

FREED BY IDEOLOGY, IMPRISONED BY REALITY: THE REPRESENTATION  
OF WOMEN IN THE CINEMAS OF THE THAW AND PERESTROIKA

DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

The goal of the present dissertation is to trace the dynamics present in film representations of women characters during the Thaw, Perestroika, and the early 1990s by identifying and analyzing female types appearing on screen as a result of political, economic, and social changes during the two periods. The given periods were purportedly the two with the most potential for change in women's status, one inferior in both family and society despite the October revolution's ostensible claims of gender equality. The present study also revisits the deeply-rooted belief that traditional gender roles are biologically-predetermined based on allegedly innate traits distinctive to both sexes, a belief that ultimately led to the rigid distribution of gender responsibilities: the domestic realm as the primary domain of women, while social and political spheres are designed mainly by and for men.

In the analysis of female images, feminist film *Reflection theory* and psychoanalysis are employed. *Reflection theory*, a sociological role-focused approach, analyzes gender stereotypes, the extent to which women are shown as active or passive, and the manner in which political, social, and economic contexts influence representations of women on screen. The second approach is situated in psychoanalytic studies including the theory of "the three orders" pioneered by Jacques Lacan, Laura

Mulvey's theory of the "three related looks" which explores the woman's passive role as a sexual object on screen for the male gaze, and Yana Hashamova's analysis of the psychological dynamics of the gender paradigm in the transitional period during and after Perestroika.

Building on and diverging from existing scholarship that discusses films relating to the gender matter, the present study combines plot analysis with analysis of the cinematic language the director employs: the cinematic narrative, photography, editing, and acting.

In the examination of women characters appearing on the screen during the Thaw, Perestroika, and the early post-Perestroika years, it is established that, while both periods portray the young woman, the mother, and the single woman, certain shifts in their representations in Perestroika cinema occurred. Thaw directors' sanctioned and favorable images metamorphose into more antagonistic female portrayals by the directorship of Perestroika. The self-sacrificing mother of the Thaw is replaced by an overbearing mother figure in Perestroika films, a replacement that puts forward a question for further inquiry: can the mother fully and successfully assume the position of the father? The representation of the single woman during the two periods champions an unchanged tenet of the traditional perspective: the roles of mother and wife are the most deeply satisfying for a woman and a single woman's professional success is an insufficient substitute for personal happiness.

The research and cinematic analyses allow the reader to conclude that, despite powerful female images on screen during the two periods, attempts to advance the “woman question” expose, first and foremost, gender discrepancies. As a result, the patriarchal structure maintains its primary position and the “woman question” continues to be auxiliary in the traditional view of gender and, therefore, remains one of the major philosophical quandaries in gender studies.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Долой предрассудки! Женщина– она тоже человек!”<sup>1</sup>

(*White Sun of the Desert*, Vladimir Motyl’, 1969)

Along with such “high and humane ideals” as the dissolution of private property, the nationalization of land and industry, free education at all levels, and universal health care, the October revolution of 1917 set as one of its goals the establishment of gender equality. The resulting Soviet government actually established coequality with men in name only, officially granting access for women to the means of production, legalized divorces, and abortions. In reality, Soviet men continued to be designated and functioned as leaders in all spheres of society, while women fulfilled their pre-revolutionary traditional complementary role. Andrew Horton and Michael Brashinsky argue that, since the Communist ideology was created solely by men, the newly established state continued to support the existing patriarchal structure (101). The core of Horton and Brashinsky’s argument is situated in Teresa de Lauretis’s principle that posits the interrelation of a sex-gender system with the specific political and economic factors of a given society. Applying the ideas of Horton, Brashinsky, and de Lauretis, it is clear that the existing political and economic factors before and after the October revolution

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<sup>1</sup>“Away with prejudice! A woman is also a human being!”

continued the Russian pattern of a male-dominated governmental hierarchy. Such a hierarchy was destined to fail to give women in the Soviet Union true freedom, such as relatively equal involvement in political life, a reasonable distribution of leisure time between the two genders, the elimination of the wage differential for equal work, thereby freeing women from the “double burden” of work in and out of the home (Bodrova 180).

The conscious or subconscious belief that traditional gender roles are biologically predetermined due to supposedly innate traits distinctive to both sexes naturally led to the fixed distribution of gender responsibilities: the domestic sphere emerges as the primary domain of women, while the social and political spheres are occupied mainly by men.

Although the question of the distribution of gender responsibilities is still debated in many societies, these debates tend to focus on a woman’s ability to be dedicated to both family and profession and on whether a woman can experience equal success and satisfaction in both spheres. As in many societies, there is still no consensus in Russia, a society in which traditional gender perceptions still dominate.

I share the opinion of Anastasia Posadskaya and other egalitarian feminists who believe that “the so-called natural division of labor between man and woman is socially constructed” and that relationships should be “mutually complementary in society and in the family” (174). Posadskaya’s views will be discussed further in the dissertation within the context of the egalitarian approach to the gender equality issue and I will clarify my stance on the subject.

## Objectives

In my exploration of gender equality, or its lack, as seen in the portrayals of female characters in Soviet/Russian cinema, I focus on the periods of the Thaw, Perestroika, and the early post-Perestroika years. I have chosen this focus since these eras represent the coalescence of women's disillusionment with the revolution's lofty and unrealized ideals of equality. In everyday reality and in screen representations, these periods had the potential and promise for change in a woman's status in her family and her society. After decades of unfulfilled aspirations, a woman's actual status remained inferior to a man's, in spite of ideological rhetoric. The goal of my research is to trace the development and dynamics of film representations of female characters of the Thaw, Perestroika, and the early 1990s and to analyze the new female types that emerge as a result of these eras' political, economic, and social changes. Furthermore, I will focus on the phenomenon of *masculinization* of major female characters who, due to their manly (innate or acquired) features, perform as well as or even more successfully than men in political, professional, and social spheres. At the same time, I will argue that the use of the masculinization device, which apparently seems to be the only way for women to succeed and be recognized in the prevailing patriarchal order, actually reinforces existing gender discrepancies.

It should not be assumed that the present paper views the masculinization of female characters as a purely negative phenomenon in Russian cinematography. The directors under consideration in this work took a variety of approaches to the advancement of gender equality issues, one of which was masculinization. Considering

this variety and the scope of the films presented here, I argue that the masculinization of female characters ultimately fails to lead to gender equality. The source of this failure is that the masculinization of female characters brings their behavior and mentality in line with dominant male models. As a result, the women's personae adhere completely to the society's homogenous dominant male values, even if only on the level of women's mannish physical presentation and their manly behavior in social life. Such adherence inevitably supersedes anything "feminine" in the characters. In my research, I intend to demonstrate that, by the time of Perestroika, the trend of masculinization of strong female characters ebbs and femininity later becomes a key characteristic of major female protagonists.

### **The Methodology and Its Relation to Extant Research**

In the scope of my research two books, *Women in the Khrushchev Era* (2004) and *Perestroika and Soviet Women* (1992), are of great importance, especially when determining the shifts which occurred in women's status in such areas as politics, agriculture, heavy and light industries, and social life during the two periods under consideration in my research. While there has been a great deal of research conducted on the Thaw and Perestroika in political and cultural studies, gender issues and their reflection in literature and film has become the subject of active and ongoing debate intensifying at the turn of the millennium.

In his book *Russian Cinema* (2003), David Gillespie provides a survey of films which were produced during various periods beginning in the 1920s until the present day, and which have women as major characters. A shortcoming of Gillespie's survey is that,

although he determines the main types and traits of female characters for a given period, he does not offer detailed cinematic analysis of these films. Gillespie's oversight presents the opportunity for further study.

Studies by Brashinsky, Anna Lawton, and Josephine Woll offer particular insight into how the cinema industry and film-making as an art were affected by societal changes. While their film analyses primarily examine the plots of Russian films in relation to the political, social, and cultural transformations occurring during particular historical periods, the representation of female characters can be explored in more detail, especially comparing the depictions of women in the two periods of the Thaw and Perestroika.

While studying works on the Thaw by Gillespie, Julian Graffy, Elena Monastireva-Ansdell, Joe Andrew, and others, it becomes apparent that nearly every scholar focuses on a particular female image. Independently, these studies present no complete portrayal of the female protagonist of Thaw cinema. Two examples of this focus on particular female images come from Gillespie, Stishova, and Monastireva-Ansdell. Gillespie emphasizes the "little man" type and discusses human weakness and the ability of the viewer to sympathize and understand main protagonists, such as Veronika in Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Cranes are Flying* (1957). Stishova and Monastireva-Ansdell discuss the strong masculinized image of the commissar, Klavdia Vavilova, from Aleksandr Askol'dov's film *The Commissar* (1967). However, in the works of these scholars, the female character is just one of the aspects that the scholars discuss along with some ideological and social shifts occurring during the Thaw.



Therefore, my goal is to present a more essentially complete discussion of female protagonists by determining a number of female types which appear on the screen in this period, provide analysis of the types, and enhance the works of the scholars mentioned above and other scholars relevant to my research.

The films of Perestroika, Brashinsky argues, began to change the representation of the woman on screen (111). Interestingly, when discussing two of the arguably most prominent films presenting women during Perestroika, Vasily Pichul's *Little Vera* (1988) and Pyotr Todorovskii's *Intergirl* (1989), prominent scholars offer completely different interpretations of the main protagonists. While Gillespie views Vera and Tania (*Little Vera* and *Intergirl* respectively) as more challenging portraits of young women who "want something more out of life than drudgery and low expectation," Brashinsky finds both of these characters in a stage of great confusion, and in the case of Tania, victimization. In this view, one may also argue that Tania's character appears as a metaphor to convey the general atmosphere, speaking in Brashinsky's terms, of the "confusion" and "victimization" that Russia undergoes during the transitional period of Perestroika, a period which brought about a wide array of such negative social phenomena as racketeering, the Russian mafia, the release of pornographic materials, etc.

My analysis of female characters will go beyond these two films. I will extend it to the films of the early 1990s, which continue portraying the transformations brought about by Perestroika in Russians' ideological, economic, and social lives. I will provide historical, ideological, and economic background for the Thaw and Perestroika periods to provide a clearer picture of certain societal shifts reflected in films of the two eras. In

addition, I will determine whether Khrushchev's and Gorbachev's reforms addressed any gender issues. If such issues were addressed by reforms, it would follow that there would be a reevaluation of women's roles in society in the two periods. As will be apparent from my analyses of female images, I employ two main approaches in feminist film theory, albeit to different extents for each period. By utilizing a sociological role-focused approach, I analyze gender stereotypes and the extent to which women show active or passive adherence to such stereotypes and how a woman's status in family and society changed between the periods of the Thaw and Perestroika (Kaplan 16). Such sociological analysis was pioneered by Molly Haskell and Marjorie Rosen and later became known as *Reflection theory*. This analysis considers the ways that political, social, and economic contexts reflect on women's representations on screen. Additionally, the analysis addresses such gender matters as men being threatened by women and women being perceived primarily as sexual objects of male desire (Kaplan 17). The second approach is guided by Laura Mulvey's theory, introduced in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), which proposes three related "looks" associated in cinema: 1) the look of the camera, 2) the look of the spectator, and 3) the dominating look of male characters within the film narrative (Mulvey 47). Mulvey was convinced that psychoanalytic theory could advance the understanding of women's inferior status in a male-dominated system, which would help them to improve their position in family and society (Kaplan 18).

As with the Thaw films, I will pursue the goal of cataloguing various interpretations of female images during Perestroika and the early 1990s in order to shape a relatively complete, albeit diverse, female image. More importantly, I will juxtapose

female images during the Thaw, Perestroika, and the the first half of the 1990s to determine the shifts that occurred in the representations of women through the first half of the 1990s.

In contrast to existing research, I am interested in combining plot analysis with the analysis of the cinematic language employed by a director to deliver and reinforce a certain idea. Film, an entirely different medium from text, provides visual material shaped by cinematic narrative, photography, editing, costumes, décor, and acting that conveys certain messages, which are often interpreted differently by diverse kinds of viewers because of their varied backgrounds. Thus, film analysis limited only to content interpretation seems to be partial and inconclusive.

It should be noted that Woll's work in her book *Real Images: Soviet cinema and the Thaw* (2000) stands out among the works of scholars who study and write about the films of the Thaw Period (Horton, Brashinsky, Gillespie, Graffy, Stishova, among others). She provides not only deep analysis of many major Thaw films, but also discusses the significant shifts that occur in the greater variety of cinematic techniques, themes, genres, and the portrayals of main characters.

During the Thaw and Perestroika, cinema departs from the practices of realism promoted under the doctrine of Socialist Realism. In the time of the Thaw in particular, directors experiment with various techniques, form, lighting, and non-linear narrative – all of which are unusual for didactic Stalinist cinema that employed film as a tool to educate the masses. Similarities in the variety of film techniques, genres, characters, and

themes during the two periods occur due to a “more relaxed” ideological atmosphere and, consequently, less strict censorship. Since cinematic language gains a greater significance during these two periods, it will be an inextricable part of my analysis.

While carrying out my analysis, I do not have the goal of defining which film schools a director belongs to or of outlining similarities or differences within directors’ cinematic styles. Instead, I include in my discussion only those techniques, shots, and angles that effectively highlight certain messages and/or aspects of a scene to which the director draws the audience’s attention, especially when gender construction is involved. As a result, my analysis of cinematic language will complement the analysis of the typology of female characters, mainly in order to demonstrate how film, a different medium from literary text due to its cinematic language, substantiates the director’s message. For example, in Askol’dov’s *The Commissar* (1967), the extreme medium shot of the commissar Klavdia Vavilova, holding her child in her left arm and her military coat in her right, represents her *mixed* identity as a soldier and a mother and her emotional torment when facing this choice of identities.

Finally, I have engaged existing scholarship critically, citing and detailing it briefly in my research. Overall, I consider film production during the Thaw, Perestroika, and the first half of the 1990s: the directors’ types of women characters, their major themes in films (with women as major characters), popular genres of these periods, and how the categories mentioned above reflect ideological, economic, and social shifts. Of primary importance in any discussion of cinema is the presence of an audience: only the presence of an audience allows a film to “acquire[s] social and cultural importance”

(Gripsrud 201). Robin Wood, for instance, views films as the fusion of “the personal dreams of their makers and the collective dreams of their audiences,” a fusion which occurs as a result of “the shared structures of a common ideology” (78). Fredric Jameson also argues that the nature of a film’s symbolic meanings express an individual’s fantasies and realities and their conflict with those of the society (20). Drawing on Wood’s and Jameson’s positions, Yana Hashamova concludes that films, when “representing anxieties, desires, and fantasies” project on “collective (un)conscious expressions of hidden drives” (15).

When cataloguing the film lists for the Thaw, Perestroika, and the early post-Perestroika periods, I identified the main criteria for my film selection as those films that address the “woman question”<sup>2</sup> and those which have a female protagonist as the lead character, a character who stands out due to her exceptional abilities to perform successfully in social and/or professional spheres.

### **Outline of chapters**

The dissertation consists of two Parts which discuss female characters during the Thaw and Perestroika, extending the analysis of the female protagonist to the early 1990s. Each Part has chapters which focus on various topics depending on the female images or types under discussion.

Part I briefly discusses the Thaw period as a time of “political and cultural relaxation” and also whether Nikita Khrushchev’s reforms addressed the “woman

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<sup>2</sup>The “woman question” deals with “the extensive public discussion of women’s role in society, their rights to education and work” (Heldt 22).

question.” As mentioned previously, any reforms could have possibly led to some fluctuation in the gender role paradigm. Furthermore, the chapter traces the shifts occurring in the Soviet film industry and film-making process (the main cinematography principles, the nature of the characters, the major themes, etc.) during this time. Primarily, the chapter focuses on women characters, dwelling on such topics as *zhenskii fil'm* (*woman's film*)<sup>3</sup> and the masculinization of female soldier characters. While discussing women soldiers, the paper elaborates on the concepts of the “feminine” and the “masculine,” the idea of motherhood, personal happiness versus common cause, and, finally, whether female directorship affects the presentation(s) of women in Thaw cinema. Lastly, I summarize the female types depicted in Thaw cinema in order to compare their images and characteristics (for example, “feminine” versus “masculine” presentations, involvement with political, professional, and social activities, etc.) with the female characters appearing on the screen during the time of Perestroika and the early post-Perestroika years.

Part II provides a brief overview of ideological, social, and cultural changes brought about by Perestroika and how they affected the Soviet/Russian film industry and film-making from the end of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s. Significantly, both periods of cinema art, of the Thaw and Perestroika, revive the Soviet past through the reexamination of the revolution and the Second World War as the two major episodes in Russian history and as markers of national identification. Yet, the cinematic representation of these historical events was somewhat different during the two periods.

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<sup>3</sup> The *woman's film* is centered on female protagonists, usually appeals to a female audience, and addresses such "women's concerns" as heterosexual romance, domestic life, family, and motherhood (White 120).

Thaw cinema primarily revisits the revolution and the War with presentations in line with this period's approach of prioritizing individual values over ideological concerns.

Reflecting this new approach, cinematic presentations depict "heroic acts not in terms of the glorious defense of the fatherland, but as personal achievement" (Beumers 117).

Post-Soviet cinema tends "not only to debunk past ideologies, but also to create new myths as pointers for the future" (Gillespie 14).

Hashamova identifies two major tendencies in these new portrayals which revisit the Soviet past when analyzing films of the 1990s. The first tendency is to revisit the past, focusing predominantly on Stalin's era. The second tendency reflects the film directors' interest in "more distant" Russian history: nostalgia for pre-revolutionary values as "a chance for salvation" and the role of the royal family in Russian history (Hashamova, *Pride and Panic* 65). Hashamova concludes that such films express the keen desire of Russian society "to rethink and reconfigure its national identity under the new post-Soviet conditions by engaging and reconstructing Russia's historical events and figures and by revising and recreating historical myths" (*Pride and Panic* 65).

The chapter also discusses femininity as the key characteristic of female characters in the cinema of Perestroika, acknowledging the absence of strong women soldiers (as leading characters), and the *zhenskii fil'm* genre which, I believe, continues to be a tradition during this period. Therefore, I demonstrate that the phenomenon of masculinization of female characters fades out by the time of Glasnost' cinema. Furthermore, the chapter dwells on the female images in the context of the "sexual revolution" (the second half of the 1980s), incorporating the works of Eliot Borenstein,

Helena Goscilo, and other scholars on the rapidly growing phenomenon of prostitution in Russia and its relationship to money and market issues during Perestroika. Finally, I reiterate the women types depicted in the cinema of Perestroika and the early 1990s in order to contrast them with the female images portrayed in Thaw cinema and to trace the dynamics of representations of women during the two periods.



## PART I

*Nature made woman different from a man;  
society made her different from a human being.*  
-- Shulamith Firestone

### CHAPTER ONE: GENDER POLICIES DURING THE KHRUSHCHEV ERA

While my major focus remains on identifying the types of changes that occur in the representations of women in the cinema of the Thaw period, it is essential to my work to explore whether the status of women in domestic, professional, and political spheres underwent any significant adjustment due to Khrushchev's gender policies. In addition, I intend to trace the extent to which Thaw cinema reflects women's actual position in society and the roles they played in society and family.

By pointing out the absence of women among political leaders and top management personnel, Khrushchev himself called attention to the issue of gender inequality (Attwood 159). During their discussions of the main economic, social, and political initiatives of the Khrushchev era, such scholars as Melani Ilic, Donald Filtzer, Lynne Attwood, and Susan Reid conclude that Khrushchev's reforms remained fairly limited. Below, I summarize the major studies by these scholars in order to highlight the

limits of the Khrushchev reforms, reforms which ideally should have eased the “double burden” of women and offered them new possibilities in social and political spheres.

Ilic provides a thorough analysis of the initiatives introduced in agriculture, heavy and light industries, politics, and social life. The initiative to mechanize agricultural production in order to alleviate the manual labor of women ultimately alleviated the work of men, as men were the ones entrusted with mechanized equipment (Ilic 14).

In industrial production, an increase in the number of women who took on traditionally “male” jobs was intended to be a step forward in gender equality, especially considering the period’s tendency toward the “feminization” of management in such areas of employment as health care, trade, public services, etc. Nevertheless, some observers<sup>4</sup> instantly expressed their concerns about women obtaining “masculine” occupations, which supposedly deprived them of femininity and their “natural” roles (Ilic 15).

In politics, two of the most significant events associated with the inclusion of women in political life were the appointment of Yekaterina Furtseva to the Presidium<sup>5</sup> and the creation of the Committee of Soviet Women chaired by Nina Popova beginning

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<sup>4</sup>Ilic refers to the comments of an observer, V.I. Nemtsov, who expressed his views on ‘respect of women’ in a series of articles published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* in 1958. He criticized literary portrayals of women workers. Most significantly, he was convinced that physical work deflects women from their major function of motherhood (Ilic 15).

<sup>5</sup> In Soviet Russia the presidium was the permanent governing body of legislative bodies such as the Supreme Soviet in the USSR. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR existed from 1936, when the Supreme Soviet of the USSR replaced the Congress of Soviets with its Central Executive Committee that administered in between sessions, headed by "the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee."

in 1958. In addition, by the end of 1950s, women's councils (*zhensovet*<sup>6</sup>) had been formed. Along with the ideological training of women, *zhensovet* oversaw women's employment, conducted socio-cultural events, and organized educational lectures on such matters as maternity and childcare (Ilic 18).

As evidenced by the description above, the work of the *zhensovet* primarily targeted women's performance in the domestic sphere. Disappointingly, these councils failed to explore responsibilities beyond the scope of those that women already fulfilled in family and society. In addition, they failed to facilitate women's engagement of any sort in the political sphere. Unable to separate themselves from the traditional understanding of gender role disposition, *zhensovet* endeavored to teach women how to be good mothers and workers. Likewise, *zhensovet* did not encourage any discussion of changes to women's status, either in family or society; instead, they pursued the goal of improving women's working and living conditions, which in no way contributed to bridging the gap between reality and gender equality.

The two magazines, *Rabotnitsa*<sup>7</sup> (*The Woman Worker*) and *Krest'ianka*<sup>8</sup> (*The Woman Peasant*) discussed the activities of *zhensovet* and exalted the achievements of

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<sup>6</sup> *Zhensovet* was a prototype of *zhenotdel*, the Women's Section of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1919-1930). Similarly to *zhensovet*, *zhenotdel* addressed issues of abortion and motherhood, child care, prostitution, female unemployment, and labor regulation.

<sup>7</sup> *Rabotnitsa* had several interruptions in its availability to readers: it came out first in 1914, but its publication was disrupted when the First World War began. *Rabotnitsa* began to be published again in 1917, but ceased again soon after due to the paper shortage during the Civil War. The periodical's distribution was resumed once again in January 1923 (Attwood 160).

<sup>8</sup> *Krest'ianka* was published for the first time in June 1922 (Attwood 160).

the *udarnitsy* (shock workers). In her analysis of *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest'ianka*, Attwood explores the images of women that appeared in these periodicals from 1954 to 1964 and analyzes the contradictions in representations of women during this period, as well as throughout Soviet history. On the one hand, the magazines emphasized the necessity of women working outside the home, as well as the fact that housework should not be performed exclusively by women. On the other hand, as both Attwood and Ilic stress, the fact that women started acquiring male jobs raised the concern of the possibility that they would lose their femininity (Attwood 172; Ilic 15).

Based on a public survey<sup>9</sup>, Ada W. Finifter and Ellen Mickiewicz claim that one of the crucial causes of women's insufficient involvement in political life in the Soviet era was their shortage of free time (867). While men and women had equal opportunities (at least in principle) to pursue their educational goals and eventually their career goals, women were simply restrained from participation in political and/or social activities. While one may agree entirely with Fenifter and Mickiweicz that the "double load," customarily accepted and fulfilled by women limited (if not entirely consumed) their leisure time, thus depriving them of the opportunity to explore beyond their work and house errands, the traditional (patriarchal) perception that men were more apt to participate in political life should be also acknowledged.

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<sup>9</sup>According to Finifter's and Mickiewicz's national public opinion survey carried out in the Soviet Union during November and December 1989, only 32% of women (as opposed to 45% of men) were very interested in politics. The rest of women reported no involvement in politics due to the lack of free time because of their domestic obligations.

