see Dymshits.

3. For a survey of Postsoviet film critical debates, see Larsen 1999.

4. For other critical approaches to contemporary Russian films about the Stalin era, see Boym 1993, Graffy 1993, Lawton, and Youngblood.

5. Commentators at both ends and in the middle of the political spectrum have blamed Soviet women's alleged "emancipation" for the breakdown of the Russian family and social structure, as well as the rise in juvenile delinquency, male suicide, and the general "spiritual" crisis. For more details on the scapegoating of women and on essentialism as the dominant

mode in late Soviet and Postsoviet discussions of sexual difference, see Goscilo, Larsen 1993, and Murav.

6. Useful discussions of the construction of women's social and sexual roles in the Soviet period may be found in Attwood 1990, Buckley, and Lapidus.

7. For discussion of viewers' phone calls and letters about this series of television screenings of films from the 1930s and 1940s, see Mamatova.

8. Prominent Stalinist films that feature women as model workers and citizens include, but are not limited to: *Chlen pravitel'stva* (*Member of the Government*, Zarkhi and Kheifits, 1939); *Devushka s kharakterom* (*A Girl with Character*, Iudin, 1939); *Ona zashchishchaet rodinu* (*She Defends the Motherland*, Ermler, 1943); *Svetlyi put'* (*The Shining Path*, Aleksandrov, 1940); *Svinarkha i pastukh* (*The Swinemaiden and the Shepherd*, Pyr'ev, 1941); *Kubanskii kazaki*, (*Cossacks of the Kuban* Pyr'ev, 1949); *Zagovor obrechennykh* (*Conspiracy of the Doomed*, Kalatozov, 1950). On women in Soviet film, see Attwood 1993, Stishova, Stites, 114-16, and Turovskaya, 1997.

9. In contrast to the now "classical" Hollywood melodramas of the 1950s, these Postsoviet films emerge primarily from tensions within the public sphere, rather than, as Laura Mulvey and others have argued, from either a dominant female character's point of view or from a focus on "tensions in the family" (76). The films that interest me in this essay are best described not as women's, but as men's "weepies."

10. Portions of my discussion of *Encore, Again, Encore!* and *Moscow Parade* were presented in Russian at a Symposium, "Postsoviet Culture: In Search of a New Ideology," sponsored by the 1995 Moscow International Film Festival and the journal *Iskusstvo kino*. An edited transcript of my presentation was published without authorization in *Iskusstvo kino* 2 (1996): 170-72. My remarks are presented here in substantially revised and expanded form.

11. Translations of dialogue from the films discussed here are my own throughout. Subtitled videotapes of both *Encore* and *Moscow Parade* are available from distributors of Russian films in the United States; for greater accuracy, however, my translations often differ slightly from the subtitled versions of these films' dialogue.

12. For the text of the song, S. Alymov's "Rossiia," see Belov et al., 13.

13. This verse does not appear in the text of this song as printed in Belov et al., 13.

14. For a discussion of the film's anachronistic use of postwar Stalinist monuments in a story set in 1939, see Trofimenkov and Dykhovichnyi

15. According to Dykhovichnyi, all the events in the film, “even the story about the horse,” are the “absolute truth,” based on events from the lives of real people, in some cases, members of his own family (1992b, 12).

16. Anna is played by the German singer Ute Lemper, whose performance seems modeled in part after Marlene Dietrich’s in films like *Morocco*. The resemblance is most marked in the scene in which Anna concludes a song and dance number for a group of drunken NKVD officers with a mock tender kiss to the pregnant Deputy Commissar of Culture. Evgenii Sidikhin also plays Gosha with all the wooden charm of a Soviet Gary Cooper.

17. The object of the Writer’s unrequited affections, the Ballerina, was modeled, according to Dykhovichnyi, after his own mother, who was once courted by Stalin’s son Vasilii, although that, says the filmmaker, “was a whole different story” (1992b, 12).

18. My thinking about “excess” in this film is much indebted to Vladimir Padunov’s incisive analysis of the “Poetics of Excess.”

19. Two of his male friends also betray the writer, but this scene indicates that the fatal accusation is that made by the Deputy Commissar of Culture, whose treachery is deepened by her public proclamation that she was the recipient of the writer’s first love poem.

20. The unsubtitled videotape of the film in the Video Library of the Filmmakers’ Union in Moscow does not include this statement, which may have been added solely for the benefit of foreign viewers unfamiliar with the historical role of the NKVD.

21. For an incisive analysis of the play of simulacra in this film, see Prokhorov.

22. In an interview Livnev stated that he chose Serebriakov for the role in part because of his stereotypical “Aryan” looks.

### Filmography

*Ankor, eshche ankor! (Encore, Again, Encore!)*. Dir. and Screenplay: Petr Todorovskii. Cinematography: Iurii Raiskii. Production design: Valentin Konovalov. Music: Petr Todorovskii (arranged by Igor’ Kantiukov). Krug (Mosfil’m), with Domino XXI. 1992.

*Prorva. (Moscow Parade)*. Dir.: Ivan Dykhovichnyi. Screenplay: Nadezhda Kozhushanaia and Ivan Dykhovichnyi. Cinematography: Vadim Iusov. Production design: Vladimir Aronin. Music: Iurii Butsko. Ritm (Mosfil’m), Parimedia (France), Proekt-Kampo (USSR-Germany), in association with Canal Plus (France). 1992.

*Serp i molot (Hammer and Sickle)*. Dir.: Sergei Livnev. Screenplay: Vladimir Valutskii and Sergei Livnev. Cinematography: Sergei Machil'skii. Production design: Elena Dobrashkus. Music: Leonid Desiatnikov. Lenfil'm, in association with ROSKOMKINO and VGTRK. 1994.

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