In the area of housekeeping, as Reid argues persuasively in her article “Women in the Home,” domestic responsibilities were still expected to be performed exclusively by women. This ultimately resulted in limited participation in public life. Khrushchev’s policies simultaneously drew attention to the lack of women’s involvement in social and political activity and promoted the idea that “the natural order of things” for women was to be in the home (Reid 160). Attwood draws the same conclusion, saying that the “promotion of female activism” did not cohere with the “perpetuation of old gender stereotypes” (“Celebrating the ‘Frail-Figured Welder’: gender confusion in women’s magazines of the Khrushchev era” 172).

Unquestionably, a new vision of gender dynamics necessitated liberation from the traditional perspective on gender role distribution in society. However, this could not possibly be realized until the concept that “traditional roles” presupposed stereotypical behavior for each gender was changed. Without such a change, “superior-subordinate” relations between men and women would inevitably be maintained. As long as men perceived with skepticism the idea of redefining traditional roles on an equal basis with women and if the “sil’nyi pol”<sup>10</sup> viewed this process as a violation of their freedom and an attack on their masculinity, the entire concept of gender equality seemed to be doomed.

As Posadskaya argues compellingly, a “master and subordinate” relationship (established by tradition) should be replaced with a new, egalitarian one, which is free of

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<sup>10</sup>In Russian culture, it is common to refer to men as “sil’nyi pol” (*the strong sex*) and to women as “slabyi pol” (*the weak sex*). “Sil’nyi pol” came from the French “Sexe fort,” which is a playful notion for “man.”

such social constraints as class, background, sex, age, etc., and be realized within the “space of free choice” (174). Unless these socially constructed notions, including the stereotype of gender, are eliminated, any individual is forced to realize only his/her “natural traits” as a woman or a man (Posadskaya 175).

## CHAPTER TWO: SOVIET CINEMA DURING THE THAW ERA

The denouncement of the “personality cult” by Khrushchev at the Twentieth Communist Party Congress in February 1956 marked the beginning of the new period in Russian history. This period is generally identified as the Thaw and is widely viewed as a time of “political and cultural relaxation” (*Russian and Soviet Film Adaptations of Literature, 1900-2001* 100). Due to the time-consuming film production process, the film industry responded more slowly to Stalin’s death as compared, for example, to the less complicated process of releasing literary works in print (Woll 3). Preserving the collective nature of film-making process and its necessary dependence on state support, film-making institutions continued functioning as they had previously: “script boards” evaluated scenario drafts, artistic councils (*khudsovery*) approved scripts, and “creative units” (*tvorcheskie ob’’edineniia*) produced the films (Woll 6).

Finally, after many years of strict censorship during the Stalin era, Soviet directors had the opportunity to demonstrate a certain amount of artistic freedom and individuality in their films. Thaw cinema offered a new vision of Soviet reality mainly through the prism of the eyes of the individual, the emotional side of his/her inner world, and, frequently, the internal struggle between his/her personal concerns and the common

good. Yet, as John Haynes emphasizes, it would be misleading to assume that Khrushchev's policies wholly liberated cinema from the ideological constraints imposed on it by the official discourse (115).

The time frame of the Thaw varies in diverse interpretations of the period by different critics. While some scholars define only the first decade after the death of Stalin as the Thaw, others stretch this period until the early seventies (Prokhorov 10). Some film critics, including Woll, regard the late 1960s as the end of the Thaw, based on the variety of themes (banned earlier by the official ideology) and the more formalistic approach to film creation in terms of narrative, film techniques and the depictions of characters. Birgit Beumers, for example, highlights three dates as “a good cut-off point for the history of cinema,” dates which marked the “clampdown in culture”: Khrushchev's deposition on 14 October 1964, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, and the arrest of Andrei Siniavsky and Yuli Daniel in 1965 for the publication of “anti-Soviet” works abroad (112). In any case, all critics concur that it is practically impossible to determine the exact date when the Thaw ends. Personally, I am inclined to view the late 1960s as the end of the Thaw, the time when Soviet film directors started to depart from formalistic techniques and returned to realist ones.

Such scholars as Alexander Prokhorov, Dmitry Shlapentokh, and Vladimir Shlapentokh argue that, even though the dominant principles of official ideology continue to prevail in filmmaking until the demise of the Soviet Union, Thaw directors found ways to diverge from “the official line” by encoding their works with “various allusions, associations, and hints” that would require “special decoding efforts” on the part of the



viewer (Dmitry Shlapentokh and Vladimir Shlapentokh 130). Therefore, while the formalistic (comparing to Stalinist times) Thaw cinema departs from the Realist tradition due to its versatile experimentation with cinematic language, it becomes more realist in content. Thaw filmmakers, Prokhorov emphasizes, did not question such major tropes as “the positive man,” “war,” and “the big family,” in which Soviet leaders fulfilled the role of the “fathers” of the nation. Instead, filmmakers centered their attention on new original stylistic manifestation of the same tropes (Prokhorov 30).

Thaw cinema depicts “complex” and “warm” characters, as prescribed by the Ministry of Culture by the end of 1954 (Woll 8). These depictions were entirely unlike the tradition of Stalin’s cinematic Socialist Realism, a tradition that primarily presents the main protagonists as idealized characters keenly devoted to the common good and lacking the expression of their personal feelings and emotions. The image of a virtually impeccable “positive Soviet man” was replaced with the image of an “ordinary” Soviet man. Significantly, Thaw cinema depicts more realistic characters with both emotional complexity and weaknesses and flaws, all of which are exposed to the viewer, while the characters’ positive, often heroic presentation is preserved (Woll 8). Hence, one of the major tropes, the “collective,” morphs into the trope of the “big family” with the primary focus on the individual. As Lawton points out, the cinematographers of the 1960s endow their films with a great degree of “aesthetic and moral concerns,” thereby producing more emotionally appealing movies (2).

Another important feature of Thaw cinema, as Graffy argues, was a repudiation of the “idealized” reality of the late Stalin period and the “re-establishing of the greater

*truthfulness*” of the post-revolutionary years. The motivation of the Thaw directors to rethink the Soviet past led to several cinematic adaptations of literary works, such as Grigorii Chukhrai’s *Sorok pervyi* [The Forty First] (1956), based on the story of Boris Lavrenev, Askol’dov’s *Komissar* [The Commissar] (1967) based on Vasilii Grossman’s story *In the Town of Berdichev*, Sergei Gerasimov’s *Tikhii Don* [Quiet Flows the Don] (1957-58), based on Mikhail Sholokhov’s epic novel, Alov and Naumov’s *Pavel Korchagin* [Pavel Korchagin] (1956), based on the Nikolai Ostrovskii’s novel *How the Steel Was Tempered*, and Andrei Tarkovskii’s *Ivanovo detstvo* [Ivan’s Childhood] (1962), based on the 1957 short story “Ivan” by Vladimir Bogomolov (*Russian and Soviet Film Adaptations of Literature, 1900-2001* 100).

In my dissertation, I focus predominantly on how the Thaw features discussed above are employed, if at all, in the portrayal of women on the screen in this period. The following chapter explores and analyzes the most representative female images, outlines the major types of women characters during this period, and finally places them within the social, economic, and political context of the Thaw era.

### CHAPTER THREE: SCREENING WOMEN DURING THE THAW

The wider acknowledgment of *zhenskii fil'm* as a separate genre was not included in the discussion of strong female characters until the cinema of the Stagnation period. While critics such as Viktoriia Tiazhel'nikova and Neia Zorkaia claim that the *zhenskii fil'm* genre appears as early as the 1970s, I argue that this genre actually emerges much earlier, in the second half of the 1950s. I intend to delineate the essential features of this genre in order to determine whether they are applicable to Thaw movies, validating the plausibility of my argument. In part, I rely on the definitions of the melodrama and romantic comedy, since these two genres have been established by various film critics to be the main genres of *zhenskii fil'm*. My analysis of *zhenskii fil'm* in Russian cinema is based on three distinguishing features of this genre. First, the title of *zhenskii fil'm* should convey the “woman premise.” For example, Lawton cites films with the “woman theme” that became fashionable by the middle of the 1970s: *Sladkaia zhenshchina* [A Sweet Woman] (Fetin, 1977), *Molodaia zhena* [A Young Wife] (Menaker, 1979), *Strannaia zhenshchina* [A Strange Woman] (Raizman, 1978), *Zhena ushla* [The Wife Has Left] (Asanova, 1980) (26). It should be mentioned that titles which reflect the “woman question” are not exclusive to the period of Stagnation, and such film titles were present in the second half of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. Examples of such

films from the pre-Stagnation period include *Devchata* [Gals] (Chuliukin, 1961), *Zhenshchiny* [Women] (Liubimov, 1966), *Koroleva benzokolonki* [The Gas Station Queen] (Mishurin and Litus, 1962), *Devushka bez adresa* [The Girl Without an Address] (Riazanov, 1957), and *Devushka s gitaroi* [The Girl with a Guitar] (Faintsimmer 1958). Second, the presence of a female character, who is clearly the major protagonist, designates a film as part of the *zhenskii fil'm* genre. Finally, as expected, the core motif of *zhenskii fil'm* should indubitably reflect the “woman question.”

In my dissertation, I intend to go beyond the films mentioned above and include in my analysis motion pictures that do not necessarily contain the “woman premise” in the title, but engage the viewer intensely in the discussion of the “woman question.” The cinematic analyses below demonstrate that the genre of *zhenskii fil'm* originated in 1950s and continued its tradition and presence during Thaw cinema and beyond.

### **Perfection in the Shadows: the Representation of Young Soviet Woman in the Cinema of the Thaw**

Iurii Chuliukin's *Gals* and Eldar Riazanov's *The Girl Without an Address* portray young ambitious heroines who are in search of their ‘selves,’ and, most importantly, possess the ability to transform the major male protagonist (who might be an ideal worker, but lacks moral principles) into a better person. The female protagonist's transforming influence leads to the man becoming a true hero, according to the values of the period.

Chuliukin's *Gals* depicts the lives of five young women who work in a Russian logging camp and room together in a communal dormitory. Each woman represents a different type: a deceived wife (Vera) who abandons her husband because of his fleeting affair; a twenty-eight-year-old "spinster" (Nadia) who is going to marry a much older man only because she has already passed the socially-accepted age to be married; a young, lighthearted and easy-going woman (Katia) who always and almost effortlessly manages to have her life together; a heartbreaker (Anfisa) who is stunningly beautiful on the outside, but devious on the inside; and, finally, the main protagonist, Tosia.

The story begins as eighteen-year-old Tosia Sinitsina arrives at the logging camp to start a new life working as a cook. Upon Tosia's entry into the girls' collective, she is confronted by one of her future roommates, the most beautiful woman in town, Anfisa. Anfisa scolds Tosia for taking the women's food without permission. Anfisa's dislike for Tosia escalates when a young man, Ilia Kovrygin, supposedly involved in a romantic relationship with Anfisa, develops feelings for Tosia. As the film progresses, Tosia's "beautiful" personality triumphs over Anfisa's beautiful looks. Furthermore, losing Kovrygin to Tosia teaches Anfisa a lesson and, more importantly, destroys her skepticism about the existence of true love.

Kovrygin represents the ideal worker whose portrait is hung on the "wall of honor" as the most productive employee in the logging camp. When he arrives in the culture club, all his colleagues begin applauding him in recognition of yet another work record he has set. Even so, his nearly perfect character is questioned because of his reputation as a womanizer.

Ironically, the romance between Kovrygin and Tosia develops from a conflict between them at their first meeting at the culture club. Tosia happens to be the only woman who opposes Kovrygin and his brigade turning the gramophone off, so they could focus on playing checkers with a rival group in a quiet atmosphere. Tiny and frail at first sight, Tosia, although new to the collective, shows her fearlessness when facing Kovrygin's gigantic colleague, who is trying to turn off the music.

Taken aback by Tosia's daring gesture, Kovrygin invites her to a dance in a very arrogant manner: he beckons to her. The medium shot of Tosia's reaction reveals her beckoning back to Kovrygin, challenging him to approach her. This challenge causes the other women to burst into laughter, especially after she makes him first remove his hat and throw away his cigarette.

Determined to avenge his embarrassment in the culture club, Kovrygin makes a bet with his malevolent work rival, Filia, that he can win Tosia's heart within a



Figure 1. Chuliukin's *Gals*

week. Ironically but unsurprisingly, Ilia is caught in his own "trap" and develops genuine feelings for Tosia based on her virtue and naiveté.

A fairly predictable climax occurs when the film shows Tosia's heartbreak when she finds out about Kovrygin's bet to woo her. This climax continues into a no less

predictable dénouement. Having found his true love and having acknowledged that it is unacceptable and unethical to play with another person's feelings, Kovrygin grows into a better person. He ultimately transforms into an exemplary character. At this point in the film, his work performance harmonizes with his positive personality. Even Tosia's close friend Katia (who was the most cynical about Tosia's relationship with "the main philanderer in the camp") comments on Kovrygin's transformation, saying, "Look! He has changed a lot!" The couple reconciles in a scene in which all workers at the logging camp are building a house for some newlyweds. The fact that the event is taking place in spring evokes the ideas of love and new beginnings, symbolic of Tosia and Kovrygin's new life together.

Notably, in the union between Kovrygin and Tosia, Ilia emerges as the central figure: he is a shock worker (*udarnik*)<sup>11</sup> whose professional success delights everyone in the logging camp, while Tosia shows no professional advancement in any way. Hence, as opposed to the major male protagonist, who undergoes a process of character building and eventually emerges virtually ideal, the female protagonist overall lacks development and thus appears as a rather static character.

Despite the fact that Tosia shows signs of a strong personality, as in the scene in the culture club discussed above, certain traits in her image testify to the superficiality of the overall presentation of her character. In a way, she needs only a little attention from a man to fall in love: the long shot of Tosia dancing and singing joyfully and somewhat

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<sup>11</sup>*Udarnik* (Russian: ударник) is a Russian term for a superproductive worker (or a shock worker) in the Soviet Union. The term is derived from the expression "udarny trud" for "high-powered labor."

childishly after her first walk with Kovrygin suggests that she has made a quick emotional attachment to him. Another scene, on the train, which depicts her weeping when Kovrygin ignores her, indicates the fast shifts in Tosia's emotional reactions, reactions that supposedly depict her "feminine" nature, in the traditional perception of genders. While one may argue that all these abrupt shifts in emotional states are typical for the genre of romantic comedy, they also seem to be representative of the deep ambivalence between the stereotypical elements of femininity and the attempt to depict a strong female personality.

Tosia's characteristics discussed above mirror the inferences Barbara Heldt draws regarding women writers and the woman protagonist in nineteenth-century Russian prose, which are relevant, to a large extent, to the young Soviet heroine portrayed in the cinema of the Thaw. Heldt argues that "there is no novel of gradual female development, or rebirth, or transformation." Instead, the heroines are used "in a discourse of male self-definition" (Held 2). Indeed, Kovrygin in *Gals* is the only character who undergoes a positive transformation under Tosia's influence, while her character shows no development whatsoever, especially in the professional sphere. Overall, Tosia sets an example of a central female character who, in Heldt's terms, "exists only for the hero" (Rosenshield 117).

Another interesting point that Heldt makes is that female culture is purportedly based on feelings, while males are driven by ideas (19). If one analyzes the female and male group dynamics depicted in the film, it becomes apparent that the scenes showing the female collective are devoted solely to discussions of their personal dramas,



explaining the director's reliance on close-up and medium shots when revealing the girls' emotions. In contrast, the scenes depicting Kovrygin's brigade are primarily set in the workplace. Furthermore, even those scenes that take place in the men's dormitory show Kovrygin's team engaged in some kind of professional activity. By way of example, the men discuss proposals for innovations in logging, with the goal of setting a new work record in order to beat other brigades and, thereby, win the socialist competition.<sup>12</sup> Hence, *Gals* presents the domestic realm as occupied principally by women, while the social and professional areas are suggested as the comfort zone of men. When tracing such a tradition in the gender role distribution to the time of Perestroika, it becomes apparent that no significant changes occur in the depiction of Russian womanhood in Russian prose and films produced during and after Glasnost'. Goscilo's assertion, "Women procreate - produce babies. Men create – generate art and ideas" indicates that "the gendered binarism that feminizes nature and masculinizes culture" remains intact not only during Perestroika but also afterwards (*Dehexing Sex* 45).

Can *Gals* be considered a *zhenskii fil'm* by genre? Although the title of *Gals* pertains to the "woman theme" and the film addresses the "woman question" by emphasizing the gender discrepancy represented in the division between the social (male) and domestic ("feminine") realms, I view *Gals* as a *pseudo-zhenskii fil'm* rather than *zhenskii* per se. I take this view because of the film's lack of psychological depth in the construction of female character building (which occurs partly due to the specificity of

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<sup>12</sup>*Socialist competition* was a form of competition between state enterprises and between individuals practiced in the Soviet Union.

the film genre) and the fact that the male protagonist undergoes the lion's share of his development towards the end of the film and, thus, plays the role of the leading character.

Riazanov's *Devushka bez adresa* [The Girl Without an Address] portrays a young, vigorous, and determined girl named Katia, who arrives in Moscow from a small provincial town in pursuit of her dream of becoming an actress. Riding the train to Moscow, she meets a young man named Sasha, who is instantly captivated by Katia's outspoken and fiery personality. Separated by a crowd, the couple loses each other in the hectic flow of people at the station. Sasha's attempts to find Katia in Moscow are not in vain. In the last scene, he finds her at the exact place where they separated, at the train station, just in time to stop her from leaving Moscow. The final shot, which reveals Sasha and Katia leaving the station and holding hands, suggests their future together.

Having failed as an actress, Katia takes on various jobs trying to make a living in the capital. Following the principle, "Everyone should act according to Soviet ideology!"<sup>13</sup>, she confronts all her supervisors for their lack of professionalism, which results, consequently, in her losing her jobs. In contrast to Katia's supervisors, Sasha values Katia's straightforwardness more than any of her other qualities. While life teaches Katia the lesson that reality often does not conform to individual and ideological convictions, she remains faithful to her personal principles.

In general, similar to Tosia's character in *Gals*, Katia's character displays a lack of complexity. Her primary function is, in the words of Heldt, to inspire the male

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<sup>13</sup>"Поступать нужно по-советски!"

protagonist to experience genuine love which he is not capable of before (20) and which ultimately shapes him into a true hero, a similar transformation to that of Kovrygin in *Gals*. In turn, Katia fails to realize her dream of becoming an actress; therefore, in the end, she emerges as an underachiever. Yet, the fact that Katia ends up as a worker who will build “the bright future” of the country composes a positive moral image of a truly Soviet citizen within the confines of the accepted ideological upbringing of the time when the film was released.

Overall, in the late 1950s the genre of romantic comedy, Beumers argues, gains popularity due to its ability to expose shortcomings in the system in a rather undisclosed manner (116). She also emphasizes that it becomes possible to ridicule bureaucrats as long as they are placed in some “carnavalesque atmosphere” instead of in everyday life situations, as happens in Riazanov’s *Karnaval’naia noch’* [Carnival Night] (1956) (136) and Aleksandr Faintsimmer’s *Devushka s gitaroi* [The Girl with Guitar].

Remarkably, all of the Thaw comedies mentioned in this chapter have romance in the spotlight of the film. By contrast, in the socialist realist master plot, as Katerina Clark argues, love remains “an auxiliary pattern” (Clark 178) and ideas of love, bourgeois by nature, are marginalized by the glorification of the country and the role of the Party in building socialism. Thaw film directors began producing movies in which love becomes the central focus of the plot.

## **Deprived by the War: Portrayals of Single Women during the Thaw**

Based on Irina Velembovskaia's story *Women* (1966), Pavel Liubimov's melodrama *Women* depicts several life stories of women marked by the war. The film title reflects the very essence of the picture: the role(s) and status of women during the post-war era. All female characters share a key trait – their solitude and longing for the men taken from them by WWII. The film opens with a shot of a couple saying goodbye to each other in a small river harbor as the husband departs for war. A three-quarter close-up shot lingers on the woman's face (one of the main characters, Katia Bednova) to show her emotion of extreme grief. The following dolly shot takes the viewer into the crowd, full of the distressed faces of women seeing off their loved ones to war, and therefore suggesting that the film communicates the story of many women rather than a particular few.

The major female character, Dusia Kuzina, is a country girl trying to make a living on her own in the city. Like many other women, she is desperate to get married, and like them, sadly (according to traditional female values), will never find her happiness due to the shortage of men resulting from casualties of war and Stalin's camps. Ironically, Dusya truly believes that purchasing a nice coat and boots is the "key" to finding real love and starting a family. In the end, Dusya achieves financial independence and follows the latest fashion trends, yet remains single.

*Women* portrays three female characters representing three different generations, who were brought up in the same milieu, but whose life accomplishments vary with their personalities, morals, and motivation. Similarly to Dusia, Katia Bednova arrives from a

village in pursuit of a better life in the city. She manages to build a successful career as a well respected factory leader and is eager to help Dusia follow suit. Thus, she arranges Dusia's employment at the factory and gives her room and board when the latter needs a place to stay. A medium shot reveals Katia and Dusia sitting at a table, symbolizing their future life together, in which they will share the fortunes of their lives. The depiction of Katia and Dusia at a family table in one shot creates the effect of them being united by their personal losses of a husband and a father. As Katia states, "The war ate your father and my husband."<sup>14</sup>

Eventually, Katia becomes Dusia's best friend and professional mentor. As their relationship progresses, it becomes obvious that their views on such matters as genuine love, the creation of a family, and professional success are entirely different. Dusia's involvement with several skirt-chasers at the factory, her abortion at the price of never being able to conceive again, and a strong taint of commercialism make Katia realize her failure as Dusia's life coach.

Among the three major female characters, Dusia functions as a liaison between Katia (who represents the oldest generation) and Alia (Al'ka) Iagodkina (the representative of the youngest). In order to secure a better future for her son, Slavik, and avoid public judgment for having had an illegitimate child, Al'ka agrees to come with Dusia to the city.

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<sup>14</sup>“У тебя отца война съела, а у меня мужа.”

Al'ka emerges as a character endowed with the moral standards entirely opposed to Dusia's. The latter's obsession with marriage, followed by several affairs with factory philanderers, is contrasted with Al'ka's strong sense of dignity when it comes to men. Al'ka's hurt pride as an abandoned woman does not allow her to forgive and reconcile with her beloved Viktor, who disappears for a time after they decide to marry. Even the fact that Al'ka is expecting a child does not prevent her from sending Viktor on his way when he finally appears on her porch two months later. The camera masterfully conveys Al'ka's and Viktor's emotions when they finally sort out their relationship. Though depicted mainly via high-angle medium shots, which suggest humiliation and vulnerability, Al'ka shows enough courage to reject the father of her son to retain her self-respect, thereby breaking the main dilemma of women's obsession to have a life companion. As Viktor leaves, the camera shifts from depicting him at eye level to a low level angle in order to communicate his arrogance and vanity, reinforced by his last words to Al'ka, "You'll come to me to the city and you'll cry your heart out. I'll forgive you, but I'll never forget this."<sup>15</sup>

Significantly, the scene stresses the women's dilemma, whereby they find themselves in the position of inevitable subjugation by men, forcing them to reassess their value system in the highly limited choice of a life partner. This subjugation also impacts the dynamics between the two sexes in both family and public domains. The predicament of women's desperate need for men is best expressed in Al'ka's mother's

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<sup>15</sup>“Приедешь ко мне в город, будешь рыдать. Я тебя прощу, но здесь останется...” (When stating this, Viktor points at his heart.)

statement, “When you’re a woman of a certain age, you’ll be pleased to have even a limping passerby.”<sup>16</sup> While the statement above leads to the problem of women’s lowered self-esteem, it also creates to an even more complicated problem, which is women’s degradation.

Upon Al’ka’s arrival in the city, Katia becomes her mentor as she once was for Dusia. For Katia, Al’ka is a chance to redeem herself for failing Dusia, “Maybe I’ll help her become the kind of person that I failed to make you.”<sup>17</sup> However, the moment Katia spots a spark of mutual attraction between her son, Zhenia, and Al’ka, her exceedingly overprotective motherly feelings overbear her noble intention to help Al’ka. Katia irately reminds Al’ka of her public disgrace (having son out of wedlock) and states firmly that, as a single mother, thus as a woman with a doubtful reputation, she would never be a good match for Zhenia, an ideal son, who should befriend a “soderzhatel’naia devushka” (well-educated), “You don’t acknowledge any guilt... It’s much better when one chooses in accordance with one’s social status.”<sup>18</sup> As Katia reproaches Al’ka, a long shot reveals her with her back to the girl, signifying her rejection of Al’ka and the impossibility of their reconciliation.

Katia’s prejudice toward Al’ka reveals that her enthusiasm for helping women and being their mentor is superficial: she wants to help until she realizes that one of the

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<sup>16</sup>“Вступишь в бабью пору, хоть кривому, хоть храмому будешь рада, хоть охотнику заезжому!”

<sup>17</sup>“Может из неё удастся сделать то, чего из тебя сделать не сумела!”

<sup>18</sup>“Ты и вины-то никакой засобой нечувствуешь... Гораздо лучше в жизни, когда по себе выбираешь.”

imperfect women has intentions toward her perfect son. In fact, Katia's antagonism to Al'ka's status of a single mother results in the mother's rejection of the union between her son and Al'ka, signifying the great extent to which she is confined by traditional gender expectations. Eventually, Katia accepts the idea of Zhenia and Al'ka as a couple and even displays initiative by going to Al'ka's village with the intent of bringing her back to the city. The film closes with a medium shot of Katia smiling at Al'ka's son, indicative of her acceptance of him as well as of his mother.

It should be noted that while Katia attempts to befriend and mentor Al'ka, Zhenia becomes an obstacle to Katia and Al'ka's bond of sisterhood. Katia's motherly sentiment toward Al'ka is motivated by her social and patriarchal prejudices. It is because of these very prejudices that she is a prisoner of her deeply-held traditional beliefs. Interestingly, while all women are united in their pain and grief over the men they lost to the war, the emergence of any new man, whether a negative character like Iurka or a positive one like Zhenia, serves to sow seeds of discord in the sisterhood relationship. Caught within traditional gender-role expectations, women are unable to view themselves as independent of a male figure. This inability to move past prevailing patterns of gender-role expectations cripples the sisterhood bond.

It is noteworthy that all of the main male characters, with the exception of Bednova's son, demonstrate negative characteristics – Dusia's boyfriend Iurka is a drunkard and a womanizer; Al'ka's fiancé disappears indefinitely when marriage is imminent. At the same time, nearly all of the women are driven by their desperation for a man and are willing to compete for even the least desirable mates.



The scene in which Dusia hosts her lover, Iurka, in her room shows Dusia in a long shot on her knees while she gathers the pearls of her broken necklace. The scene suggests that her life is falling apart in the same way as her necklace. The high angle of the shot, as well as the entire mise-en-scène, conveys Dusya's overall relationship dynamic with men: fawning behavior, a lack of self-respect, and abject self-abasement on her



Figure 2. Liubimov's *Women*

part; emotional coldness, dalliance, and superiority on the part of men. When Dusia raises her eyes to look at Iurka and makes the assumption that he has no genuine feelings for her, he frigidly replies, “Give me a break! Love, don’t love... Let’s not dramatize!”<sup>19</sup> The fact that Iurka is positioned with his back to the camera distances and alienates him from the viewer and, thus, conveys the overall impression of a lack of any true connection between the lovers.

While women's lack of discernment when choosing men is undoubtedly attributed to the gender imbalance due to life losses in World War II,<sup>20</sup> the issue goes beyond the demographic factor per se. One may also speculate that the film conveys the fact that a

<sup>19</sup>“Да брось ты, Дусь, любишь, не любишь...Давай не усугублять.”

<sup>20</sup> The ratio of men to women in 1946 was 4 to 5 (Andreev, Darskii and Kharkova, 74). For a more detailed analysis of the sex ratios of women to men in post-war Russia, see Andreev, Darskii and Kharkova's *Naselenie Sovetskogo Soiuza*.

woman's existence is presumably totally insufficient without a man. Though portraying women as physically and emotionally strong characters, the director also reveals their vulnerability – their need to love and be loved.

The phenomenon of a woman's alleged need for a man is presented as a part of the natural course of life. Consequently, the absence of a man, as depicted in the film, supposedly affects all aspects of a woman's life, mainly when she bears the hardships of being a single mother and faces the dilemma of a woman's professional success not compensating for her unhappy personal life. In turn, men are portrayed as self-sufficient and, most importantly, deprived of any emotions, which generally implies that they perceive women primarily as sex objects. Yet, the director avoids a completely biased portrayal of men by featuring the idealized character of Zhenia, who appears very strong and frank, with no hesitation in refuting his mother's verbal assaults on Al'ka and defending her honor as a single mother, or when openly confronting Al'ka for concealing the truth about having a child.

*Women* also addresses the matter of motherhood. Among the three major female characters, Dusia emerges as the only superfluous woman. I believe that the fact that she never acquires the identity of a mother immeasurably contributes to her portrayal purportedly as an unessential woman. A tinted close-up shot of Dusia, showing her in the hospital after she has had an abortion, lingers on her facial expressions to reveal her despair and shame simultaneously. The obliqueness of the shot communicates her

emotional disturbance and the agony she experiences the moment she informs Katia that she will never be able to conceive. As the years go by, Dusia dreams of adopting a boy to whom she can give her love.

In fact, women's longing for men is manifested through their desire to have a male baby – presumably another way to compensate for the absence of men in their lives. At times, the film portrays women's excessive love for their sons becoming self-sacrificial in nature, as, for example, in the case of Katia, who rejects a loyal suitor fearing that her relationship with her son may suffer somehow from the marriage.

Both women, Katia and Al'ka, face the challenge of being single mothers, though for different reasons. Katia successfully bears the burden of raising her child alone, after her husband is killed early in the war, and, consequently, nurtures a model of a "positive man" for the state. Al'ka ends up as a single mother due to her inability to rise above her hurt pride as an abandoned bride. Notably, having a chance to avoid the status of a single mother upon Viktor's return, she makes the choice to raise her child alone. She is condemned by society, and her social "downfall" makes her an outcast. Yet, in the end, she is "rewarded" for her "true-to-herself" personality and professional achievement – she finds love with the only ideal man in the film, Zhenia.

In conclusion, despite the fact that Liubimov's film is about women, it cannot be considered a *zhenskii fil'm* by genre. While promising, persevering, accomplished, and strong in bearing "the double burden," the female characters are not portrayed as entirely independent subjects, but as women whose unhappiness is supposedly caused by the

lack/absence of men in their lives and who live *for* men and *because of* men. Similarly to the films discussed above, *Women* offers various “types” rather than complex multifaceted portrayals of female characters. Hence, I am inclined to classify *Women* as a *pseudo-zhenskii* rather than a *zhenskii fil'm*.

### **The Union between Teacher and Worker: Portrayals of Social Activist Women during The Thaw**

In line with the main principles of Thaw filmmaking discussed above, Stanislav Rostotskii's *Delo bylo v Pen'kove* [It Happened in Pen'kovo] (1957) and Marlen Khutsiev and Felix Mironer's *Vesna na zarechnoi ulitse* [Spring on Zarechnaia Street] (1956) dwell on such Stalinist tropes as *the positive man* and the nation as one big family. Even so, these films delve deeper into the individual's inner life, which brings out the emotional density of the character. Both films also focus on romance and simultaneously promote such ideas as the value of education for working class people, their moral images, and the increase of their culture appreciation. Though the titles of the two films mentioned above do not evoke the “woman theme,” both movies grapple with the question of what role(s) women should play in society.

Rostotskii's *It happened in Pen'kovo* depicts a love triangle which takes place in a poor kolkhoz<sup>21</sup> in Pen'kovo (Woll 66). Structured as a flashback, the film reveals the

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<sup>21</sup> A *kolkhoz* is a shortened for the term of the rural economics of collective farming (literally - *collective management*) in the Soviet Union.

memories of the major male protagonist, Matvei, and how the arrival of a city girl, Tonia Glechikova, changed his life, as well as the life of the entire village.

Tonia is a young specialist who, after graduating from an agricultural university, arrives to work as an agronomist in the native village of her parents. She is very ambitious and enthusiastic about sharing her knowledge of how to improve life in the village. Dressed in a fashionable suit, gloves and high-heeled shoes, she appears as a complete outsider among the kolkhoz dwellers.

Though initially received with a great deal of skepticism by the local people, including the chairman of the kolkhoz, she does not give up her plan to bring progress to the village and ultimately succeeds in its complete renovation. Tonia's physical presentation as a very stylish woman functions as a metaphor for the innovations that she introduces to the villages' residents, individuals who are highly reluctant to abandon the old ways of the kolkhoz management. The



Figure 3. Rostotskii's *It Happened in Pen'kovo*

opposition between “the old” authorities and “the new” ones (represented by the opposite sexes) is revealed through a long shot of Tonia's first meeting with the chairman of the kolkhoz, who looks rather askance at her. The fact that virtually every villager questions

Tonia's expertise as well as her authority (from the inception of the rebuilding of the kolkhoz) indicates the rigidity of the social assumption about a gender hierarchy in the administrative pyramid, which the film attempts to undermine.

Having received her degree, Tonia arrives in the village not only as a specialist, but also as an educator for less-educated citizens and eventually becomes the moving force for advancement in the village. It is precisely her knowledge and passionate desire to change life for the better that fascinate Matvei. He is married to Larisa, the daughter of the chairman and the most beautiful girl in the village. However, her seductive beauty and devotion to Matvei are insufficient to keep him from falling in love with Tonia.

Woll identifies Matvei as "the most unconventional man" in the village (66) and, until Tonia appears in his life, he seems to be highly cynical about the possibility of a more civilized life in the village. Handsome, smart, with a good sense of humor, he has great potential as a worker. However, he fails to perform according to his potential because he is bored with the monotonous and primitive reality of life in the village. He entertains himself by pulling pranks on the villagers, thus earning the reputation of "nothing but a pest,"<sup>22</sup> in the words of the kolkhoz chairman. Only upon Tonia's arrival is Matvei transformed into a new man: he becomes actively involved in the social life of the village, he helps anonymously to build a new culture house, and he becomes the leading performer in the newly created drama club, in which the troupe exposes all the flaws in the workings of the kolkhoz.

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<sup>22</sup>"...не человек, а зараза!"

The value of Tonia's character is her ability to inspire Matvei and other locals to take a different viewpoint on life, as well as her talent for engaging them actively in the process of transforming the village. Matvei is captivated by Tonia's vision of the future and his fascination is revealed in the scene in which he pictures himself operating innovative tractors from the control station.

As the film progresses, Tonia's efforts produce rewarding results: the village is full of new buildings, including a new culture club and a kindergarten. Ultimately, the young city girl proves to be a strong leader with a superb ability to achieve her goals. Her abilities and success result in a progressive representation of women's role in society.

Yet, the fact is that Matvei, not Tonia, who undergoes the major character development in the film once Tonia enters his life. Tonia's primary function in *It Happened in Pen'kovo* is similar to Tosia's in *Gals* (despite their drastically different character presentations). Her function is to facilitate the male protagonist's transformation into a better man. In this respect, Tonia's character represents a reoccurring motif of a woman's life revolving around a man and thus, in Heldt's words, being defined by the man (2). Accordingly, women are portrayed as dependent on men, even though, as in Tonia's case, not necessarily in both professional and personal lives. For instance, while Tonia emerges as a self-sufficient worker and the most highly-educated social activist in the kolkhoz, her personal life is entirely driven by her love for Matvei.

The scene in which Tonia and Matvei's wife blame each other for not saving him from jail dwells on their remorse about and devotion to Matvei. A long shot that depicts Tonia with her back to Larisa, communicating the ongoing conflict between the two competitors, is juxtaposed with a following medium shot of the two women engaged in a sympathetic dialogue, united in their love and grief over Matvei.



Figure 4. Rostotskii's *It Happened in Pen'kovo*

The experience of love, referring back to the argument about the female protagonist in nineteenth-century Russian prose, is the way for the heroine's religious, political, and moral "positive convictions" to emerge, which appears to be accurate in the case of Tonia (Costlow 22). Yet, as opposed to the heroine who often rebels against societal conventions, as described by Heldt, Tonia acts in accordance with the "prescribed" norms of the official discourse, and, thus, is portrayed as ethically superior to all the film's other characters. While Matvei is ready to sacrifice his marriage to be with Tonia, she, in turn, tolerates no idea of breaking his family apart, even though she develops reciprocal feelings for Matvei.

The scene in which Matvei confesses his love for Tonia, with the intent to break the love triangle, shows that Tonia retains the image of the "positive woman": she states that her personal convictions do not include the role of a home wrecker. Nevertheless, a lasting close-up of Tonia's eyes, emanating nothing but affection and genuine love for



Matvei, speaks otherwise. The scene is shot in a heavy downpour (clearly a metaphor for tears) to convey the pain, sadness, and disappointment shared by Tonia and Matvei for their might-have-been happiness and love.

Throughout the film, Tonia reveals her feelings for Matvei to no one; even her grandfather only speculates about her emotional agony over her impossible love. Yet, the director avoids a too unemotional and unyielding portrayal of her. Her internal struggle is revealed to the viewer through a series of close-ups and medium shots that focus



Figure 5. Rostotskii's *It Happened in Pen'kovo*

on Tonia's facial expressions and body while she is thinking of Matvei. Her visual image is complemented by the audio image of a song ("Ognei tak mnogo zolotykh") about a woman's secret heart-breaking love for a married man. The director employs the song to express verbally Tonia's heartache over her budding love for Matvei, a love that is morally wrong and doomed from the beginning:

*...Парней так много холостых  
А я люблю женатого.  
Эх рано он завел семью.  
Печальная история.  
Я от себя любовь таю,  
А от него тем более.  
Я от него бежать хочу,  
Лишь только он покажется.  
А вдруг все то, о чём молчу  
Само собою скажется...*

*There are many single fellows  
But I am in love with a married one.  
He got married when he was young,  
A sad story.  
I keep my love secret even from myself,  
Let alone from him.  
I want to run away from him  
As soon as I see him.  
What if everything I keep inside  
Comes out on its own .*

In the final scene, Matvei returns home to his wife and son, having served two years in prison for locking up the wicked Aleftina (Larisa's accomplice in the attempt to poison Tonia) in a cold cellar. The long shot of Matvei embracing his son and wife suggests a happy ending for Larisa: the three of them will stay together as one family. At the same time, the following close-up of Tonia, who smiles happily when seeing Matvei return home, leaves the impression that she is content with such a finale. Though the dénouement may seem somewhat disappointing in terms of the unrealized love between Tonia and Matvei, by averting Tonia's moral "downfall," the director undeniably elevates her character in the viewer's eyes in the end. In the spirit of Thaw cinema, along with the depiction of a the heroine's somewhat complex inner struggle between her love for a married man and generally accepted mores (also "prescribed" by official ideology), the film delivers an idealized moral image of a woman who resists all the temptations of real life, thereby giving all women a model to strive for. Yet, one may argue that, although the director advances the "woman question" by portraying an empowering image of a woman who performs her social role(s) successfully, the fact that numerous scenes depict Tonia learning and working under the supervision of a male *partorg* ("party organizer")<sup>23</sup> and other men who vastly outnumber women as administrative officials, testifies to the limited representation of women's leadership within the rigid framework of the patriarchal structure.

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<sup>23</sup> *Partorg* is a representative of The Communist Party in the Soviet Union who performed ideological work and supervised work in important places: plants, institutes, kolkhozes, etc.

Similarly to Rostotskii's film, Khutsiev and Mironer's *Spring on Zarechnaia Street* portrays a recently graduated teacher, Tania Levchenko, sent to an industrial city to teach Russian language and literature to workers in an evening school. Apparently, small-town life became unbearable for the previous teacher, unable to tolerate the town's old-fashioned lifestyle. She abandoned her assignment several weeks after her arrival in town. A truck driver, Iura, gives Tania a ride to the local school-board office and on route describes the monotonous lack of entertainment and cultural events in the city. He also suggests sarcastically that Tania should pay him for the return trip, when she "runs away" from the city.

Indeed, Tania faces an entirely different reality from what she expected. Her teaching skills turn out to be useless for the adult students who work full time, "grow mustaches, drink beer, and give birth to children." Eventually, she becomes a part of their collective, recognizing and treating them primarily as humans, friends, one big family, and only secondarily as students. However, until then, as Woll emphasizes, Tania is "not sensitive to human beings": she scolds her student Migulko for falling asleep at his desk because he spent all night at the hospital by the side of his wife, who was in labor. She also demands that an eight-month pregnant woman get up when her name is called in class (Woll 48). Even so, the film indicates that having an emotional breakdown and leaving her job and the city is not a viable option for Tania. The scene in which nearly all her students help Tania move to her own place and bring new furniture for her manifests the acceptance of Tania into their big collective/family.

Notably, *Spring on Zarechnaia Street* carries on the tradition of Stalinist cinema in which two “ideal citizens,” often an industrial worker and a young school teacher, are brought together<sup>24</sup> (Dmitry Shlapentokh and Vladimir Shlapentokh 139). Nevertheless, the main focus shifts from the portrayal of excellent workers of the Soviet state to romance.

Recalling Matvei’s fondness for Tonia in *It Happened in Pen’kovo*, Sasha Savchenko (the best steelworker at the factory) is fascinated with Tania’s personality, higher education, and broad cultural scope. Some critics, including Woll, comment on the cultural gap that “separates” Tania and Sasha (48).



Figure 6. Khutsiev and Mironer’s *Spring on Zarechnaya Street*

The scene in which Tania is listening to a Rachmaninov concerto not only shows the “incompatibility” between Sasha and Tania, but also demonstrates Sasha’s attraction to Tania due to her superior intellect. A close-up shot reveals Tania’s rapturous gaze as she is overwhelmed by the music. Her mesmerized look is perceptibly contrasted to Sasha’s empty and apathetic stare. At the same time, his irritation over his inability to feel and comprehend the beauty of music is obvious. It is not so much the cultural gap that captures the attention of the viewer, but rather Sasha’s awareness of how narrow his

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<sup>24</sup> This type of romance/union between a worker and a teacher was a potent model of male-female relationship in Stalinist cinema, as in Micheil Chiaureli’s *Padeniye Berlina* [The Fall of Berlin] (1949).

world is and how much this narrowness separates him from Tania. Savchenko leaves inconspicuously, so as not to disrupt Tania's delight in the music. More significantly, he slams the door as he leaves the house without saying a word to his former girlfriend, Zina. His gesture is unmistakable: he can no longer be with someone like Zina, a very pragmatic and narrow-minded girl, and he breaks off his superfluous relationship with her, based purely on physical attraction.

Unlike Zina, Tania awakens Sasha's urge to grow "culturally" (*kul'turno*) and experience a world beyond his work. Although he possesses model professional skills, these are not sufficient to view him as an ideal hero. Specifically due to Tania's influence, Savchenko acknowledges the importance of education and develops a keen interest in music and art. Tania's character is another example of a young Soviet heroine's "terrible perfection," which makes a man's betterment possible (Heldt 24).

It is Tania's versatile personality that captivates Savchenko and makes him fall in love with her. As he notes to his friend Iura, "I like this person!" Despite the fact that Tania's portrayal lacks any emotional tint for nearly the entire film, the value of Tania's character (similar to the major heroines in *It Happened in Pen'kovo* and *Gals*) is in her ability to transform the major male protagonist, Savchenko, into a true hero.

The finale is quite conclusive – the union between the worker (Sasha) and the teacher (Tania) is achieved in the end. The scene in which Savchenko enters the classroom in a very unorthodox way (through the window) and helps Tania catch the test papers blown around by the wind reveals the two characters in profile facing and

affectionately gazing at each other. Savchenko reads aloud one of the exam cards that asks the examinee to define the ellipsis. His answer, “The ellipsis is used at the end of the sentence or story which is not completed, and everything is still ahead,”<sup>25</sup> indicates the potential of their relationship. The camera cuts to a silent Tania looking meek: the reaction shot of her slight nod at Sasha is a subtle way to show her consent. Furthermore, the fact that the scene takes place in spring (referenced in the title of the film) implies love and new beginnings in Sasha and Tania’s life together. In short, the film has a happy ending.

Progressive but rather stereotypical portrayals of Tonia in *It Happened in Pen’kovo* and Tania (though to a lesser extent) in *Spring on Zarechnaia Street*, together with the fact that their lives revolve around men, mark these two films as *pseudo-zhenskii* rather than *zhenskii* per se.

### **Invincible Faith: Female Images in Kalatozov’s *The Cranes are Flying* and Chukhrai’s *Clear Skies***

Kalatozov’s *The Cranes Are Flying*, which gained vast national as well as international popularity, delineates all of the Thaw cinema features mentioned above. This movie distinguishes itself with such powerful experimental film techniques (discussed in the scene analysis) as double exposure, the spinning camera, the idea of stasis, and numerous oblique shots and angles to convey mainly the psychological trauma of the female protagonist, Veronika.

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<sup>25</sup>“Многоточие ставится в конце предложения или целого рассказа, когда он не закончен и многое ещё осталось впереди.”

My analysis supports and elaborates Beumer's argument that it "it is not Boris, but Veronika who is the hero" in the film (120). While Boris's experience of war is limited to a few scenes, nearly the entire film is devoted to Veronika's drama: the loss of her family, her fiancé's death, her rape by his cousin Mark, and her unbearable marriage to the latter.

The film opens with a dating scene of Veronika and Boris Borozdin, whose dreams of a future life together are disrupted by the war. Sadly, Veronika has no chance



Figure 7. Kalatozov's *The Cranes Are Flying*

to see Boris off properly when he is deployed to the front. Another tragic element of disrupted dreams in the film is that Veronika will never have a chance to welcome Boris home, as he is killed in a reconnaissance mission during the war.

The director effectively uses frequent oblique close-ups of Veronika to express the heroine's enduring drama. For example, a canted close-up of Veronika communicates to the viewer her shock at the tragic loss of her parents after they are



Figure 8. Kalatozov's *The Cranes Are*

killed during a fatal air raid. The camera cuts to a close-up of the still ticking clock – the only thing that survived the raid. The scene is paradoxically evocative of death and life:

while the idea of stasis emphasizes Veronika's emotional paralysis as she learns of her parents' death, the ticking sound of the clock implies that Veronika's sad and absurd life continues.

Driven by grief, Veronika accepts Fedor Ivanovich's (Boris's father) proposition to move in with their family. Ironically, his gracious intention to help Veronika ultimately leads to an even more tragic experience in her life. During another raid, when Veronika refuses to leave for the bomb shelter, the film suggests that she is raped (physically and emotionally) by Boris's cousin Mark. In the scene when Mark carries Veronika's motionless body in his arms, the director resorts to the technique of double



Figure 9. Kalatozov's *The Cranes Are Flying*

exposure to convey the idea of Mark is shattering Veronika's dreams of her life with Boris. A close-up of Mark's feet treading on the crushed glass is imposed over the oblique close-up of Veronika's glassy eyes depicted upside down. She quietly utters Boris's name, as if calling for his help and, at the same time, giving up her hope to be with him ever again.

Veronika's "moral demise" is directly linked to the scene of Boris's death. While trying to save his wounded comrade-in-arms, Borozdin is shot by a sniper. As Boris is collapsing on the ground, he sees spinning birch trees, an image that morphs into the



illusion of his imaginary wedding with Veronika. Drawing the two concepts of death and wedding together in one scene, the director creates a powerful dramatic effect: at the point of death, Borozdin visualizes the happiest and most desirable moment in his life, which remains nothing but an illusion.

Crushed with shame after Mark has taken advantage of her, Veronika consents to marry him, a union obviously doomed from the beginning. As Woll argues, the film imposes no judgment on Veronika for “betraying” Boris (75). The director leaves viewers the chance to reach conclusions about Veronika. Her multifaceted character evokes contradictory emotions: admiration and disappointment, sympathy and contempt.

Even though married to Mark, Veronika continues to believe in Boris’s safe return home. As Woll emphasizes, Veronika’s act of marrying one man when she never stops loving another is paradoxical and “resistant to logical analysis” (75). Yet, one may argue that it is precisely Veronika’s contradictory behavior that makes her a true multidimensional heroine. While Veronika’s decision to marry Mark is influenced by social constraints, family loss, feelings of guilt, and, most importantly, her vulnerable state of mind, she nevertheless remains faithful to her love for Boris. It appears that her devotion to him cannot be shattered by any social convictions. Furthermore, although she is the actual victim in this ordeal, she is the one who is constantly haunted by guilt for having not prevented the rape. Veronika’s self-affliction inevitably diminishes the imposition of the viewer’s judgment, and calls for the viewer’s compassion instead.

Veronika experiences an emotional climax in the scene in which Boris's father inveighs against a soldier's fiancée, who has married another man while her fiancé (Zakharov) was fighting in the war. The story about Zakharov's broken heart and his fiancée's betrayal mirrors Veronika's feelings about and assessment of her own behavior. Fedor Ivanovich's devastating speech finally expresses the unspoken burden by which Veronika is tormented. Consequently, she rushes to the train station in despair, presumably to commit suicide. The director reinforces her drama through the alternation of oblique close-ups of Veronika's distressed, but determined face and the accelerating movement of her feet as she runs toward the station. The tension escalates powerfully when a train appears in the background of Veronika. The chaotic camera movement and spinning communicate Veronika's emotional distress and convey a



Figure 10. Kalatozov's *The Cranes Are Flying*

sense of her imminent death. The dénouement is quite unforeseen: Veronika is saved when she rescues a little boy nearly killed by a truck. It is no coincidence that the boy's name is Boris: little Boris symbolically assumes Veronika's fiancé's position, bringing a new meaning to her life.

Having learned about Mark's devious way of gaining exemption from active duty and having witnessed his lewd behavior at a birthday party, Veronika finally leaves him.

She continues to wait for Boris, despite news of his death. Real closure occurs for Veronika only when Stepan, Boris's best friend, hands Veronika a picture of her that Boris kept with him. She realizes that Boris would have never given up her picture if he were alive.

In the final scene, medium shots of Veronika in tears are juxtaposed with long and medium shots of the happy crowds of people celebrating victory. A dolly shot reveals Veronika giving away flowers meant for Boris to the soldiers returning home from the front. Even through her tears, one sees the resolute expression on Veronika's face – she is capable of going on with her life, even though she has to carry the burden of her loss with no hope of relief.

When comparing Veronika with the other female protagonists already discussed, characters whose main function is to motivate men, her representation differs drastically in several respects. First of all, in *Gals*, *It Happened in Pen'kovo*, and *Spring on Zarechnaia Street*, falling in love with the heroine because of her virtues compels the male protagonist to transform into a better (usually morally superior) man, while the heroine herself reciprocates his love only upon his conversion into a true hero who actually “deserves” her love. In most instances, such a female character is engaged in some sort of social work in which she appears as an activist and/or a teacher. She sets the male protagonist on the path of self-improvement, a path he is not capable of beginning on his own.

In *The Cranes Are Flying*, however nothing indicates Veronica's social involvement; instead, all public life revolves primarily around her personal drama. To love and to carry her feelings through life is the hallmark of her character. As opposed to the more static images of Tosia, Tonia, and Tania, Veronika's character is revealed in much greater depth and complexity through such cinematic techniques as dissolve, double exposure, numerous oblique shots, and spinning camera, all of which allow the viewer to see how her character undergoes constant psychological development each time she faces a new dilemma.

In his portrayal of Veronika, Kalatozov offers a complex three-dimensional female character whose role is not to serve and "define" the men surrounding her, but to endure her personal drama and mature through the mistakes she has made – all of which entitle *The Cranes* to be viewed as a *zhenskii fil'm*. At the end, Veronika's happiness comes from her finding the meaning of life in motherhood, caring for and offering her life to others. Since she "sins," suffers, and redeems herself through the adoption of the orphan Boris, her character does not appear as one-dimensional to complement to that of the male personae.

The major female heroine, Sasha L'vova, in *Chistoe nebo* [Clear Skies] (1961) by Chukhrai evokes Veronika from *The Cranes Are Flying* in several respects. Similarly to Kalatozov's motion picture, Chukhrai's film reveals the personal drama that Sasha experiences during World War II: leaving her family, receiving the news of her fiancé's death, and dealing with the unrequited love of her former classmate, Petia.

*Clear Skies* is structured in a series of Sasha's flashbacks, from the early days of the war until the Thaw period. The film opens with close-ups of the sky and Sasha's intent gaze locked on a plane, which (as we learn later) her husband is piloting. Sasha fell in love with a high class pilot, Aleksei Astakhov, the very moment she saw him when he came uninvited to a New Year's Eve party at her place.

As Woll points out, two stories unfold in the film simultaneously: a romance between Sasha and Astakhov, and a post-war drama, whereby Astakhov loses the Party's trust, after having been held as a prisoner in a German camp, and regains his honor and his job as a pilot with the beginning of the Thaw (118). Astakhov's character lacks psychological depth and emotional tinge overall. All events are presented through the prism of Sasha's perception, her feelings, and her immense support of Astakhov in numerous predicaments. Therefore, it is precisely Sasha who is the main protagonist in the film. Throughout the film, the camera work lingers on her multifaceted character via numerous close-ups, oblique shots, and the double exposure technique, which will be discussed in the cinematic analysis of Sasha's representation.

In the tradition of Soviet cinema, Chukhrai especially stresses Sasha's "inner beauty" over her looks. It is powerfully manifested through the juxtaposition of her character with her sister, Liusia, who is gorgeous, but is entirely devoid of moral values. Having seen her fiancé off to war, Liusia marries a man much older than herself only because he can take good care of her and her younger brother. Not surprisingly, upon her return home from evacuation, the first issue Liusia wants to discuss with Sasha is her right as an older sister to have the bigger room.

Sasha's character, in contrast, is motivated by moral principles that allow her to find complete happiness in the end. Sasha is indisputably presented as a strong character; she is actually more resolute and active in her relationship with Astakhov than he is. First of all, she is the one who initiates their acquaintance and wins his heart within the four days they spend together before he leaves for an assignment. Though during their first meeting Astakhov acts very superficially, because he is not attracted to her tiny body in frumpy clothes, he is enchanted with her sparkling personality the very first day they spend together. The scene in which they joyfully play snowballs and Astakhov kneels in front of Sasha to put her shoe on shows the first signs of his genuine attraction for her. Revealed in high



Figure 11. Chukhrai's *Clear Skies*

angle, he looks at her with admiration and even some meekness. Depicted in an extreme low angle, Sasha's facial expressions convey a strong feeling of contentment and triumph – the love she dreamed about is actually coming true.

As the romance between the couple develops, she is the one who approaches Aleksei for their first kiss and the one who makes a decision that he will stay overnight with her before his departure. Additionally, she nearly proposes to him when suggesting that her house is no longer merely hers, but theirs, "You are mine today! Only mine! Let

it be our home.”<sup>26</sup> Once their relationship is consummated, the camera fixes its gaze on Sasha, leaving Astakhov totally off screen. As she peers at the sleeping Aleksei, the oblique close-ups and medium shots depict her adoring yet tense gaze, as if foreshadowing the upcoming drama.

Several days later, Sasha receives the news of Astakhov’s heroic death. To intensify the dramatic effect of Sasha’s anguish, the director effectively uses the double exposure technique, whereby the close-up of Sasha crying is superimposed on a red flickering screen, visually associating the scene with blood and death. Yet, a part of Astakhov will always remain with Sasha – she finds out that she is pregnant.

The real value of Sasha’s character is in her ability to love genuinely and maintain her faith. Even though she has no hope that Astakhov will return from the war alive, she refuses to accept the idea of another man assuming Astakhov’s place. The following scene demonstrates that she is not only not ready to let Petia into her heart and return his love, but possibly she will never be ready to do so. In the scene in which Sasha’s son mistakes Petya for his father and rushes forward him to embrace him, Sasha shakes her head hysterically and screams, “No!”

Her faithfulness to Astakhov’s memory and her everlasting love for him pay off – he returns home unexpectedly after the war ends. The double exposure technique reveals Sasha’s astonished and delighted face as she hears Aleksei’s voice at the door. The

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<sup>26</sup>“Сегодня ты мой! Только мой! Пускай это будет нашим домом.”

close-up instantly calls to mind the scene when Sasha finds out about Astakhov's death. However, in this scene, the shot of her face is superimposed on a blue (water like) flickering screen, which is reminiscent of life.

When happiness seems to be so close, Astakhov and Sasha's life is affected dreadfully by his status as a former prisoner-of-war. Having survived a death camp, Astakhov finds himself in the position of a presumed traitor, "I am guilty because my plane was shot down. I am guilty because, when I was half-dead, they captured me! I'm guilty because I escaped, and got caught... I am guilty because I wasn't shot..." Eventually, Astakhov realizes that he should not have come back to Sasha to make her life only more miserable. Astakhov tries to drown his resentment by binge-drinking, while Sasha stays by his side without a word of reproach. At a certain point, Aleksei breaks down and even attempts to commit suicide, while Sasha saves his life again. She is determined to fight until the end. Ultimately, the Thaw brings "spring" into Astakhov and Sasha's life – the former outcast gets his honor back and is presented with the highest possible award, the medal of a Hero of the Soviet Union.

As did Kalatozov in *The Cranes Are Flying*, Chukhrai leaves actual war actions off the screen. Instead, he portrays the war through people's tragedies, moral torment, and personal loss. The film is mainly centered on Sasha's personal story; however, a powerful scene positions her amongst thousands of other Russian women who experience similar dramas. In this affective scene, a group of women are waiting for a train that passes through the local station, hoping to see, even though momentarily, their men. The camera pans across the distressed faces of women who are crying and desperately



screaming the names of their dearly loved ones. The cross-cutting between the brisk movement of the train (left-to-right) and the exposure of the women's faces (right-to-left) makes the whole scene chaotic and conveys the impression of inapproachability, thus suggesting incompatible destinies between the women and the men they love.

In both *The Cranes Are Flying* and *Clear Skies*, tragedy of the war is conveyed through women's suffering and personal loss. While portrayed as emotional and even vulnerable at times, both heroines, Veronika and Sasha, may be viewed as examples of great fortitude, sustained faith, and eternal devotion to their beloved men. As opposed to the *pseudo-zhenskii* films discussed above, the *The Cranes* and *Clear Skies* deliver much more complex female characters, and thus might be considered "breakthroughs" or truly *zhenskii* films.

### **Women Soldiers in Thaw Cinema: Personal Happiness versus Common Cause**

In my analysis of female soldier images of the Thaw period, I focus on three films: Askol'dov's *The Commissar*, Chukhrai's *The Forty First*, and Larisa Shepitko's (1938-79) *Kryl'ia* [Wings] (1966). I intend to examine how the directors utilize the phenomenon of masculinization in their portrayals of the major female characters who engage in the supposedly "male" profession of a soldier and who prove to be strong and successful activists in a society under patriarchal authority. When exploring how films draw on "masculine" and "feminine" traits in the heroines' representations, I employ these concepts as they are traditionally understood within the patriarchal system. As Goscilo summarizes, "the masculine" is associated with "culture, activity, intellect,

aggression, power, and logos,” while “the feminine” comes laden with the connotation of “nature, passivity, sensitivity, softness, and pathos” (“Perestroika ili “domostroika”? Stanovlenie zhenskoi kul’tury v usloviiah glasnosti” 135). Goscilo also emphasizes the importance of the distinction between the terms “femininity” and “femaleness,” which are often mistakenly confused. By way of distinction, Goscilo limits the term “femaleness” to the biological aspect, which should be understood exclusively as the woman’s reproductive ability (“Perestroika ili “domostroika”? Stanovlenie zhenskoi kul’tury v usloviiah glasnosti” 136).

Although I have to employ the terms “masculine” and “feminine” in my analyses of female soldier images in order to show how some films challenge the traditional understanding of gender role dynamics by offering multifaceted and flexible gender identities, I personally object to the idea of classifying features attributive to both genders since categorization of any sort entails labeling both sexes with distinctive and, in most cases, supposedly inborn traits. Such categorization consequently results in a stereotypical perception of the two genders as well as their functions in family and society. Moreover, gender studies by Krin Gabbard and William Luhr show that such categorizations as “masculine” and “feminine” are themselves very limited and should be relentlessly reexamined and revised (10).

Both directors, Chukhrai and Askol’dov, portray the period of the Russian Civil War and present complex female images (revolutionary women, the Red Regiment soldier Mariutka, and the political commissar Klavdia Vavilova) as the main protagonists. By examining the gender representations in both films and juxtaposing

Vavilova's and Mariutka's identities, I argue that, while "feminine" and "masculine" coexist in Mariutka's character (as long as the first one does not interfere with her revolutionary duty), the commissar's "manly" nature unquestionably dominates Klavdia's identity, even when she experiences motherhood. Closer study of *The Forty First* also shows that, unlike Askol'dov's film, in which the heroine must make a choice between revolutionary duty and motherhood, Chukhrai's film depicts a revolutionary time that allows personal happiness and romance, even love for the "ideological enemy," to coexist along with social duty. Finally, I dispute those critics who view Klavdia and Mariutka as negative characters because they sacrifice their personal happiness in the name of the common cause. In the commissar's case, this dissertation argues against previous interpretations of Vavilova's character from some critics' essentialist perspective and attempts to open space for discussion of why motherhood should be the only *positive* identity for a woman and why her social role is excluded from this identity.

From the very moment of Vavilova's appearance in *The Commissar*, she is portrayed as a determined and authoritative commander. Her "masculine" side is manifested not only through her manly appearance as a soldier, but also through her resolute behavior. This behavior is particularly well depicted in the scene in which Vavilova mercilessly executes the deserter Emelin, who escaped from the region in order to visit his family. While some of the Red soldiers are trying to justify Emelin's desertion due to his wife's sickness, the commissar shows neither hesitation nor mercy and sends him to a military tribunal. A few oblique close-ups of the soldiers reveal their stirred emotions and even astonishment at the death sentence given to Emelin. In

contrast, Vavilova's image, caught in full frontal close-ups and paired with her command "Fire!", suggests determination and even cruelty. Interestingly, until the moment of the execution, Emelin is shown holding a jug of milk, the last thing remaining from his home. The milk clearly symbolizes family and domesticity, which Emelin undeniably chose over the revolution. After having been shot, Emelin falls down in slow motion and drops the jug of milk. The close-up of the spilt milk clearly implies that domestic life cannot be an obstacle to the furtherance of the revolution, while the close-up of Emelin lying on the ground shows that the revolution has no sympathy for those who choose family and personal happiness over the common good.

Ironically, Vavilova later encounters a dilemma much like Emelin's and faces the choice between her son and the revolution, a difficult decision indeed. Andrew argues that Vavilova remains "enmeshed" in her "masculine" identity until the act of giving birth, the moment when she presumably finally acquires her "essential femaleness" (36). Vavilova's experience of motherhood will be discussed in more detail further in the paper. Nevertheless, the following question should be posed at present: Was the process of acquiring "femininity" ever completed by Vavilova?

Bearing in mind the fact that Vavilova's "feminine" (maternal) side was never very strong in the first place (otherwise she would have made a different choice in the end), I disagree with Andrew, who claims that "militarized masculine imagery invades this most female and private of areas, childbirth" and posits that the commissar's old identity is "an unnecessary remnant of her past" (36). Significantly, before Vavilova's pregnancy, one can scarcely find any evidence or signs of her maternal ("feminine")

instincts. Her military uniform, commanding voice, and the fact that she is respected by her regiment as an authoritative figure instead point to her “masculine” identity rather than her “feminine” one. Can we actually talk about the “invasion” of Vavilova’s femininity if this femininity has never been sufficiently presented in the film?

Acknowledging Vavilova’s ardent devotion to the revolution, her manly image, and, most importantly, her contentment with her manly identity as well as her position as successful commissar, one can argue that motherhood interferes with Klavdia’s “masculine” side, not vice versa.

The only exception to the dominance of Vavilova’s “masculine” side is the scene of her second vision, when viewers see in Vavilova not so much a strict commander, but rather a woman caught in an emotional moment with her lover Kirill, another political commissar. The camera lingers on the cannon’s “phallic” barrel and shows (in the close-up shot) Vavilova’s hand tenderly touching it; afterwards the camera cuts to her kiss with Kirill, the father of her child. However, as soon as Vavilova finds out that she is pregnant, she wants to abort the baby, a barrier to her main vocation of fighting in the revolution. It appears that the opposite process occurs: “feminine” nature “invades” Vavilova’s “masculine” identity.

In *The Forty First*, the overall image of Mariutka resembles Klavdia Vavilova’s in many respects. Her physical appearance makes her blend in with the rest of the male soldiers in the regiment: she is dressed in a military uniform covered with a heavy coat and her long fair hair is hidden under a fur hat. She seems to be not so much “desexed,”

as Woll argues, but defeminized (41). Mariutka's mannish behavior is reinforced by her rudimentary language, filled with lower class swear-words, such as "fish cholera," "snout," "old lady," and "bastard."

From the very opening scene of the film, Mariutka is introduced by the narrator as the best shooter in the Red regiment. Significantly, the only woman in the regiment is as skilled a soldier as any man in the unit, and, in fact, she proves to have even better shooting skills than any other regiment member. Obviously, Mariutka is recognized by commander Evsiukov as one of the most trustworthy and strong soldiers, since he entrusts her to guard the White Lieutenant Govorukha-Otrok, who was captured in the Karakum desert and kept alive because of his knowledge of important information about the White Army. In the regiment's long, exhausting and never-ending trip across the Karakum desert, Mariutka endures the unbearable heat better than many other soldiers. The sequence of extreme-long and long shots depicts the gradually decreasing number of regiment soldiers who survive, suffering from excruciating thirst, and fall dead in the dunes of the desert. Just before the regiment reaches the Aral Sea, one of the older soldiers falls to the ground. A full shot depicts him crying hysterically, ripping apart his shirt, and losing any hope of reaching the final destination.

In order to deliver the White Lieutenant to the Red headquarters sooner, Mariutka and another two soldiers set sail. Unfortunately, only Mariutka and Govorukha-Otrok manage to survive a sea storm and find themselves on an uninhabited island. The only thing that matters for the two, while being isolated on the island, is human life and survival, concerns that evidently overcome any class or ideological differences. In this

critical situation, Mariutka proves to be much more resilient than the White officer and actually saves his life after he becomes seriously ill. From that point on, Mariutka's attachment to and feelings for the White Lieutenant become stronger as she takes care of him while he is fighting fever and hallucinations.

This drastic turn in Mariutka's feelings for the Lieutenant suggests that no matter how essentially "masculine" she seems to be, her "innate" instincts (purportedly those of the "feminine" nature) are supposedly stirred under certain circumstances and ultimately prevail. Outside the revolutionary milieu, Mariutka presumably behaves as a woman rather than a soldier and, thus, she undergoes a certain "transformation": her "masculine" identity no longer dominates her character; it is rather her "feminine" side that manifests itself at this point. Though attempting to present a more liberal portrayal of a female protagonist, the film still advocates the traditional perception of the gender matter: while Mariutka is depicted as a resolute revolutionary and the best shooter among all the men in the regiment, she is a *woman* above all.

Such a shift in Mariutka's identity is reflected in certain changes in her physical presentation: her hair is loose and no longer hidden under her hat, her clothes highlight the silhouette of her attractive body, and a short sleeve shirt completely reveals her arms. Most importantly, she is dressed in a skirt that gives her a feminine look, unlike the soldier pants she wore before. It seems that the director deliberately uses the skirt to emphasize Mariutka's gender and attractiveness as her romance with the White

Lieutenant develops. Of course, the viewer is not sure where Mariutka finds the skirt, as she had no belongings during the trip in the Karakum desert, but the skirt clearly contributes to her “feminine” presentation.

As Woll points out, the camera pays particular attention to the human body in the second part of the film and shoots Mariutka’s and Govorukha-Otrok’s bodies “as an extension of nature,” as opposed to the first part of the film, in which the soldiers “have no bodies,” because they are wrapped in heavy uniforms, hats, and boots (41). As the romance of the two progresses, the camera lingers on Mariutka’s and the White Lieutenant’s bodies, emphasizing the development of their attraction to each other. By bringing the couple’s personal relations to the forefront, the film suggests that, while ideological (socially-constructed)

convictions are likely to break down under the conditions of a life threatening situation, the natural instinct of self-preservation allegedly brings the two sexes together in their joint effort to survive.



Figure 12. Chukhrai’s *The Forty First*

The scene in which Mariutka and the White Lieutenant are drying out by the fire is particularly striking because of the great extent to which their bare bodies are exposed to the viewer. Revealing the Govorukha-Otrok’s bare torso and Mariutka’s naked back and hip, the



medium shot and closed frame suggest a romantic and intimate atmosphere. Ideology and class differences are left behind and, instead of two class enemies, we see a woman and a man attracted to one another.

Indeed, their reciprocal attraction eventually turns into a passionate romance. The Lieutenant's noble blood is no longer an obstacle for Mariutka's love and she is not ashamed to express her love by addressing him with the affectionate diminutive phrase "my blue-eyed darling."<sup>27</sup> Mariutka spends days and nights watching over the Lieutenant while he is sick and, despite her political beliefs, she puts human feelings above the class differences between them. She even objects to Govorukha-Otrok's astonishment when he questions her care of an enemy, "I am not a beast that I would let a human die."<sup>28</sup> Taking care of the White soldier, Mariutka is still strong and resolute. It is not, however, the same type of "masculinity" she showed before as a soldier. This time, she is moved by her feelings for Govorukha-Otrok, rather than by her ideological beliefs, especially when she saves all the food for him and raises her voice in order to make him accept it.

Mariutka's love for the Lieutenant is so deep that she is ready to sacrifice the very paper on which she writes her poems. The reaction close-up shot of Govorukha-Otrok's face reflects his shock and amazement at Mariutka's sacrifice. In several days, his love for "Mashen'ka/Sunshine" (as he affectionately calls her later) grows immensely.

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<sup>27</sup>"Синеглазенький мой!"

<sup>28</sup>"Что я зверюка какая, чтобы дать человеку помереть!"

One can argue that the use of such diminutives is not only the Lieutenant's way to express his love for Mashen'ka, but also manifests his softer, even "feminized," character which contrasts with Mariutka's nature, much stronger emotionally and physically. In spite of the fact that the Lieutenant belongs to the enemy camp, his image is very attractive not only because of his physical appearance (his handsome face, blond hair, and deep-blue eyes, which Mariutka cannot resist), but also because of his caring and perceptive personality, conveyed in his affection and love for Mariutka. It is precisely his sensitivity and capacity to understand Mariutka's passion for poetry that reveal the "feminine" part of his persona from the very beginning of his acquaintance with her. Furthermore, in certain situations, particularly when Govorukha-Otrok is exposed to any kind of danger, his actions demonstrate a lack of manly behavior. For example, in the skirmish between the Kazakh caravan and the Red regiment, he is the first one to throw the white flag of surrender. Unlike Mariutka, who never forgets about her revolutionary duty, Govorukha-Otrok dreams of staying on the island, because he finally has a chance to isolate himself from the "troubled world" – more precisely, the revolution – and pursue a happy life with Mariutka.

As viewers learn from the Lieutenant's disputes with Mariutka on the island, he obviously values his life greatly and places it above all ideological ideals. It also comes as no surprise that his love for Mariutka is enough reason for him to convert to the Reds' side. After he declares that the Reds will not be able to accomplish the ultimate goals of the revolution without the intelligentsia's help, it takes him merely a moment to convert back as soon as he sees the boat with White officers. Such an extremely rapid shift from

one camp to the other suggests inconsistency in Govorukha-Otrok's behavior and convictions. Overall, the sensitive and, at times, even weak personality of the White Lieutenant-"intelligent" is associated with "femininity," as opposed to Mariutka, a tough and resolute representative of the "narod" (people), who is associated with "masculinity."

Mariutka's "manly" manners are further emphasized through her juxtaposition with the character of Altynai, a Kazakh girl from the small village where the Red regiment spends a night. Altynai's Kazakh traditional dress, combined with an excessive amount of jewelry, not only highlights her "femininity," but also greatly contrasts with Mariutka's military outfit. In addition, it is also the highly *domesticated* atmosphere of the Kazakh village that stands in stark contrast with the image of Mariutka, whom the viewer sees constantly with a rifle in her hands.

If we compare the manifestations of the "masculine/feminine" identity of the two female protagonists in *The Commissar* and *The Forty First*, Vavilova obviously struggles when acquiring the new role of mother and, most significantly, she is never completely comfortable with it. Mariutka, in turn, seems to be quite content with her "feminine" side throughout her short-lived romance with Govorukha-Otrok, and her so-called "transition" from her "masculine" identity to the "feminine" one seems to happen quite naturally. Evidently, in Chukhrai's view, masculinity is not the critical attribute that makes a woman a successful revolutionary. Instead of an idealized character blindly devoted to the revolution (in such a case, Mariutka's character presumably would have been completely masculinized), the director depicts her as both a determined soldier and a passionate woman. As Isaac Shneiderman argues, in *The Forty First* Chukhrai succeeds

in “preserving the complexity of life” – it is true that revolutionary duty often required people to make sacrifices, but this duty did not deprive people of natural human feelings, including love (61). Chukhrai explores an even more complicated situation, since his heroine falls in love with an enemy who contradicts her ideological convictions. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Mariutka’s romance with Govorukha-Otrok only lasts until the moment when her mission of delivering the White Lieutenant to the Reds’ headquarters is threatened by the possibility of the Lieutenant’s escape with the White soldiers. A long shot reveals Mariutka determinedly grabbing a rifle and shooting her forty-first victim the moment she realizes that she is about to fail in her assignment.

Unlike the commissar, Mariutka never experiences motherhood in her fleeting romance with Govorukha-Otrok. However, as Shneiderman argues, there is something maternal in Mariutka’s behavior when she is taking care of the sick Lieutenant: the way she makes sure he is kept warm while sick or the way she forbids him to carry heavy things as he is still weak after his sickness (76). On the one hand, Mariutka’s scrupulous care of the White officer can be explained by the fact that she is trying to save the only human who happens to be with her on the uninhabited island. On the other hand, the reciprocity that emerged between Mariutka and Govorukha-Otrok early on eventually turns into a passionate romance. Mariutka’s maternal behavior, supposedly an innate attribute of a woman’s nature, is another manifestation of her “feminine” side, which reveals itself to a great extent presumably due to the fact that she finds herself with

Govorukha-Otrok on a deserted island, where ideological barriers yield to the instinct of survival. In the real world, she is a revolutionary and a fighter and, therefore, her “masculine” identity comes to the fore.

In *The Commissar*, Vavilova acquires the new role of a mother that becomes a hurdle in her revolutionary mission. As the film progresses, viewers learn that Vavilova is pregnant and that she has already tried to abort several times, although unsuccessfully. Unwillingly, she has to accept the idea of having the child, since it is too late for her to have an abortion. Consequently, she finds herself in Emelin’s situation when her commander threatens, somewhat jokingly, to put her before a tribunal.

During the final months of her pregnancy Vavilova is placed in the family of Efim Magazanik, a hard-working Jewish man struggling to make ends meet. As Gillespie points out, the “masculine” and cold Vavilova contrasts starkly with Magazanik’s happy and loving family, leading to the conflict between them (70). Furthermore, due to the limited living space, the Magazaniks treat the commissar as an intruder and, thus, the beginning of their relationship is quite tense. Having gotten used to the severe conditions of the Civil War, the commissar feels extremely uncomfortable in the highly-domesticated atmosphere of the Magazanik family. The director emphasizes this discomfort in the scene where Vavilova spends the first night in her new place. While the entire Magazanik family manages to sleep cozily and warmly head-to-toe on very small and narrow beds, Vavilova chooses to sleep on the floor on her military trench coat instead of in her comfortable bed.

The tension between Vavilova and the Magazanik family vanishes by the next day, when Efim's wife Mariia initiates a friendly relationship with Vavilova by offering her slippers and a cup of tea in the morning. Mariia warmly welcomes Klavdia into her house and guides her through childbirth. In the scene of the two women sitting at the dinner table while having a woman-to-woman chat, Mariia shares with Klavdia her experience of being the mother of six children and explains to her how much harder it is to care for children than to fight in a war, "War is easy: boom, boom. It's raising a family that's difficult!" (Quoted in Horton and Brashinsky 38)

The married couple turns out to be very understanding and supportive of the commissar's pregnancy. It is particularly obvious in the scene when Mariia and Efim are sewing a



Figure 13. Askol'dov's *The Commissar*

bright dress for Klavdia, who was earlier seen only in the military uniform. Some critics, for instance Stishova and Andrew, interpret the shot of Vavilova seen for the first time in a white dress and a headscarf as the moment of her transformation from the "masculine" commissar into the mother-to-be, her new and "more positive identity" (183).

Nonetheless, it is questionable whether Vavilova's new outfit can be an adequately compelling argument to view it as the point of her transformation, especially considering how uncomfortable she feels in it. The camera zooms in on Klavdia's distressed facial

expression and her lasting and ambivalent look downward shows her submission to the situation rather than her acceptance of her new identity as a mother. Throughout the scene of Vavilova sitting in the courtyard, she seems to be more passive than ever before. Without saying a single word, she merely observes the Magazanik family in their daily routine, as if learning what domestic life is like.

Vavilova's almost static image (in the same scene) contrasts considerably with the vigorous behavior of Mariia, who is presented as a homemaker from her first appearance. She is constantly preoccupied with her domestic chores of cooking, doing laundry, and taking care of the children. As Andrew emphasizes, Magazanik's home full of love and joy suggests "an aura of the idyll" (33). Unlike Vavilova, who is burdened by her pregnancy, Mariia is extremely happy with her role of mother. In the scene in which Mariia is bathing her brood, the camera cuts from a long shot of laughing children to a medium shot of their mother, whose happy smile obviously indicates how much she enjoys motherhood. Stishova argues that the film does not attempt to present either woman more positively or negatively than the other; it rather depicts two opposite female types in the extremely severe conditions of revolutionary times: one (Vavilova) makes a personal sacrifice for the sake of the revolution and is ready to die for it, while the other (Mariia) places her family above everything else (185). Although the argument above seems to be very convincing, it is impossible for viewers and critics to remain impartial when it comes to their judgment of Vavilova. The moment the Commissar leaves her son, the viewer begins to judge Vavilova's choice negatively, either condemning her for abandoning the child and so ignoring the fact that she sacrifices her life for him as well as

for the country, or by trying to justify Vavilova's devotion to the revolution. Despite Stishova's attempt to be impartial in her judgment of Vavilova, she takes sides by calling the commissar's transformation into a mother "a *more positive* identity."

The time the commissar gives birth seems to be one of the most decisive moments in her experience of motherhood; however it is arguable whether her so-called "conversion" to a mother would ever be entirely completed. The theme of motherhood is already emphasized and foreshadowed in the opening shot of the statue of the Mater Dolorosa, the symbol of all suffering mothers, accompanied by the sound of a lullaby (Andrew 32). The focus of the camera gradually shifts from the statue to the view of the Red Army regiment entering the city of Berdichev. Significantly, while the camera is focusing on the moving division of soldiers, our attention is still drawn to the statue of the Mater Dolorosa as dominant in the shot, even though it is positioned to the left of the center of the frame.

The scene of Vavilova giving birth is particularly powerful due to the parallel the director draws between Vavilova's excruciating labor and her memories of a cannon stuck in the desert, all of which create the effect of the conflation of the different sides of the commissar's identity during the delivery. In Vavilova's vision, she is straining along with other soldiers, trying to push the cannon. The close-up of their motionless feet shows that their effort is in vain and the cannon is unyielding. This scene, along with the commissar's anguished screaming, clearly symbolizes Vavilova's thus far unsuccessful attempt to push the baby out. Finally, the gun starts moving slowly, although the feeling of excessive tension is maintained due to the fact that the camera keeps changing its



points of view when showing the cannon. The weapon moves from left to right and vice versa and the camera reveals it in various angles. Relief comes only in the following scene, when the soldiers are thirstily drinking water from the river in the unbearable desert heat. The camera cuts to a close-up of Vavilova drinking water from a glass and the montage links the two scenes together, transferring us back to the Magazaniks' house. The fact that the angle of the river flow is virtually parallel to the position of the glass from which Vavilova drinks makes the transition between the two scenes even smoother.

The moment when Vavilova's child is born coincides with the death of Kirill in Klavdia's third vision. As Andrew emphasizes, the birth of Vavilova's child is surrounded by the imagery of death, chiefly in her last two visions (39). For instance, the scythes, with which the soldiers are mowing the desert, are instantly associated with death, since they evoke the image of the Grim Reaper.

However, there may be other possible interpretations of the scene. The act of mowing implies the gathering of



Figure 14. Askol'dov's *The Commissar*

some sort of harvest, thus the

mowing of the barren ground performed by the soldiers in three sequential shots (an important number in folklore), may symbolize the future "fruitless" outcome of the revolution. On the other hand, the scene may speak of the fate of Klavdia's child. In that

case, the picture turns out to be quite pessimistic, considering all the elements of the mise-en-scene: intolerable heat, devastated land, futile harvesting – everything reminds the viewer of hell rather than paradise.

The first time that viewers see Vavilova content with her new identity as a mother is when she takes her child for a walk in town. The male workers repairing the paved road in the town square give her their approving looks and smiles when they see an infant in her arms. Then the camera cuts back to Vavilova proudly carrying her child. The effect of her pride is achieved through her depiction at a slightly low angle. One cannot help noticing that now she is wearing a dark dress and a black headscarf, which can be seen as another reference to the Madonna. An iconic shot of Vavilova standing under the arch in the synagogue and holding her baby constructs her as a Madonna.

At the same time, it should be noted that Klavdia feels comfortable only in the presence of unfamiliar men who are not even aware of her earlier having been a Red commissar, which is another manifestation of the dilemma of Vavilova's various identities being combined into an integral whole. As soon as Vavilova meets several comrades from her former regiment, she is overwhelmed with embarrassment and even humiliation and runs away from them. When Klavdia is running across the bridge, the hand-held camera assumes her point of view: its jumpy and jolting movement projects the commissar's agitated and confused state of mind. Afterward, a medium shot of Vavilova shows the viewer how she weeps over her son. In all probability, she is yearning for her past life and realizes that perhaps she would never be able to accept her new identity of mother completely.

When the Whites are approaching, Vavilova's commander and her former assistant come to warn her and they meet an already different Klavdia, who wears a dress, washes the floor and forbids them to smoke in the presence of her child. The fact that she is no different from Mariia in doing her housework indicates Vavilova's new identity as a mother. Significantly, Mariia is the one who emphasizes Vavilova's transformation, which Vavilova herself does not seem to acknowledge. Mariia is amazed by Vavilova's emotional performance of a lullaby and the display of utmost affection in caring for her child; she sings Klavdia's praises for her resemblance to "a good Jewish mother." Purportedly, no other character in the film could be more objective than Mariia, a mother of six children, for whom maternity is the core of her identity.

Like Mariutka, though for different reasons and in different circumstances, Klavdia is torn by the inner struggle of making the choice between her revolutionary mission and her personal feelings. Vavilova is torn between motherhood and her revolutionary mission; Mariutka must choose between her love for the White Lieutenant and her devotion to the revolution. The endings of both films suggest that making such a choice for both heroines is impossible if they want to retain their multifaceted identities. Despite the fact that the quite liberal portrayals of Vavilova and Mariutka (who possess superior military skills compared to male combatants) challenge the traditional perspective that the occupation of soldier is reserved for men, both films deny women the option of combining personal happiness with revolutionary/military life.

Some critics, including Gillespie, view the character of Vavilova as a "betrayal of herself as a mother" and her own child (70). She is forced to make a choice between the

revolution and her son, and her firm commitment to the common cause wins. The highly negative characteristic of “betrayers” seems to be quite inadequate to typify Vavilova as such on the grounds that no matter which choice she makes, she “betrays” one side or the other. Other critics, such as Andrew, try to justify Vavilova’s choice by pointing out that Klavdia does not merely abandon her son; instead, she leaves him in the very reliable hands of caring parents, Mariia and Efim (43). Furthermore, considering the fact that it takes a strong will and personality to sacrifice one’s own child for the sake of the common good, Vavilova can be viewed not so much as a “betrayers,” but rather as a victim of the circumstances and historical time she happens to live in.

Below, I analyze two scenes that shed light on Vavilova’s decision to leave her son and go off to fight in the revolution. The first scene is a flash-forward in which Vavilova, Efim’s family, and other Jews are shown walking into a concentration camp during World War II, an obvious reference to the Holocaust.

This scene requires closer analysis, since Vavilova’s role in it is interpreted differently by various critics. For example, Graham Roberts takes this episode as Askol’dov’s attempt to underscore the ethnic conflict between Jews and Russians. Significantly, Roberts insists that Vavilova is presented as a very “passive” character, because she fulfills the role of “a detached observer” of the Holocaust scene and takes no action to help the Jewish family (96). The entire scene can be interpreted more metaphorically. The fact that Vavilova remains distinctly separated from the Jewish people/group and stays constantly behind them indicates that she does not belong to their community. Hence, the entire process of her following the Jewish people, yet being not

entirely together with them, might symbolize the process of her struggle, as she chooses between staying with the Magazanik family and her son and leaving in order to fight in the revolution. The moment Vavilova stops and turns around is when she sees the place the crowd reaches the concentration camp. This is probably the most crucial moment for Vavilova, when her vision of the Holocaust triggered her decision to prevent such a tragedy and to fight for a better future for these people, her child, and her country. Importantly, when Vavilova turns around, she looks directly at the camera. Her determined look, depicted in the close-up shot, leaves no doubt for the viewer that she is going to war. This is the moment when she starts turning back into the active commissar, her previous identity before she acquired the role of mother. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether she would ever be able to reacquire her old identity after having acquired her maternal experience.

The Holocaust scene occurs when Vavilova is no longer the same character she used to be during her first appearance in the film. At this point in the film, Vavilova has already undergone a certain transformation due to her experience of motherhood and her interaction with the Magazanik family: while in the opening scene, she is a merciless and unsentimental commissar who shoots the soldier Emelin for his desertion, in the Holocaust sequence, Klavdia feels sympathy for the Jewish family and sacrifices her own child to save families like theirs.

The analysis of the second scene, in which the whole Magazanik family and Vavilova are hiding from the Whites in the basement, continues contemplation of Klavdia's choice of the revolution over her family. While waiting in the basement for the

White artillery bombardment to pass, Klavdia is engaged with Efim in a dispute, which resembles a dialogue between their two different ideologies. While Efim speaks as an individual who advocates personal interests as primary and dreams of living a full and valuable life, Vavilova, as a devoted Party representative, believes in some common causes that “one could die for.”

At this point, nonetheless, Efim questions whether a hopeful and happy future is possible at all. He tells Vavilova a pitiful story about the death of his brother, who was decapitated by the Whites, as if implying that a similar outcome is awaiting the rest of them. If earlier Efim dreamed about “trams running in his city” (in the scene when he is making a dress for Vavilova), now he is full of pessimism and convinced that it will never happen, because there will be “no one to ride them.”

Efim’s hopeless call for a “kind internationalism” seems almost ironic when he emphasizes that, no matter who comes to power, policies of killing and destruction are sure to be established. Vavilova contributes to Efim’s disillusionment by stating that “the Internationale is founded on the blood of workers and peasants.” There is nothing hopeful or proud in Vavilova’s speech; nevertheless, she accepts the necessity of such methods for the purpose of building a better future and fighting the enemy. Vavilova’s fervent exclamation, “We shall live! And the harmony of working people on earth will come!” is not merely her personal belief in “a bright future,” but a cause that she is going to fight for, even if she has to abandon her son. The *mise-en-scène* in the final shot of the scene presents Vavilova as a powerful character. Her face is the only part in the screen that is brightly lit; therefore, our attention is inescapably drawn to her figure as dominant

in the shot. At the same time, Efim remains in the dark background of the frame for the entire scene. Vavilova's positioning towards the front of the shot presents her as a protector of Efim, situated behind her. Therefore, the entire scene suggests that the fate of people like Efim and his family is in the hands of Vavilova and other revolutionary soldiers entirely committed to their cause.

Furthermore, this shot is indicative of two entirely different types of masculinity displayed by its characters. The presence of these two types suggests the implicit fluidity of "masculine" and "feminine" traits and, thus, undermines a rigid stereotypical perception of both genders. Even with an infant in her arms, Vavilova's representation as the commissar supersedes her representation as a mother. Efim's "softer masculinity" can be explained by the fact that he is a father and a husband primarily concerned with providing for his large family. His physical portrayal as a small, fragile, and scrawny man cannot be mistaken for that of a soldier. Efim immediately sees any changes to the city's authority as a potential threat to his family while remaining oblivious to the ideological implications of such a change. Another factor that contributes to Efim's representation as a vulnerable character is his ethnicity. As Monastireva-Ansdell points out, Efim, as a representative of the Jewish nation, symbolizes "suffering humanity" subjugated by ideological systems. She also emphasizes the parallel that the film draws between the three autocratic totalitarian regimes: tsarist, Nazi, and Soviet, each of which practiced an anti-Semitic or nationalistic policy (247). The idea that the Magazanik family would be oppressed every time a new regime controls the city is implied in the scene in which Efim's oldest daughter is violently abused by her siblings. The scene

takes place immediately after the news that the Whites are approaching and it seems that the children's brutal and vicious game mimics situations they have witnessed, most likely more than once.

The tragic end of the Magazanik family is foreshadowed in the scene when Efim engages his family in a "death dance," at the end of which every Magazanik member slowly descends below the bottom frame line, a line that clearly implies their demise. The fact that the dance is accompanied by Jewish music and that Vavilova (of Russian ethnic origin) does not participate in it can be interpreted as a fatal outcome not only for the Magazanik family, but for the entire Jewish community – a future tragedy projected through Vavilova's flashback of a prison camp, which she endeavors to avoid by going back to war.

Vavilova's internal struggle to choose between her child and the revolution seems ongoing until the moment she actually leaves the Magazaniks' house. This



Figure 15. Askol'dov's *The Commissar*

ongoing struggle is well demonstrated in the scene when she rushes into her room and pulls out her military coat from a drawer. The following shot reveals Vavilova holding her child in her left arm and her coat in her right. The camera briefly on Vavilova, who is emotionally torn between her two choices, as if still uncertain about what to choose. Vavilova's physical presentation in the next shot, when she feeds her son for the last time



before she goes to the front, suggests that she has a “mixed” identity of soldier and mother. The camera deliberately zooms in on her legs to show that she is not wearing her uniform pants, which emphasized her masculinity and made her blend in with the male surroundings. Viewers still see Vavilova in her dress covered by her military coat as she runs through the streets of Berdichev, trying to catch up with her division.

The last scene of Vavilova leading her regiment is tragic, but it does not have to be viewed as negatively as Gillespie sees it. According to his interpretation, the commissar chooses death over life, in effect implying that her death is in vain. Such an interpretation can be disputed when one takes into account the fact that Vavilova most likely would be executed by the Whites as a former Red commissar. I am rather inclined to agree with Andrew’s view of the ending, in which he claims that Vavilova chooses not between life and death, but between “two different kinds of death – a passive death of waiting for the Holocaust or a death in the name of a cause” (43). The final scene shows that Vavilova chooses the latter. Every shot in this sequence shows a diminishing number of soldiers, until the last shot, which freezes for a while as it depicts an empty field, evoking the death of Vavilova and the entire regiment. Evidently, the soldiers themselves are aware that they are moving towards their death. Such a realization is emphasized in a close-up that depicts one of the soldiers looking up to the sky for the last time before he dies. Though the commissar and her regiment die tragically, they meet their fate as heroes in the name of the common cause that they do “not regret,” to quote Vavilova’s own words.

In *The Forty First*, Mariutka faces a different dilemma: she has to choose between her revolutionary duty and her love for the White officer Govorukha-Otrok, a member of the “enemy camp.” Although the film suggests that the main heroine’s constant struggle is between her love and social duty, Chukhrai himself (according to his interview about the film) saw revolutionary heroism and devotion to a common cause as the most fundamental and essential message of the film. Another matter altogether is whether viewers should wholly trust the director and believe what he says about his work. Chukhrai claims that in *The Forty First*, he tried to induce “the heroic romanticism of the unforgettable years of the Civil War, to bring to Soviet people the idea of indomitable faith in the motherland and in the revolution that is stronger than any personal feeling” (quoted in Woll 39). His main female protagonist, Mariutka, indisputably embodies the idea of steadfast devotion to the motherland and revolutionary mission; yet she surrenders herself to her love for the White soldier, a surrender that flies in the face of her ideological principles.

The film demonstrates that human feelings and love, in particular, are beyond conventional divisions of people, as in the present instance into Reds and Whites. The French director Marcel Bluestein stresses that he was impressed with Chukhrai’s *The Forty First* because the film has no “didactic goals and attempts to prove nothing but [the] greatness of love” (Shneiderman 39). It seems that Bluestein’s interpretation of the film is different from Chukhrai’s intention, possibly because of a quite ambiguous ending (to be discussed later), which might imply a different reading of the overall message of the film. In any case, the fact that the love between Mariutka and Govorukha-Otrok is

presumably possible due to their isolation on the island should not be ignored. After their boat wrecks in the Aral Sea, the couple is chiefly concerned with nothing more than survival, and that concern brings them closer together and leaves no room for their mutual class hatred. Furthermore, one could argue that their class difference actually draws them together, even from the very beginning of their acquaintance. Not a single soldier in the regiment would have understood Mariutka's passion for poetry, most likely because of their lack of education, but cadet Govorukha-Otrok does. In the scene when she recites a poem, "simple, but full of expressiveness," he suggests that Mariutka should pursue her education in order to improve her writing. In response, she kindly puts her hand on his shoulder. This first sign of the emotional and physical closeness between Mariutka and the cadet stands in stark contrast to their aloof behavior at the beginning of the conversation, when they speak with no direct eye contact and with their backs turned to each other.

Apparently, due to Mariutka's illiteracy, as mentioned above, she is attracted to the intelligent Govorukha-Otrok as someone from whom she can learn. The scene in which he tells her the story of Robinson Crusoe reveals, in the reaction close-up shots, her fascinated and smiling face. A set of double exposure shots, in which the close-ups are superimposed on shots of sparkling water or flame, reveal Mariutka being captivated by the story and by Govorukha-Otrok's excitement as a story teller. The scene demonstrates how the two class enemies can understand each other and enjoy each other's company, as long as their communication is devoid of any political talk. A sequence of long and extreme long shots present not the Red Mariutka and the White

Govorukha-Otrok, but a young and happy couple: they cheerfully play in the water and walk along the seashore holding hands, and he romantically carries her in his arms.

Nonetheless, as Shneiderman argues, the closer and more intimate the two characters get, the more apparent their social and class differences become. Consequently, their love is threatened even before the White soldiers arrive at the island, when the tension between Mariutka and the White officer as “class enemies” worsens (40). It also should be noted that Mariutka and Govorukha-Otrok are devoted to their political beliefs to different degrees; while she remains firm in her ideological convictions, he is eager to abandon his after he enjoys life on the island – a life stripped of political, ideological, and social conventions. It seems that no kind of agreement is really feasible between Mariutka and Govorukha-Otrok, they want completely different things: while he wants to stay on the island and needs nothing more in his life than to merge with nature, she is obsessed with her revolutionary mission and is willing to return to battle. The medium shot of Mariutka standing with her back to Govorukha-Otrok while he is proposing that they leave together for the Caucasus region manifests her rejection of a “calm and happy life.” The young couple’s recurring fights demonstrate the struggle between their passionate desire to be together and their uncompromising ideological stances: while he views the revolution and its bloodshed as completely absurd and pointless, she sees it as the most essential mission in her life.

The couple's dilemma is solved in the final scene, when, moved by her "revolutionary duty," Mariutka shoots her beloved "blue-eyed darling," thereby claiming her forty-first victim. The camera retreats in order to show how Mariutka drops the rifle into the water and rushes towards Govorukha-Otrok, his motionless body floating in the sea. The final close-up of Mariutka mourning over the dead body of the White officer leaves the viewer with an ambivalent feeling: on one hand, the fact that she shot Govorukha-



Figure 16. Chukhrai's *The Forty First*

Otrok in the name of the revolution suggests the triumph of her military mission over her feelings for him; on the other hand, her regret and desperation over losing her "blue-eyed darling" suggest the triumph of her love over "revolutionary duty."

In conclusion, Askol'dov's *The Commissar* and Chukhrai's *The Forty First* offer critical viewpoints on the past and question the ethics and methods of the revolution. Both female protagonists face an extremely complicated choice between their personal happiness and their revolutionary duty: Vavilova abandons her newborn son, while Mariutka kills her beloved White officer for the same reason – in the name of the

revolution. The majority of film critics view Vavilova and Mariutka as rather negative characters, while, as I have argued above, underestimating the sacrifice and excruciating pain both women experience in making their decisions.

In exploring the role of Russian women in the establishment of the Soviet state, Askol'dov's film, I believe, presents the commissar as an inspiring and strong character rather than a negative one. The director shows the struggle between the "individual" and the "social" when Vavilova faces the choice between her child and the revolution. Since most critics, including Gillespie and Roberts, consider motherhood to be her destiny, they reject the complexity and difficulty of her choice. Nonetheless, the question remains: Why does motherhood have to be the only mission for a woman? As Elizabeth Jones Hemenway argues, many revolutionary women, including Inessa Armand, Klavdiia Smirnova, and Konkordiia Samoilova, among others, found their true destiny in fulfilling the roles of surrogate mothers and sisters for people in their social work (80). Although they had to sacrifice their personal happiness and families, in that historical and political context it seemed to them to be the only right choice, and more importantly, their independent choice.

Similarly to Askol'dov's and Chukhrai's films, Shepitko's *Wings*, scripted by Valentin Iezhov, portrays a female protagonist of a "mixed" identity, a former fighter pilot, Nadezhda Petrukhina. The film reveals Petrukhina's struggle in the present: while her war skills are no longer in demand, she works as a school principal, primarily supervising a male staff. While she seems to be quite an authoritative and respected leader, she has no strong emotional connection with either her students or her colleagues.

Among other Thaw films with a female as the central character, Shepitko's *Wings* offers the most "masculine" image of a major heroine. Everything about Petrukhina's appearance, from her "mannish" suit to her equally "mannish" hairstyle, wholly matches her strict, resolute, and "masculine" nature.

The film opens with a scene in which Petrukhina is being measured by a tailor to have a suit made. Ironically, her standard size does not comply with her "non-standard" personality. The opening scene emphasizes the dilemma of



Figure 17. Shepitko's *Wings*

Petrukhina's "fit" into the society because of her behavior and life principles, presumably so uncharacteristic of a woman. In this respect, an interesting interpretation of Petrukhina's character is offered by Tatiana Mikhailova and Mark Lipovetsky, who argue that Petrukhina incarnates "the collapse of Soviet subjectivity," which is produced by a failure "to internalize two incompatible ideological scenarios": the "normal" Soviet woman of the fifties and the sixties and a woman soldier (Mikhailova and Lipovetsky 81). The scholars advance their analysis of Petrukhina by employing the studies of Stephen Kotkin, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Igal Halfin, and others who explore the interconnectedness of explicit ideological doctrine, cultural myths, and individual/group experience. When the first two come into conflict with individual experience, "a collapse of subjectivity" occurs (Mikhailova and Lipovetsky 81).

While I entirely agree with Mikhailova and Lipovetsky that Petrukhina is suppressed by social conventions regarding the patriarchal understanding of what a “normal” woman should be, I also believe that her failure to find a niche for herself in life results from the fact that the film denies the heroine, and women overall, the possibility of having both professional success and a fully meaningful family life. Nothing, as Mikhailova and Lipovetsky stress, indicates Petrikhina’s social oppression: she is the principal of a vocational school, she is a deputy in the City Soviet, and she was not dismissed from the occupation of pilot (85). Therefore, despite the fact that Petrukhina is granted opportunities equal with men in social life, as promised by the state after the revolution, she still cannot find “her own place” in life once her military skills are unclaimed.

Nadezhda’s “masculine” identity reaches its apogee during the war. In several scenes, she witnesses how school students listen to lectures about her heroic deeds in the local war museum. She cannot go back in time when she lived her life to the fullest as a fighter pilot, so she comes to the museum in an effort to revive her past experiences. Apparently, during peace time, Petrukhina’s war skills are no longer required. Neither her career as a successful school principal nor her city council deputy service replaces her nostalgic feelings for the past.

The film reinforces the idea that domestic and social domains are supposedly mutually exclusive for a woman, conveyed by Petrukhina’s inability to retain her identities of mother and pilot simultaneously. The film proposes that a woman soldier must transcend her identity as mother and wife in order to become a fully-fledged pilot,



and so draws the distinctive lines of division between the “masculine” and the “feminine.” Therefore, a conflict rises between the societal myth in terms of what a woman should be, as Mikhailova and Lipovetsky claim, and Petrukhina’s identity as a warrior.

Petrukhina’s “masculine” profession of pilot becomes an obstacle for her “feminine” (and, most importantly, from the traditional perspective of gender) role as a mother, which she clearly fails to fulfill. Purportedly, the “masculine” side of her “mixed” identity obviously serves as an emotional and psychological barrier to building a warm relationship with her adopted daughter, Tania. Nadezhda’s suitor, Pasha, also her best friend, appears to be closer to her daughter than she is. The fact that Tania sends her regards to Petrukhina mainly through Pasha suggests a lack of closeness in the mother-daughter bond. At the present time, Nadezhda may only speculate whether acting on her initial impulse to adopt a boy would have resulted in a stronger mother-child relationship. Petrukhina’s expectation that a girl would be “closer to the heart” turned out to be a great disappointment. Evidently, the “masculine” side of Petrukhina’s “mixed” identity and Tania’s incapability to recognize in Nadezhda as a true mother led to the failure of both to open their hearts to each other.

Tania deeply hurts Petrukhina’s feelings when she refuses to discuss her personal life with her mother, “I don’t want to talk about it with anyone, especially with you.” Nor does Tania involve Petrukhina in her life decisions, such as marriage. Mikhailova and Lipovetsky make an interesting observation about the big age difference between Tania and her husband, Igor’. Tania’s choice of a man who is much older than she

indicates her “yearning for a strong paternal presence, for an authority figure, which Petrukhina cannot be” (Mikhailova and Lipovetsky 87). Therefore, the film asserts that, on the one hand, even such a “masculine” mother as Petrukhina supposedly cannot fully assume the role of the father, while, on the other hand, Petrukhina’s “mixed” identity allegedly prevents her from giving Tania her maternal warmth and, thus, fulfill her ultimate role (from a patriarchal perspective) of mother.

The scene in which Petrukhina pays a visit to Tania finally to get acquainted with her husband, Igor’, manifests another of Nadezhda’s failures to break the ice in this unresponsive and complicated family relationship. Petrukhina tries to be the “soul of the party,” which consists entirely of men who have come to visit Igor’ and are eager to leave as soon as Nadezhda intrudes on their manly companionship. None of Petrukhina’s efforts to blend in, be it holding a cake knife the way men do or drinking vodka on a par with them, helps her become one of them.



Figure 18. Shepitko’s *Wings*

Having failed in her personal life, Petrukhina experiences an overwhelming sense of loneliness throughout the film. Every time her feelings of solitude intensify, the director resorts to flashbacks of Petrukhina’s past and numerous oblique shots of the sky, a reminder of her happier times as a fighter pilot.

In one of those scenes, an extreme long shot reveals a road (perhaps a symbol of life), which becomes completely desolate, similar to Petrukhina's life. The camera cuts from the close-up of Nadezhda to a close-up of the rain, presumably evoking the image of tears, hence suggestive of her "crying soul." The flashback that follows depicts Mitia, her lover and fellow pilot, whose tragic death Nadezhda witnesses in an air combat. The director personally involves the viewer in Mitya's communication with Petrukhina when the camera assumes Nadezhda's point of view.

At one point, Petrukhina realizes the necessity of parting with the past in order to be able to start a new life. Consequently, she decides to resign and furthermore proposes to Pasha - another manly act on her part. Her efforts to change her life beg the question of whether escaping the reality of her professional world would change Petrukhina's life for the better, especially considering the fact that family life was never comfortable for her. One may speculate that her marriage proposal to Pasha is her way of saying "good-bye" to her loyal friend and partner. Proposing to him is the warmest thing she can say to him before she leaves forever.

Petrukhina goes to the aerodrome with the singular purpose of reliving her moment of happiness. The final scene, in which she gets into a plane and takes off, is symbolic of her suicide. The film ends with another oblique shot of the skies – Petrukhina does not come back to the world that did not accept her the way she was.

## CONCLUSION. COMBINING THE INCOMPATIBLE: “FEMININE” VERSUS “MASCULINE”

In conclusion, the woman-protagonist<sup>29</sup> comes to the fore in the cinema of the Thaw. While romantic comedies and some melodramas, referred to in this study as *pseudo-zhenskii* films, adhere to stereotypical presentation(s) in their portrayals of women, the psychological development of some major female characters, as demonstrated above in the analyses of the final four films examined in the present study, complicates the task of defining the female types depicted on screen during Thaw. As Beumers argues, Thaw cinematography diverges from “external portrayals (or types)” and elaborates instead complexity of the character’s inner world (128). Even so, Woll identifies such female types of this period as “single mothers, women who adopt children, and former heroines,” claiming that “the emancipated woman is, for the cinema of Thaw, a new phenomenon” (128). I believe that this classification can be extended, considering the major female characters discussed earlier in the dissertation.

Each of the comedies and melodramas discussed above depicts a young, impulsive, and extremely ambitious heroine endowed with an ability to transform the major male character into a true hero due to her strong, constructive personality and high

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<sup>29</sup>In his book *Unasledovannyi diskurs*, Aleksandr Prokhorov emphasizes that the number of Thaw films with a “woman-protagonist” (zhenshchina-protagonist) significantly increased during this period.

moral values. It should be noted that the occurrence of such a female type in the cinema of the Thaw cannot be considered a phenomenon exclusive to this period. Already during the Stalinist era, Prokhorov observes, it was typical for a “young positive heroine” (mainly in comedies) to oppose a malevolent bureaucrat. Such a major female character, for example, can be seen in Riazanov’s *Carnival Night* (69).

I believe that in nearly all the films analyzed above, this type of woman-protagonist is consistently unaccomplished in terms of her professional achievements. In *Gals*, for example, Tosia is merely a brigade cook. One may argue that the film promotes one of the foremost Soviet principles, “All professions are noble.”<sup>30</sup> And yet, Tosia’s roommate Anfisa skeptically emphasizes that her occupation is of no importance for announcements in the weekly newspaper, which highlights the most significant work achievements of the collective. In *The Girl Without an Address*, the heroine ultimately gives up the pursuit of her dream of becoming an actress and becomes a worker instead. The fact that Katia’s superfluous fixation on the career of actress gives way to the more productive profession of a worker building “the bright future” allegedly elevates her character in the eyes of a Soviet viewer. Nevertheless, on the whole, she ultimately fails to achieve her goal and her work accomplishments remain hardly noticeable, especially in comparison with the major male protagonist, who in the end turns out to be successful in both professional and personal domains.

Another (this time vastly masculinized) female type, depicted multidimensionally and with deep internal conflicts, is the woman soldier, a type portrayed in *The*

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<sup>30</sup>“Все профессии в почёте.”

*Commissar*, *The Forty First*, and *Wings*. Women's "masculine" side is best shown in their ability to perform equally to (or better than) men in military action. However, outside of the military environment, masculinization results in women being outcasts in both gender groups, since they are unable to blend in fully with men and refuse to follow the "assigned" traditional roles of mothers and wives. Masculinized female characters (especially beyond the military milieu) can be like men, but they cannot be men – they will always maintain their complementary role and inferior status.

One of the most essential findings of scholars who analyze cinema in relation to gender is that gender is *performative* and not "natural" and making yourself more "masculine" or "feminine" is merely "engaging yourself in a performance of gender" (Gabbard and Luhr 3). In addition, Gabbard and Luhr argue that all traits that one wants to acquire are manifestations of "value-laden cultural presumptions" derived from "sociocultural norms, personal imperatives, and value-encoded media representations" (3). Thus, tackling the dilemma of gender discrepancy must go beyond the "performance of gender" and delve into such fundamental issues as patriarchal inertia, cultural traditions, education, etc.

I believe that masculinization of female characters limited merely to physical representation and episodic manly conduct falls short of shattering the canons of deeply-rooted traditional gender roles. I am also convinced that the process of masculinization of female images only reinforces gender discrepancies by "assimilating" one gender to

another, even though this assimilation is manifested on the level of physical presentation. Furthermore, some of the film analyses provided above demonstrate that being like men does not necessarily lead to acquiring the same status and rights.

Finally, the woman-mother type appears to be quite distinctive for its capacity for self-sacrifice for the love of the child. For example, in *Women*, Katia sacrifices her personal happiness and chooses never to marry, in order to devote her entire life to her son, Zhenia. In the case of such female characters as the Commissar (Klavdia Vavilova) and the fighter pilot (Nadezhda Petrukhina), the secondary identity of a mother is highly marginalized by the primary identity of soldier, which leads to failure to ultimately acquire a maternal identity. Evidently, the more excessively film directors masculinize female images, the less the “masculinized” female protagonists emerge as multifaceted characters capable of fulfilling themselves in both professional and personal realms.

In general, though Thaw films portray women who possess strong personalities and exceptional skills, all of them succeed in professional activities at the expense of their personal happiness. For instance, in Kalatozov’s *The Cranes Are Flying*, Veronika’s character is contrasted to the highly “masculinized” image of Irina, Boris’s sister. Obviously, Irina’s plain appearance and her “mannish” behavior are devoid of femininity. She devotes her life to nothing but her career as a doctor, while, at the same time, she is often compared to a man (especially when performing surgeries) for her

resolute character and professional skills. As her father notices, “You should have been born a man!”<sup>31</sup> As in Irina’s case, for nearly all other main female characters, devotion to work diminishes personal life.

Virtually all of the female characters discussed eventually fail to do well in both building a career and keeping a family together. Unfortunately, each of them constantly faces the choice between her personal life and professional success. Furthermore, even if the heroine entirely devotes herself to work, almost certainly she becomes an outcast (as happens in the case of Petrukhina in *Wings*) in a world not ready to accept a highly emancipated woman who dares to break the traditional patterns of the gender paradigm.

All of the films analyzed in this study either advocate masculinization of female characters as the only way toward gender equality or, on the contrary, reinforce traditional roles. None of the movies depict a female character for whom success in work and the importance of family could be achieved successfully. Such a woman will appear on the screen much later (during the Stagnation period) in Vladimir Men’shov’s *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (1981) in the character of Katia Tikhomirova – a successful factory director, a single mother, and eventually a loving and loved wife.

When placing the discussed female images within the context of gender policies during the Thaw period, it becomes apparent that such areas of concern as the lack of women’s involvement in political and social activities (as a consequence of bearing the “double burden”) are treated fairly superficially. Furthermore, even though the hardship

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<sup>31</sup>“Тебе бы мужиком родиться!”



of the “double burden” is acknowledged in the representation of some major female characters (for example, Katia and Al’ka in *Women*), praising women who can be simultaneously exemplary workers and caring mothers and/or wives does not necessarily indicate the need for any change. While glorifying women’s ability to bear the dual load they perform at home and at work, none of the films actually undermines the concept of the distribution of traditional gender roles.

Finally, if one analyzes the genres of the films discussed above, all pictures, with the exception of dramas that portray either the Russian Civil war or World War II, fall into the two genres of melodrama and romantic comedy. Kathleen Karlyn claims that these two genres, which are considered to be “lower” forms as opposed to “the higher dramatic plane” for a male hero, are most typically used “to narrate fictions about women’s lives” (156).

Karlyn further advances the study of romantic comedy in terms of gender. According to her work, romantic comedy, which usually emphasizes the theme of love, provides “a sympathetic place for female resistance to masculine authority” as well as an alternative to a woman’s suffering in melodrama (157). The female protagonist Katia in Riazanov’s *The Girl Without an Address* is a vivid example of a young heroine who challenges every authoritative man who acts against the postulates of Soviet dogma.

As for the genre of melodrama, Karlyn argues convincingly that its narrative forms, which are “centered on female suffering and tears” when dealing with the themes

of loneliness and/or motherhood, convey social gender discrepancies in a most convincing way (156). The melodramas explored in this paper touch upon each of these themes.

Even though Karlyn claims that drama is essentially a “masculine” form (157), this dissertation examines several films, such as *The Cranes are Flying*, *Clear Skies*, *The Commissar*, and *Wings*, which are considered dramas by genre despite the fact that they have a woman as the lead character. While I entirely agree with the scholar that a heroine’s story in drama is “placed in relation to a man,” I would strongly disagree that her heroism is always “subordinate to that relationship” (Karlyn 157). For instance, in my analyses of *The Cranes are Flying* and *Clear Skies*, I argue that the major female characters, Veronika and Sasha respectively, emerge as the actual protagonists.

At the same time, it should be acknowledged that all of the melodramatic elements mentioned earlier are present in these war dramas. On the one hand, I believe that this occurs due to the fact that each drama has a woman as a protagonist; on the other hand, it indicates that most of the relevant directors, and thus the filmmaking process by virtue of various techniques, narrative, shots, and angles, are driven by stereotypical perceptions in their representations of both genders.

## PART II

### SCREENING (OTHER) WOMEN DURING PERESTROIKA AND THE BEGINNING OF 1990s

*Women procreate – produce babies. Men create – generate  
art and ideas. Most Russians do not question the gendered  
binarism that feminizes nature and masculinizes culture.*  
-- Helena Goscilo

#### CHAPTER ONE: GENDER REFORMS DURING PERESTROIKA: FROM GREAT HOPE TO GREAT DISILLUSIONMENT

This chapter provides a brief overview of gender studies conducted by such scholars as Mary Buckley, Judith Shapiro, Ol'ga Lipovskaia, Genia Browning, Goscilo and others who explore the ideological, social, and cultural transformations in the status of women brought about by Perestroika in public and domestic spheres. The chapter also compares the shifts these reforms caused in the gender role paradigm during Perestroika to the shifts of the Thaw period.

During Glasnost', Gorbachev attempted to show that women were more involved in political activities than they had been previously. He demonstrated this greater

involvement by appointing a woman, Aleksandra Biriukova, to the Party's Secretariat. Even with Gorbachev's attempts to make women more visible participants in the political process, women's participation as politicians in the Soviet era never exceeded 5 percent, and only two women were ever appointed to the Politburo. At best, such attempts to advance women's roles in politics proved to be fractional (Lapidus 143). As mentioned earlier in this study, women's participation in political and social activities was inevitably hindered by the "double burden" of family and work responsibilities. In her article "Gender and Restructuring: The Impact of Perestroika and its Aftermath on Soviet Women," Gail Warshofsky Lapidus argues persuasively that Gorbachev's reforms remained "limited and contradictory," due to the pervasive "resistance to the idea of female politicians and the mounting burden of everyday life on women" (154). Buckley stresses the same point when noting that "the weaker the political institution, the higher the percentage of women active in it" ("Introduction: Women and Perestroika" 3).

When describing the labor force of Soviet industry, Buckley notes that women dominated the workforce of low-paid, low-skilled and often manual work ("Introduction: women and Perestroika" 3). Naturally, the same discrepancies occurred during the Thaw, and the reforms of Perestroika produced no significant changes in women's status. Furthermore, women continued to hold low-levels positions in the occupational hierarchy and very rarely received administrative positions<sup>32</sup> (Lapidus 141). Finally, most

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<sup>32</sup>Women constituted over 80 percent of food and textile workers and over 90 percent of garment workers, but less than 30 per cent of workers in the spheres of in coal, lumber, electrical power, and mineral extraction (Lapidus 141). According to available statistics, the proportion of women among enterprise directors rose from a mere 1 percent in 1956 to 9 percent in 1975, and to 11 percent in 1985 (Lapidus 143).

industrial sectors actually showed a decrease in the number of female workers.<sup>33</sup> In particular, this decrease corresponded to women with children (Shapiro 17).

The above-mentioned data show that, even with some modest changes at the beginning of Perestroika, the patriarchal structure remained intact and “the woman question” did not receive any significant attention, and any change, if occurring at all, was not substantial. Nonetheless, Perestroika included the emergence of a number of women’s organizations. Lipovskaia classifies them into three types: formal/official; informal/unofficial; and feminist (72). Eventually, the women in these organizations founded two political parties: *Edinaia Partiia Zhenshchin* (the United Women’s Party) in Leningrad; and *Partiia Zhenshchin Suverennoi Rossii* (the Party of Women of Sovereign Russia) in Tomsk. Significantly, while their programs raised awareness and discussion of discrimination against women in the USSR, they did not offer any worthwhile solutions for how to address the issue (Lipovskaia 76).

Popular during the Thaw, *zhensovet*y were revived by the 27<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU<sup>34</sup> in February 25, 1986 – March 6, 1986; though this time they arose under the leadership of the Soviet Women’s Committee, which gave them national status for the first time (Browning 99). When comparing the two periods, the Thaw and Perestroika, we see that the scope of the *zhensovet*y’s work did not change noticeably. Although the era of Glasnost’ had the potential to be the most promising time for change in a woman’s

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<sup>33</sup> A detailed analysis of the role of women in the industrial workforce and statistics showing the numerical decline in female labor in various branches of manufacturing are provided by Shapiro in her article “The Industrial Labor Force.”

<sup>34</sup> The Communist Party of the Soviet Union

position, the primary activities of *zhensovet* targeted, first and foremost, social welfare, while raising women's political consciousness remained their secondary function (Browning 111). Nearly all scholars who analyze the framework of *zhensovet*, including Lipovskaia, Browning, and Buckley, stress that the *zhensovet*s' "own reinforcement of gender roles" was the major cause preventing them from accomplishing their aspirations to achieve women's rights either at home or at work. Such reinforcement ultimately only "continued to contribute to women's inequality" (Browning 112).

Women's magazines such as *Rabotnitsa* (Working Woman) and *Krestianka* (Peasant Woman) carried on discussions of various aspects of women's lives. A new journal, *Zhenskoe chtenie* (Women's Reading) published from 1988-1991 by Lipovskaia in Leningrad addressed such issues as maternity, gender relations, and lesbianism. The journal also enlightened Soviet women about Western feminist writings (Buckley, "Political Reform" 65). Discussions of this sort were the first indication that women were increasingly aware of the issue of gender role distribution and their status in family and society.

Despite the fact that many women continued to resist the idea of challenging conventional gender stereotypes,<sup>35</sup> "Gender Studies" was introduced as a new academic discipline during Perestroika (Buckley, "Introduction: Women and Perestroika" 7). One of the first and most crucial clearinghouses was Natal'ia Rimashevskaiia's Center for

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<sup>35</sup>Lipovskaia provides some data on women's organizations anti-feminist in nature. Such organizations valued highly a conservative, patriarchal order. For example, the anti-feminist group *Rossia*, formed in Leningrad and headed by Ekaterina Miasnikova, believed firmly that the primary function of a woman was to be a mother and a wife who is actually supposed to be a spiritual educator for children and men (Lipovskaia 77).

Gender Studies, established in 1990 and headed by Posadskaya. Also, a scholarly council on women's problems was created within the Academy of Social Sciences under the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Rimashevskaya 118). Rimashevskaya made a great contribution to gender studies by analyzing the research findings of the council and by writing a report on the "problems of women's status." Based on research data, she highlights the major dilemma for women: "their lives were predetermined by society and their choices were very limited" (Rimashevskaya 119). While such findings already had been published and discussed in the West, they were quite novel to the Soviet Union.

Rimashevskaya and Posadskaya advocated an egalitarian approach as the only one appropriate for tackling the issue of gender discrimination. Rimashevskaya commented on public reaction to this entirely new approach, "The majority did not accept the ideas, but they were not ready to refute them" (119). Goscilo makes a similar observation when emphasizing that, despite the fact that Russian women acknowledged that the majority of Russian men treated domestic responsibilities with disdain and as something that was "an inherently female province," not only did they "sh[y] away from feminism, but violently denounced it," associating the latter with lesbianism (*Dehexing Sex* 11). Not surprisingly, a strong tendency toward the retention of traditional gender roles, as well as some anti-feminist agitation, led to an unreceptive response to the egalitarian approach, which was new to the Soviets.

Finally, it should be noted that, along with the discussion of women's status in society and at home, gender studies examined such issues as pornography and prostitution, which remained "taboo" before Perestroika. The cinematic analyses

provided below explore how this subject matter is treated in the films of Perestroika and how the subject matter affected the representations of women during the era of Glasnost’.



## CHAPTER TWO: THE REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN THE CINEMA OF PERESTROIKA

Soviet ideology and the idea of building socialism remained an integral part of the filmmaking process until 1989, when a period of “a negative anticommunist ideology” began (Dmitry Shlapentokh and Vladimir Shlapentokh 198). Sadly, the great hopes for potential change by virtue of Gorbachev’s reforms were not reflected in the cinema of Perestroika. Instead, the representation of Soviet reality was suffused with cynicism, depression, and even aggression. While the films of Perestroika and the early 1990s presented no new models, they disparaged the old Soviet methods of building “a bright future,” and consequently exposed the Russian society as “totally sick, close to disintegration and collapse, and lacking any positive heroes or hope for the future”<sup>36</sup> (Dmitry Shlapentokh and Vladimir Shlapentokh 201).

In my analysis of female characters of the Perestroika period and the first half of the 1990s, not only do I place female images within an ideological, social, and economic context, but I also look at their psychological portrayals and employ such notions as the

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<sup>36</sup>According to *Iskusstvo Kino*, in 35 percent of the Soviet films produced in 1989-1990, heroes die, commit suicide, or become debauched. Also, 82 percent of Soviet movies show strong negativity toward reality. Such feelings as fear, anxiety, and aggression prevail in the portrayal of Russian society during this period (Qtd. in Dmitry Shlapentokh and Vladimir Shlapentokh 202).

Symbolic/the Father, and the Other (in the Lacanian sense).<sup>37</sup> These portrayals and notions shed light on the cinematic constructions of weak and/or strong, active and/or passive, and domineering and/or dominated women. The Imaginary and the Symbolic<sup>38</sup> became important to the film theory of the 1970s (Creed 78). In addition, in 1975 Mulvey argued that “in a world ordered by sexual imbalance,” the male protagonist has the active role of “making things happen,” while the female star fulfils the rather passive role of a sexual object for the desiring male (Mulvey 39; 41). Considering sexual difference to be the central aspect of the gender paradigm, feminists employed psychoanalysis to explain “women’s exclusion from the realms of language and law, and desire” – the Symbolic order (White 117).

Following Mulvey’s contribution to psychoanalytic theories of women, such scholars as Tania Modleski, Susan Lurie, and Barbara Creed suggested an entirely different representation of women in film, claiming that a woman, especially the motherly type, can be portrayed as “an active, terrifying fury, a powerfully abject figure” (Creed 84). In my analyses, I will demonstrate that Chukhrai’s *Zapomnite menia takoi* [Remember Me This Way] (1987) and Viacheslav Krishtofovich’s *Rebro Adama* [Adam’s Rib] (1991) portray a very domineering mother figure.

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<sup>37</sup>To a large extent, psychoanalysts rely on Lacan’s theory of the three orders of human existence: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. According to Lacan, during the mirror stage, which occurs during the period of the Imaginary, the infant experiences joy for the first time upon seeing itself as complete and perfect. The self is constructed through recognition and misrecognition (Creed 78). Upon the child’s entry into the Symbolic, s/he “succumbs to the law of the Father (the laws of society), which governs the Symbolic order” and the Real (Creed 79).

<sup>38</sup>The psychoanalysis movement was founded by André Breton. Theorists examine how psychoanalysis, which places emphasis on the importance of desire in the life of the individual, impacts the cinema (Creed 75).

In order to examine the psychological dynamic of the transitional period and analyze the ways that anxieties, fears, and fantasies are reflected in film in the changing Russian society, Hashamova utilizes psychological theories by such scholars as Lacan, Renata Salecl, Julia Kristeva, and Tzvetan Todorov.<sup>39</sup> Within the scope of my study, Hashamova's analysis of the shifts that occur in the gender roles paradigm in post-Soviet cinema is of particular importance.

Hashamova draws attention to two major arguments associated with gender roles. On the one hand, the representation of gender roles is "rooted in the Soviet experience," which lays the foundation for the emergence of such images as "aggressive, disoriented, and inept Russian men and victimized young women, strong (even negative) mothers, and successful female professionals" ("Castrated Patriarchy, Violence, and Gender Hierarchies in Post-Soviet Film" 196). On the other hand, the new gender role distribution is affected by ambiguities in Western gender role dynamics, dynamics in which gender role distribution is attributed to an "absence of the authority, the Father, or the Other in the Lacanian sense"<sup>40</sup> (Hashamova, "Castrated Patriarchy, Violence, and Gender Hierarchies in Post-Soviet Film" 197). Based on the arguments above, Hashamova concludes that a new dynamic in the gender paradigm emerged during this period. She notes that this new dynamic allowed for a wider range of gender representations, while, at the same time challenging the traditional patriarchal order

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<sup>39</sup>See more on Hashamova's analysis of gender dynamics in post-Soviet Russia within the contexts of the Lacanian theory of Fantasy, Symbolic, and Real as well as Todorov's and Kristeva's dialogism between the self and the "Other" in Hashamova's *Pride and Panic* (20; 25).

<sup>40</sup>For more a more thorough discussion of the "Other" in the Lacanian understanding, see the Notes in Hashamova's "Castrated Patriarchy, Violence, and Gender Hierarchies in Post-Soviet Film."

(“Castrated Patriarchy, Violence, and Gender Hierarchies in Post-Soviet Film” 197). In my analysis of Perestroika and early post-Soviet films, I intend to scrutinize the cinematic representations of female characters and how, if at all, the phenomenon of a perceived crisis of masculinity<sup>41</sup> affected the tendency to masculinize female characters in order to portray them as strong, decisive, and successful in their professional and/or social life.

Borenstein in *Men without Women* argues that women in the Soviet Union were compelled to adopt traditional male roles to be a part of the new State created and built by men (200). However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the idea of masculinization leading to strong and successful female characters and the resulting perceived challenge to the patriarchal order seems to be inadequate and hardly convincing. Additionally, the cinema of Perestroika and the early post-Perestroika years primarily depicts contemporary society undergoing a political, economic, and cultural crisis in which physical power is associated with aggressive violence. It would then follow that “manly/masculine” images, the majority of which carry no positive presentation during Perestroika and the early 1990s, can hardly serve as role models.

Only films about the Civil War and World War II produced during Perestroika would offer appealing “manly” female images, since their ability to fight (along with their devotion to the common good) becomes their key feature. Even so, the number of Civil War and World War II films that were produced during Glasnost’ is insignificant. Todorovskii’s film *Ankor, Eshche Ankor* [Encore, Once More Encore!] (1992), situated

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<sup>41</sup> The term “perceived” is associated with a discourse regarding “masculine” function, power control or loss of it in society, etc.

in the later part of Perestroika, will be discussed further in the thesis, as it demonstrates that the idea of masculinization of female characters (even women soldiers) fades away during Perestroika and the subsequent era.

Beginning with Perestroika, more “feminine”<sup>42</sup> strong female images appear on the screen. Though, I would like to focus primarily on female characters, it should be pointed out that many major male protagonists appearing from the beginning of Perestroika through the late post-Soviet era possess no exceptional physical features, as, for instance, the super agent Sokolov in Leonid Gaidai’s *Na Deribasovskoi idut dozhd* [On Deribasovskaia the Weather Is Fine] (1992), or Zhenia Timoshin in Dmitrii Astrahan’s *Ty u menia odna* [My Only One] (1993), or Danila Bagrov (a new Russian hero) in Aleksei Balabanov’s *Brat* [Brother] (1997) and *Brat-2* [Brother-2] (2000). It is not the physical power or an ability to fight that distinguish these protagonists’, but mainly their moral rendering and their love for their country. When examining the Russian hero in action films, Hashamova emphasizes that “Russians value strong spiritual qualities rather than physical strength” (*Pride and Panic* 46).

The idea of the superiority of the “rich inner content of a protagonist’s soul” over appearance was also stressed by Nadezhda Azhgikhina and Goscilo in their analysis of Todorovskii’s film *Interdevochka* [Intergirl] (1989) based on Vladimir Kunin’s novella *Intergirl* (1988) (94). Azhgikhina and Goscilo draw a parallel between the prostitute as

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<sup>42</sup> *Feminine* is used consistent with the definitions of “the feminine” and “the masculine” (refer to Part I for the definitions) as perceived by a patriarchal perspective.

embodied in Julia Roberts (in *Pretty Woman*) and Elena Iakovleva (the leading actress in *Intergirl*) to emphasize that, while the latter is very pretty, she is “hardly a stunning beauty” (95).

### **The Images of the Prostitute and the Mother as Symbols of Russian Society**

Todorovskii’s *Intergirl* and other pictures discussed in this subchapter are classified as *chernukha*<sup>43</sup> films by genre – a new phenomenon in Russian culture that became increasingly popular in the era of Perestroika due to its fundamental principle of “uncovering long suppressed truths,” while offering no solution to the dismal reality as reflected on screen. When delineating the key elements of the *chernukha* genre, Borenstein writes<sup>44</sup>:

- 1) The family, agonizing or already collapsed.
- 2) Average Soviet citizens unmasking their animal nature, ultimate immorality, and unmotivated cruelty.
- 3) The death of all former ideals, leaving no hope for the future after the closing credits.
- 4) Packed everyday conditions in “communal apartments.”
- 5) Senseless hysterics and fights arising from nowhere and dying down in the middle of a scream.
- 6) Usually a few “adult” scenes. (*Overkill* 11).

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<sup>43</sup> The term is derived from the adjective “chernyi” (black) and denotes such negative implications as gloominess, pessimism, despair, etc. (Borenstein, *Overkill* 11).

<sup>44</sup> When summarizing the major elements of the *chernukha* genre, Borenstein incorporates Horton and Brashinsky’s studies on their “chernukha formula.”

The analyses provided below show that all of the chernukha features mentioned above can be clearly identified in the films discussed in this subchapter.

*Intergirl* is set in Leningrad during Perestroika. In the film, the secret, dual life of Tania Zaitseva, a nurse during the day and a hard-currency prostitute at night, unfolds. Ironically, while saving the lives of others, she is in need of “saving” herself. Undeniably, she is a contradictory character; she stands out because of her virtuous moral principles but, at the same time, sells her body to obtain some financial stability. Tania’s quite paradoxical character is viewed by some critics, for example, Brashinsky, as “a polyphony of contradictions with no center,” speaking in Bakhtin’s terms (119). While I entirely agree with the statement above, I also believe that Tania’s character voices her Perestroika-era society’s highly-perplexed frame of mind resulting from disillusionment with the old order and no alternative for a better future.

The breakfast scene, in which Tania explicates her position regarding a marriage of convenience, sheds light on Tania’s philosophy of life, “If necessary, I will fall in love with him. Who doesn’t sell oneself today?”<sup>45</sup> Her intention to marry a Swedish businessman, Ed Larsen, is perceived by her mother, Alla Sergeevna, as nothing but an act of “selling herself.” Having worked as a teacher her entire life in order to convey high ideals to children – the task she has obviously failed to accomplish in her own daughter’s upbringing – Alla Sergeevna is incapable of understanding her daughter’s

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<sup>45</sup>“Если надо будет, полюблю!... А кто сейчас не торгует собой?”

pragmatism. The dialogue between mother and daughter reveals the generation gap that is manifested in the older generation's naïve allegiance to the State and its ideology, and the younger generation's strong denouncement of the old system.

The motif of a teacher's failure in the upbringing of her own child appears again as a sixteen-year old hard-currency prostitute is detained and questioned by the militia. The interrogation scene enlightens the viewer about the life of the girl who was brought up by a single father-professor. The young prostitute shows nothing but disdain and skepticism towards her father when stating that he ridicules (behind his students' backs) everything he lectures to them at the university, "He says one thing to his students at the university, and then laughs at it at home."<sup>46</sup> This realistic, even negative, perspective on life is another reference to the superficiality of the former ideological discourse, despite its overwhelming inculcation on the level of public institutions.

Overall, the role of the State as an educator, as well as its fatherly role, is undermined by the representations of parents (who happen to be teachers) and father figures. Tania's father abandoned his family when she was very young, leaving them without any financial support. She meets her father twenty-three years later when she comes to his house in order to receive his permission to leave the country. Tania leaves behind all regrets that her father walked away twenty-three years ago when she sees his miserable existence in a squalid apartment with his bedridden wife and two untended children who are constantly screaming. In the same way that he fails in his role as a

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<sup>46</sup>“В институте всем говорит одно, а потом приходит домой и смеётся над тем, что им говорит... И поэтому знаю со мной ничего не случится!”



father to Tania, so he fails with his other two children. The bitter realization for Tania is that her own father forces her back into prostitution when he demands three thousand rubles for granting his consent to her immigration.

The scene in which Tania spends a night with a Japanese businessman so that she can pay her father conveys her strong resentment for her former life as a prostitute. A sequence of close-ups of Tania's face (depicted from different angles and at times upside down) alternates with the disjointed images of her father, the Immigration Services officer, the hotel concierge, the restaurant hostess, and her friend Kisa – all people she had to pay, directly or indirectly, to buy her freedom. Towards the end of the scene, Tania's facial expressions shift from

apathy to sorrow and, eventually, to despair. The final close-ups of Tania crying are accompanied by the audio image of her howling, which communicates Tania's complex feelings of simultaneous anguish, abhorrence, and helplessness.



Figure 19. Todorovskii's *Intergirl*

Putting her entire immigration process in jeopardy, Tania manages to “earn” money in the world's oldest profession to pay her own father. As Tania's girlfriends are driving her away from the immigration office, she watches her father from the back seat of the car. The camera retreats from the father, thereby assuming Tania's point of view –

it is the last time she will see him and she will forever remember her father as he is at this moment – counting the money he received as a pay-off from his own daughter.

Finally, Tania achieves her goal – she emigrates to Sweden to live with her Swedish husband. She finds everything she was yearning for: fine jewelry, expensive clothes, her own house, and a car. However, Tania faces another dilemma she has never considered important: the life she strived for turns out to be tedious. On the whole, she remains an outcast both in the professional sphere due to the worthlessness of her Russian diploma and in her personal life because of the strong judgment of Ed's friends and co-workers. The scene that depicts a formal reception in Tania and Ed's house dwells on the fact that Tania still bears the stigma of a hard-currency prostitute, unable to expunge her old memories in her new life. For men, she remains merely an object of sexual desire, while for women she appears as a young and charming competitor coveted by their husbands.

Disillusioned with the idea that true happiness is wholly about financial stability, Tania experiences a strong feeling of solitude aggravated by her act of estranging herself from Ed due mainly to the cultural gap between them. Under the pressure of overwhelming longing for her family and friends in Russia, Tania's behavior runs to extremes: first, she drenches her unhappiness in binge drinking, and afterward she attends an Orthodox Church in search of life's right path.

At the same time, haunted by a premonition about her mother, Tania decides to fly back home. All Tania's doubts about whether to take a trip to Russia vanish the

moment she learns of an accusation of speculative financial activity brought against her by one of her girlfriends, Kisa. In utter despair, Tania drives to the airport, even though she acknowledges her inevitable imprisonment upon her arrival in Leningrad.

The final close-up depicts Tania's weeping face as she instinctively raises her arm to shield herself from an oncoming vehicle. The freeze frame suggests that Tania dies in the accident on her way to the

airport. Tania's death is interpreted by some critics, for example, Brashinsky, as a "convenient" resolution for all the contradictions specific to her character (120). Such a tragic dénouement is utterly predictable: Tania could not find her place in a foreign country and she



Figure 20. Todorovsky's *Intergirl*

clearly would not be able to exist in the Soviet system she was so eager to escape.

Overall, Todorovskii's film raises quite a complicated question. In one respect, with the collapse of the old system, opened borders, and the introduction of a free market economy, Soviet people were constantly longing for a Western lifestyle and higher living standards. On the other hand, once someone attains all the material well-being of the West, one finds oneself alienated from one's own culture, traditions, and moral values, all of which create another, even more complex, predicament. Yet, I strongly believe that the director is not trying to reinforce the idea of Tania's tragic death as punishment for

her longing for a better life. Reality is not so trivial and straightforward. Todorovskii's film, like most Perestroika movies, diverges from idealized images and portrays more realistic, more human characters, with their weaknesses and desires for financial security and an improved lifestyle.

By portraying a single image of Tania's mother, who still lives in line with the principles of the former ideological discourse, Todorovskii highlights the two antagonistic mentalities of the older and younger generations, thereby indicating certain shifts in moral values and beliefs. Even though people of the older generation realize that the time of living and working in the name of the common good has already passed, they still prefer to live in denial because of a lack of alternative(s) (from their perspective) in the present day.

In contrast, representatives of the younger generation (primarily in reference to *Intergirl*), see opportunities to take advantage of their skills<sup>47</sup> and sometimes bodies (as in Tania's case) for personal gain, while putting moral principles aside. Hence, Natalia Olshanskaia stresses that the birth of a new *Intergirl* (Tania's young friend, Lialia) indicates that the Russian prostitution market will continue flourishing until there is no foreign demand for it (81).

Contradicting in part the statement above, the scholar also provides an interesting interpretation of Tania's life. Olshanskaia explores the phenomenon of prostitution as "a

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<sup>47</sup> Tania makes such a statement when she has a conversation with her mother in the breakfast scene, "Who is not trying now to sell his services for a better price: architects, scholars, lawyers?! Am I worse than they are?!"

symbol of the loss of innocence by society” and concludes that Tania fails to find happiness in Sweden since her “nostalgic search for moral values [was] crushed under the pressure from the West” (79). Attwood concurs with Olshanskaia’s interpretation when stating, “Everything is forced, metaphorically, into prostitution” (“Sex and the cinema” 72). Such a symbolic reading of the heroine delineates a particular device employed by the director: he identifies the major female character with the country, whereas Tania’s dilemma appears as a manifestation of the nation’s chaos, and the ideals and wealth of the West (at least in this instance) apparently are no solution to the dilemma.

In her analysis of *Intergirl*, Goscilo expands on the topic of the metaphorical interpretation of the major character(s) and explores “the double image of womanhood” represented by Tania (a prostitute) and her mother (a school-teacher), characters whose tragic deaths ultimately serve as retribution for desiring Western amenities and redemption of their dignity respectively (43). Unlike the other readings mentioned above, Goscilo affords a multifaceted image of nationhood personified through the vastly polar tropes (in terms of the values, traits, and representations) of a mother and a prostitute (44).

The representation of Russia as “feminine” and its identification with prostitute became a trendy topic during the era of Glasnost’. Similar to Olshanskaia and Goscilo, Borenstein draws on the post-Soviet prostitute as a symbol/sign of “Russian national humiliation” (“Selling Russia – Prostitution, Masculinity, and Metaphors of Nationalism

after Perestroika” 175). While commenting on the boom in prostitution during Perestroika, Borenstein elevates the notion of this social phenomenon to a metaphor to describe the post-Soviet stage as a “nexus of buying and selling” (175).

While I agree with all of the scholarly interpretations of Tania’s character above and find Goscilo’s “double image of womanhood” as a more comprehensive construal of Russia as “feminine” during the time of Perestroika, I also believe that Tania’s character emerges as a “bridge” between the older and younger generations, representing the two opposing value systems: while Tania is still committed to the moral values of the older generation (like her mother), she is unable to maintain the belief that a life lived in accordance with such values is worthwhile in the “new” society in which the “buying and selling” dynamic in human relationships supersedes a general sense of right and wrong. Notably, Tania’s age of twenty-five indicates that she is in the transitional stage between the two generations represented by Al’ka and Tania’s mother. Such a “twofold identity” for Tania explains why she is constantly conscience-stricken about her occupation as a prostitute. In contrast, Alk’a, who appears overall as a good-hearted girl, shows no signs of remorse when she voluntarily becomes a prostitute in pursuit of a lavish lifestyle and, in fact, is fully content with her choice.

The realization of Tania’s desire for a high standard of living, which she is finally able to attain in the West, apparently generates another desire (or a different “lack”) expressed in her deep longing for her country, culture, and family. A contradiction arises between Tania’s desire to escape her former reality and her inability to exist beyond that

reality in the West. The contradiction of the West is that it evidently cannot satisfy both of her desires/“lacks.” Therefore, Tania’s death communicates the impossibility of her existence in either Russia or the West.

Obtaining money from clients while avoiding any sexual contact with them is the hallmark of the major female character, Shura Rukoyatkina, in Sergei Ashkenazi’s *Kriminal’nyi talant* [Criminal Talent] (1987). While working as a fuller during the day for student pay in miserable working conditions, Shura pretends to be a prostitute in search of well-heeled men at night in order to clean their pockets out after having drugged them.

Thanks to Shura’s criminal talent for swindling people out of money, accompanied by her creative appearance changes, she is able to elude the militia for a long while. Shura’s unique style bewilders and, at the same time, enthralls Sergei Riabinin, the investigator on her case. Riabinin recognizes in Shura a special criminal talent that enables her to evade the militia every time they get close.

In the end, Riabinin’s efforts chasing Shura finally pay off – Shura is apprehended at the post office while trying to obtain new personal stories for her future scams. In an effort to understand what made Shura a “young and embittered idiot”<sup>48</sup> (in Riabinin’s words) and consequently set her on the path to committing crimes, the investigating officer visits the factory dormitory in which she lives and her workplace.

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<sup>48</sup> “молодая и озлобленная идиотка”

The camera lingers on the filthy wool factory, shot in extremely confined spaces that produce the effect of women being trapped within the facility. Such dark colors as grey, brown, and black, together with the bleak view of the entire manufacturing plant, contribute to the gloomy atmosphere that prevails at the place. The sight of steam billowing from the dirty boilers and causing Riabinin to cover his nose when smelling its vile odor creates the effect of suffocation. The following panning shot displays rusty pipes covered with work material waste. Finally, a long shot of a female worker who is experiencing technical difficulty with the equipment points to the difficult and poor conditions in which women have to work to earn a minimum wage.



Figure 21. Ashkenazi's *Criminal Talent*

Apparently, the women's living conditions in the dormitory are no better than the conditions in which they work. The mandatory written agreement signed by all the female workers completely restrains their personal lives: while being employed at the factory, they consent not to get married or have children, under the threat of getting fired and evicted from the dormitory. It is noteworthy that the entire idea of women signing such an agreement in order to retain their jobs not only clashes with the patriarchal precept of essentializing motherhood as a woman's ultimate mission, but also reveals the incongruity implicit in the following concepts: the idea of gender equality, the state's



intent to improve conditions for women in the domestic sphere in order to ease “the double burden” (with a view to facilitate their involvement in the social sphere), and the depressing reality of women’s misery in low-paid occupations. While career-building opportunities, purportedly equal to those of men, remain in principle, the state selects the adverse alternative of depriving women of any personal life and, thus, marginalizes them by limiting their status solely to that of a factory worker.

The imminent future of the girls who comply with such a confining policy is projected through the character of the dorm superintendent, who once was a factory worker herself. A medium full front shot, suggests of sincerity and vulnerability at the same time, depicts her crying as she tells Riabinin the bitter story of her life: her fourteen years of service are rewarded with a private room in the dormitory as long as she retains the status of a single woman and conceals the fact of having a child.

During Riabinin’s questioning of Shura’s roommates, he learns that Shura helped her girlfriends in different ways: she brought food from restaurants for the girls, who were constantly hungry, loaned them money, and bought diapers for a single mother. Surprisingly for Riabinin, the devious criminal Shura Rukoiatkina appears to be a very considerate, sympathetic, and supportive friend.

The dreary reality of Shura’s life strengthens Riabinin’s wish to comprehend her motives for committing crimes at such a young age. The camera positions the viewer as an observer of Riabinin’s dialogue with Shura when depicting them in a series of over-the-shoulder shots that alternate between the views of the two characters. At times, the

camera assumes the point of view of each character maintaining the eye-level angle, which produces the overall effect of “equally strong opponents” engaged in a psychological “clash,” in which Riabinin tries to extract confessions from Shura, while she clearly realizes that he has no evidence to prove her guilt.

Hoping to evade criminal charges, Shura employs her sexuality to entice Riabinin, who, as an exemplary party member, family man, and law officer, resists her charms. The camera assumes Riabinin’s point of view by revealing Shura crossing her bare legs in a provocative way and pulling her red<sup>49</sup> dress off her shoulder. The director’s choice of red, a color suggesting aggressiveness and sexuality, reinforces the idea of Shura’s provocative manner. In addition to the scene above, highly sexualized representations in the film instantly evoke Mulvey’s concept of “visual pleasure” – the pleasure of looking, voyeurism, scopophilia, and the image of woman as “erotic spectacle” that signifies male desire (Mulvey 40). Such representations include images of Shura’s naked body, the camera’s lingering gaze on the legs of a woman pulling up her stocking in the restroom of a nightclub, and numerous takes of the half-naked night club dancers. In addition, the presence of a voyeur in the film “completes” Mulvey’s premise of “visual pleasure.” The authoritative status of the only male dorm administrator who peeks on girls in the shower area seems to be a literal manifestation of a more negative connotation of a powerful position carried by voyeurism according to Mulvey (139).

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<sup>49</sup> In some cultures, certain shades of red are used to symbolize *anger* or *aggression*. In western countries, it is most commonly referred to as a color of *evil*, *love*, and sometimes, though rarely, *happiness*.

Furthermore, Mulvey argues that the presence of the woman on screen always conveys the problem of sexual difference: along with a pleasurable look, the woman represents “her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure,” which awakens the “male unconscious” to escape this fear of castration by way of: 1) “preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment, or saving of the guilty object” or 2) “complete disavowal of castration by turning the represented figure itself into a fetish” (Mulvey 42). Indeed, the development of the relationship between Shura and Riabinin reflects Mulvey’s pattern whereby, in order “to save the woman” (Shura), the man (Riabinin) must first “ascertain her guilt” (Mulvey 42).

As the film progresses, we witness the manner in which Shura’s formal interrogation by Riabinin eventually turns into a heart-to-heart talk. At a certain point, the camera no longer assumes Riabinin’s and Shura’s points of view; instead, it reveals the two characters talking to each other with their backs to the



Figure 22. Ashkenazi’s *Criminal Talent*

viewer, thereby conveying the first signs of mutual understanding between them. The technique of turning the viewer merely into an observer, creates the effect that Shura opens up to no one but Riabinin. Though Shura’s story about her handicapped mother

and her father being unable to take care of his four children speaks to Riabinin's very depths, he cannot justify Shura's crimes. Yet, the more Riabinin delves into Shura's past, the less he exhibits the professional demeanor of an interrogator.

The dialogue between Riabinin, who advocates conformity to the law, and Shura, who is disillusioned with the judiciary system because of her bitter experience with reality, presents two polar outlooks on life by the two generations. Driven by principles molded within the former ideological dogma, Riabinin still believes that such ideals as justice, proper social life, and working towards the common good of society should be appropriate for everyone. In turn, Shura, who represents a new value system (which denounces the old Soviet fundamentals), believes in survival by any means.

The juxtaposition of Riabinin's experience in the women's dreary working and living conditions at the factory, as well as their life in the wretched dormitory, with the lavish lifestyle of Shura's victims, who made their fortune employing less-than-honest methods, shatters the rigidity of Riabinin's conventional understanding of right and wrong and brings out his compassion for Shura, especially in light of her suffering from financial privation. Riabinin's empathy for Shura overpowers his logic and professional attitude as a seasoned law enforcement officer. He also realizes that his belief in her may set Shura on the path of redemption. Riabinin believes Shura when she says that she will return the money she has stolen from her victims and, though acting against his better judgment, he lets her go.

The film closes with a reversal of the two characters' statuses masterfully reflected by the director in the *mise-en-scène* of the final scene. The camera cuts between medium shots of Shura positioned outside of Riabinin's office – she is free, but she has no intention to run – and Riabinin depicted behind the window bars. His “confined” position signifies that releasing Shura inevitably puts his job in jeopardy, while, at the same time, his entire value system is being inverted: he is no longer certain whom to prosecute and whom to protect. As Shura walks away, Riabinin stays with his belief that she will be true to her word.

The fact that Shura voluntarily returns to Riabinin in order to confess that she had told him two lies is additional evidence that she may indeed take steps to redeem herself. In hopes of connecting with Riabinin, a person who has shown her compassion and understanding, and demonstrating her intention to atone for her crimes, Shura had lied, telling him that she will quit prostitution and that her boyfriend was killed in Afghanistan. Such apparent confessions suggest that she confides in Riabinin completely. Her final phrase, “And the rest is all true,” leaves Riabinin with the assurance that Shura will be true to her word.

Riabinin appears in the film as a father figure (the Law, in the Lacanian sense) who attempts to bring order to a troubled country and, in the end, does not punish but instead understands his “child/country.” It is not by chance that Riabinin's sixteen-year-old daughter happens to be of nearly the same age as Shura. Riabinin's relationship with Shura, in which he assumes the fatherly role, undoubtedly helps him build rapport with his daughter and vice versa. The close-up of the money that Riabinin leaves on the night

table next to his sleeping daughter communicates the father's fear of her following in Shura's footsteps in pursuit of easy money that will allow her to purchase the contemporary imported clothes she is so eager to buy.

While Riabinin emerges as the Father/the Law within the symbolic framework of the "father-daughter" relationship, the troublesome daughter (Shura) fulfills the metaphorical function of the country gripped by national turmoil during the transitional period of Perestroika. When discussing female protagonists objectified by vile males in films produced in the early 1990s, Attwood concludes that a woman is often depicted as "a metaphor not for the motherland but the Soviet State and its distorted values" ("Sex and the Cinema" 70).

On the whole, both Todorovskii's and Ashkenazi's films portray the tragic female figures of Tania and Shura as a twofold metaphor. In addition to their symbolic embodiment of the country, the two women can be also identified (following Goscilo's hypothesis discussed above) with womanhood troped through the image of the prostitute, who, though endowed with virtues, overall emerges as a "commodity" for male consumers. While women portrayed as mere sexual objects contribute(s) to their overall degraded representation, it also reveals the depressing reality that limits women's choices and forces them into selling their bodies as the only alternative to survive in a society in which a pragmatic approach to life obliterates moral reasoning.

Yet, as opposed to the fatal *dénouement* in *Intergirl*, the mutual understanding and trust that Riabinin and Shura achieve towards the end infuses the finale with some

optimism about the possibility of harmony between the State and its people, especially the younger generation, which comes into a confrontation with the authorities due to its disillusionment with the formal ideological discourse and its strong denouncement of it. Cinematically, this idea is reinforced through the juxtaposition of the two views of a bridge, the symbolic meaning of which in some cultures denotes such notions as “life,” “hope for a better life,” and “faith.” The opening shot of a bridge is accompanied by somber music and followed by the view of a dark tunnel into which the camera takes the viewer, suggesting a thorny life’s journey. In juxtaposition, the final shot of the bridge, full of light and accompanied by Stevie Wonder’s romantic song, “I just called to say I love you,” envisions a more optimistic finale.

### **Beyond Reconciliation: There Are Daughters and Then There Are Daughters**

As in Ashkenazi’s *Criminal Talent*, the theme of problematic youth is the central motif in Pichul’s *Little Vera*. The film portrays the bleak reality of an industrial town, bringing to the fore the far-from-ideal life of an ordinary working class family. The opening scene takes us from a panoramic view of the town to an apartment where we witness a family conflict, which we later find out is a routine event in the family’s life. The father, Kolia, who works as a truck driver and the mother, Rita, who works as a dispatcher at a clothing factory, are scolding their daughter, Vera, for not even attempting to choose a career what she plans to do after she finishes high school. The episode of the family fight (and all other scenes of conflict) is complemented with numerous extended

panning shots of pickled vegetables sitting on the kitchen window sill, the shabbiness of the apartment, and its confined space – all of these accentuate the monotonous life of the dwellers, as well as the “cramped” reality in which they are trapped.

Vera is a rebellious teenager beyond anyone’s control in the family. Her troublesome behavior is reflected in her flashy appearance: dyed hair, heavy make-up, mini-skirt, and massive jewelry. Vera is obviously bored with both domestic life and school. Nothing sparks her interest. Her typical disposition and behavior are generally marked by indifference and boredom. Interestingly, the first time Vera appears on screen, she is dressed in a robe that has a big hole on its backside. Noticeably, the camera lingers on such a (trivial at first glance) detail, which is actually another manifestation of Vera’s rebelliousness against the authority of her parents as well as another indication of her lack of concern for the trivial life she has.

The failure of the parents to communicate with their daughter vastly aggravates the tension within the family. Throughout the film, all dialogues between the mother and the daughter are devoid of any direct eye contact. At the same time, the mother’s obvious reluctance to understand her daughter when the girl attempts to share her life dilemmas indicates the absence of a true mother-daughter bond, an absence one may identify not only with the typical generational conflict, but also with the overall disharmony that prevailed in the country during the era of Perestroika. In Vera’s relationship with the father, she seems to be more of a mother for him than a daughter. This mother role is



demonstrated in the scene in which Vera consoles him when he complains about being neglected by his own family, puts him to bed when he is drunk, and tucks him in like a child.

Having no authority over their daughter, the parents constantly turn to their older son, Viktor, for help in controlling Vera. While the parents are proud of Viktor's professional success and his ideal family life, it appears that his marriage is actually on the edge of falling apart. His profession of doctor seems to be emblematic. The parents believe that he is the only one Vera will listen to, whilst his "treatment" proves ineffectual. The scene in which Viktor monotonously lectures Vera while avoiding any eye contact with her denotes the superficiality of the whole situation. The camera cuts to a medium shot of Vera, who is not even trying to mask her cynicism about everything she hears. A moment later, she bursts into laughter and leaves everyone with the following commentary, "He doesn't believe in what he's saying! Neither do you!"<sup>50</sup>

The emotional tension in the family escalates over Vera's affair with a good-looking student, Sergei, who comes from a different background. His parents live abroad (in Mongolia) and he spends a lot of time reading books – "doing nothing" in Kolia's understanding. Yet, Sergei has one thing in common with Vera: he has no ambitions and is uncertain which path to choose in the future (Beumers 206).

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<sup>50</sup>“Он сам не верит в то, что говорит! И вы не верите!”

The irreconcilable antagonism between Vera's family and Sergei leads to a violent dénouement: Sergei is stabbed by Vera's father at a birthday party. Consequently, Vera is torn between the two men – she loves the man who might eventually cause her father's imprisonment. To convince Vera to persuade Sergei to drop the charges against her father, the family organizes a picnic. A long shot of the entire family conveys a feeling of heavy tension hanging in the air while they are silently preparing for lunch on the beach. The mise-en-scène suggests the idea of strong disharmony in the relationship between Vera and the rest of her family. Situated by herself closer to the right edge of the frame, Vera appears estranged from her parents and her brother, who are grouped together and positioned with their backs towards her, signifying their disapproval and disappointment of Vera's siding with Sergei.



Figure 23. Pichul's *Little Vera*

Disappointingly, instead of the anticipated compromise, another (even more dramatic) family quarrel breaks out. The undesired truth is spoken by Vera's mother, "I never wanted to have you, anyway."<sup>51</sup> Instead of interceding in the feud, Viktor actually intensifies the tension by revealing another bitter fact – the only reason Vera's parents kept her was to receive a larger apartment. A long shot depicts Vera running away from

<sup>51</sup>“Я тебя и рожать-то не хотела!”

the family while none of them tries to stop her. The family's attitude towards Vera strikes one with its unresponsiveness: Kolia and Viktor go for a swim, as if nothing has happened, while the mother remains busy preparing lunch. Whereas virtually the entire family turns its back on Vera, the father is the only one who breaks the aura of coldness by rushing after his daughter in order to console her. The following long shot shows Kolia affectionately embracing Vera who is crying on his shoulder. The scene reveals the Electra complex<sup>52</sup> by suggesting a stronger father-daughter bond than the bond between the mother and daughter. Brashinsky makes a similar observation, though on a broader scale, when commenting on the framework of the film's story-telling, "the raw edges of Little Vera's narrative are those of an Oedipal and patriarchal system (political, economic, cultural) of signification and representation that are showing serious signs of disruption and change" (112).

As nearly the entire family comes into conflict with Vera, she suffers a nervous breakdown, and at the emotional climax Vera attempts to kill herself. Depicted in a low angle medium shot that is indicative of her determination to commit suicide, Vera swallows a bottleful of pills and chases them down with alcohol. The following medium shot shows Vera lying on the floor, holding to her chest a sparkler and a picture of herself as a child. The obliqueness of the frame conveys Vera's condition of despair, extreme emotion, as well as her highly-perplexed state of mind. While the picture of little Vera pertains to the title – the time of Vera acting like a little girl is over – it also conveys a

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<sup>52</sup>The Electra complex was theorized by Sigmund Freud's student-collaborator Carl Jung, who proposed that girls experience desire for their fathers and aggression towards their mothers.

sense of discontent brought on by the unrealized hopes and dreams that Vera (and thus the younger generation in general) possibly had when she was much younger.

Fortunately, Sergei and Viktor appear in time to save Vera. As Brashinsky stresses, unlike in *Intergirl*, *Little Vera* avoids the presentation of woman as victim (119). I also agree entirely with the scholar's interpretation of the ending, which strikes one with its "unfinalizedness": the father collapses from a heart attack, and whether he survives or not remains unknown; Vera's life together with Sergei is shrouded in uncertainty; and the mother has no part whatsoever in this finale (Brashinsky 115). Borenstein offers the same reading of the ending, emphasizing the absence of any resolution to the plot, which totally lacks a "sympathetic character" (*Overkill* 15). In contrast, some other film critics, for example Gillespie, believe that the film actually ends on a positive note. The scholar writes, "In the end she [Vera] stays with her family, grudgingly aware that only love and forgiveness can lead to a better life – at home" (Gillespie 98).

I do not view the finale as optimistically. Instead, I support Brashinsky's point of view that the film conveys the "no win" mood of many Soviet youth during Perestroika, a view that is congruent with Beumer's reading of *Little Vera*, "The Soviet way of life has destroyed the capacity for happiness, in the old and the younger generation" (207). In support of the argument above, it should be pointed out that Vera's name (which is the Russian word for "faith") communicates the overall message of the film: the inhabitants are trapped in a dreary reality with "little faith" in a better life. The essential characteristics of Vera's character, such as cynicism and apathy towards everything, communicate a strong rejection of everything Soviet people had, while having,

regrettably, no alternative for the future. The closing panning shot of the town takes us back to the very beginning of the film, suggesting no escape from this circular depressing reality.

Among all the films discussed in this chapter, Michail Tumanishvili's *Avariia – doch' menta* [Avariia<sup>53</sup> – A Cop's Daughter] (1989) features the strongest denouncement of the former Soviet doctrine and reveals its past fallacies in their most rigid form. The film dwells particularly upon the opposition between official authority and *neformaly*,<sup>54</sup> wherein intense verbal conflicts escalate, at times, into open physical confrontations.

The opening oblique shot of a militia car, depicted in a right-to-left movement<sup>55</sup> (normally used to create a feeling of tension) and accompanied by the sound image of a siren, foreshadows a forthcoming drama. The next shot exposes a brutal skirmish between militia forces and a group of *neformaly*. The main female character, a high school student named Valeriia, and her father, Aleksei Nikolaev, who works as a cop, appear in the two opposing parties. As becomes apparent from the following scene, Nikolaev keeps finding ways to pull his daughter routinely out of the militia station.

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<sup>53</sup> "Avariia" in Russian means "crash/collision".

<sup>54</sup> *Neformaly* – the name of the representatives of sub-cultural informal youth groups that emerged in the second half of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, in opposition to such official organizations as the Communist Party, Komsomol, etc.

<sup>55</sup> *The left-to-right* direction of sequences of shots feels more comfortable for the viewer since most people read from left to right. Therefore, this pattern of movement is more easily perceived psychologically. Depending on the context, left-to-right movement may convey a sense of ease or power. In contrast, the reversed direction (*right-to-left* movement) produces the opposite effect(s) of weakness, tension, or struggle.

Nicknamed “Crash” (Avariia), Valeriia carries herself accordingly. Her rebellious character is manifested in her physical representation: excessive make-up, bouffant hair, and *neformaly* outfit. Her provocative behavior, combined with her eagerness to challenge everything and everyone, results in drastic consequences – she is gang-raped. Her life’s motto, “I like everything that you don’t!” leads to dissonance in her relationship with virtually everyone around her and especially with her family.

As opposed to Vera’s apathy towards everything (*Little Vera*), Avariia’s character is marked by strong resentment, along with a predisposition for hurting people’s feelings. In one of the family dinner scenes, Avariia voices her repugnance toward her grandfather for his consumerism, mainly his obsession with food stamps and discounted items for war veterans. Her statement, “I wouldn’t go with you on a recon mission!..You’d sell out!”<sup>56</sup> is followed by accusations of such crimes as shooting innocent people and impoverishing the country during the



Figure 24. Tumanishvili’s *Avariia* – A Cop’s

Stalinist era. The alternation between high angle long shots of Avariia railing against her grandfather and high angle medium shots of the latter trying to refute the abuse, captures the generational conflict, whereby the young generation denounces the former ideological regime and its methods in building “the bright future” of the country.

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<sup>56</sup>“Я бы с тобой в разведку не пошла!.. продал бы!”

The scene discussed above urges the question: Why does the definitive conflict occur not between the parents and the daughter, but between the grandfather and the granddaughter? One may speculate about “the temporal breach” which, I believe, increasingly aggravates the confrontation between the two most distant generations. Aleksei, who happens to be a part of the “old” ideological system and whose subjectivity was shaped by it, is more perceptive of the missteps his father had made in the past. In contrast, Avariia adopts a highly judgmental attitude toward her grandfather because she cannot relate her life experience to the former society’s reality. The *mise-en-scène* masterfully conveys the idea of Aleksei remaining neutral in the dispute by positioning him physically between his daughter and the grandfather. The three-quarter profile shot of Aleksei communicates his reluctance to choose a side, which is reinforced by his message to Avariia, “You must understand that you know this now! No one knew anything about it then!”<sup>57</sup> This statement, along with the entire scene, instantly evokes Tengiz Abuladze’s *Pokaianie* [Repentance] (1987) and other films of the Perestroika era that bring to the fore one of the major themes in the cinema of this period –generational roles, the collision of generational values, and generational confrontations over the (grand) fathers’ mistakes in the past, along with their offspring’s ability or inability to understand and possibly to forgive them.

Avariia’s relationship with her mother appears no less difficult. As a matter of fact, all mother-daughter interactions (primarily limited to family arguments) end either with Avariia’s running away from home or, in the worst case, her suicide attempt. The

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<sup>57</sup>“Ты пойми, это ты сейчас знаешь! А раньше этого не знал никто!”

most distinctive trait of Avariia's mother's is self-centeredness, which is most evident in the scene in which the family deals with Valeriia's post-traumatic shock after being gang-raped. As Avariia locks herself in her room, the camera cuts to a long shot of the mother caught up in hysteria and mourning the family's reputation and sympathizing with no one but herself, "Why me?"<sup>58</sup> Such a representation of the mother, along with other maternal figures in films of the Perestroika era, dispels the myth of the self-sacrificial mother image as portrayed on screen earlier, as, for example, in the cinema of the Thaw.

Moreover, similarly to *Little Vera*, the film dwells on the Oedipal complex signified by a strong father-daughter bond. When suffering a total physical and mental breakdown, Avariia opens the door to no one but her father. The scene that depicts Valeriia embracing her father and crying on his shoulder indicates that he is the only one to whom she can open her heart.



Figure 25. Tumanishvili's *Avariia* – A Cop's Daughter

Motivated by revenge, Aleksei rushes to the rapists' home.

When showing the father standing in the middle of the empty apartment, the director conveys the shift in Aleksei's state of mind. In one continuous panning take the camera reveals the transition in the father's feelings from despair and helplessness, suggested in

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<sup>58</sup>“Почему это всё на меня?”



the extreme high angle medium shot, to rage and a determination to avenge his daughter's rape, which are suggested in the low angle shot of Aleksei's resolute face.

Noteworthy, *Avariia – A Cop's Daughter* employs the phenomenon of rape as a manifestation of a metaphor for perceived masculine crisis. Attwood comments on the fact that, more than in any earlier period, Russian films made in the 1990s portray women being raped. According to Attwood, this tendency was brought about by two major factors that affected gender dynamics and “posed a threat” to Soviet/Russian manhood (“Sex and Cinema” 85): women's masculinization that had begun in the 1970s, and women's emancipation in evidence two decades later.

Tumanishvili's film brings to the fore of the rape the physical aspect of violence that appears to be a disturbingly common occurrence in the chaotic reality of Perestroika, as it is portrayed in *chernukha* films.

The fact that the inept and corrupted system fails to track down criminals like *Avariia's* rapists explains why Nikolaev resorts to a rather radical punishment of the abusive young males and renders justice on his own.



Figure 26. Tumanishvili's *Avariia – A Cop's Daughter*

The final car chase scene depicts Aleksei in pursuit of the rapists. Eventually, he rams his vehicle into the perpetrators', resulting in the death of the entire gang. The final scene delivers a sad

resolution: the last freeze medium shot of Aleksei clearly indicates his arrest. Depicted in slow motion, Avariia runs towards her father while screaming, “Forgive me, Daddy!” This is the first time Avariia addresses her father affectionately. Significantly, the viewer can read Avariia’s lips, but dramatic music drowns out her voice – it is too late to change anything, and her begging for forgiveness is “voiceless.” Ironically, while the tragedy reconciles the father and the daughter, it also leads to Nikolaev’s consequent incarceration. The final separation, however, is a physical, rather than emotional, one.

Both *Avariia* and *Little Vera* display a strong father-daughter bond, as compared to a rather hostile relationship between a daughter and a mother, a bond devoid of any harmony. While one may argue that both films reveal the Oedipal complex, I also believe that the absence (in both *Avariia* and *Little Vera*) of an authoritative Father-figure and the dysfunctional structure of the two families are manifestations of an unstable patriarchal structure whose very foundation was being shaken in a country experiencing the demise of the entire Soviet system, a crisis of general confusion and political and economic instability.

Though Nikolaev (a policeman) and Kolia (a truck driver) represent two different backgrounds, both fail similarly in their daughters’ upbringing. Whereas both films address the matter of a “generational gap,” the nature of the two conflicts is somewhat different. *Little Vera* delves into the quandary of the universal conflict between “fathers and sons.” The conflict, in this case, is situated in the difficulties of Perestroika and manifested principally through the disconnect between the two generations. *Avariia* comes laden with explicit ideological messages, including the denunciation of Soviet

dogma and the condemnation of this dogma's "old ways" of building socialism. The clash is laid out clearly by Avariia in her argument with her grandfather. Comparing the two films, it is clear that *Avariia* offers a more optimistic ending, which depicts the daughter and the father finally reconciling. Not only does this reconciliation signify a recognition of the mistakes of both generations, it also opens up the possibility of coexistence and further dialogue between the two generations.

Aleksei Korenev's *Akseleratka* [Early Developer] (1987) is a small ray of light in the otherwise gloomy portrayal of the younger generation in the cinema of Perestroika. In contrast to the pessimism, rebelliousness, and deep-seated defiance toward any authority demonstrated by young female protagonists of this period, the main female character in *Early Developer*, Aniuta, exudes optimism, vitality, and strength of spirit.

Notably, the physical presentation of Aniuta drastically differs from those heroines analyzed earlier who undertake "masculine" occupations (Petrukhina, Vavilova, etc.) and whose masculinization appears as an essential attribute of their success in professional life. In contrast, Aniuta's appearance positively screams her "femininity": she wears makeup, her hair is styled, and her clothes are trendy – all of these are hardly in tune with her lifelong dream of becoming a member of the militia, with the express purpose of improving society by eradicating crime.

Having finished high school, Aniuta wants to join the criminal investigation department as an intern. Regrettably, even her extraordinary skills in skydiving, driving,

swimming, skiing, shooting weapons, and proficiency in several languages are not enough to convince the investigation department head, Major Tanin, to accept her application.

The plotline is straightforward: in an attempt to help an insurance company agent (Kuzia) find customers, Aniuta encounters a criminal group who earn their illegal profits in a clever twofold scheme; they stage carjackings in order to receive insurance money and sell the cars afterwards to a third party. Consequently, Aniuta initiates her own investigation and, together with Kuzia, sets out to search for one of the criminals, Vovchik, who is delivering a stolen car to the Crimea.

In order to strike up an acquaintance with Vovchik, Aniuta employs her sexuality. In the seduction scene, which takes place in a restaurant, Aniuta uses her “feminine” wiles on Vovchik, donning an off-the-shoulder mini-dress and



Figure 27. Korenev's *Early Developer*

bright makeup. In response to Aniuta's quite aggressive invitation to dance, the criminal invites her to join him on his road trip to the Crimea. In short, Aniuta's “femininity” and sexuality allow her to infiltrate the criminal group.

Endowed with and empowered by sexual power, outstanding intellect, and superior physical skills, Aniuta represents an entirely new type of female character in Russian cinema. While the image of Aniuta is evocative of a contemporary version of the femme fatale archetype, she can hardly be considered such. In her findings on the changes in the cinematic femme fatale archetype over time, Laura Connett concludes that the contemporary heroine uses not only her sex appeal, but also her intellect and sometimes even her physical power to achieve her goal, as opposed to the heroine of the 1940s and 1950s, whose sexual empowerment is limited to her stunning appearance, which affects men's actions in some way (2). In contrast to Connett's contemporary femme fatale type, Aniuta emerges as the "fusion" of both traditionally "masculine" traits and a truly "feminine" appearance, a blend that, I believe, seems to be the most decisive factor in preventing this type of heroine from gaining popularity in the cinema of Perestroika and afterward. Additionally, Aniuta's sexuality does not fit well into the pattern of the binary function of the femme fatale's sexuality, which, as Connett observes (citing Mulvey's theory of "visual pleasure"), is utilized for the heroine's goal fulfillment, while also contributing to her representation as an object for the "male gaze" (2). Aniuta's sexuality is primarily wielded as a powerful tool for captivating the criminal in order to trap him, while, under different circumstances, this allure gives way to rather impulsive behavior when Aniuta, more often than not, acts as an immature girl, rather than as a seductive woman. Especially when combined with such features as intelligence and physical power (supposedly attributes of male culture from a traditional

gender perspective), Aniuta's sexuality positions her as more than a "passive recipient of male desire," as the femme fatale type is often labeled by feminist film critics (Kaplan, "Is the Gaze Male" 126).

One could argue that Aniuta may be considered an example of strong female screen images, since she constantly appears, to use Kaplan's terms, as "the initiator of the action" (129). When viewing Aniuta as an initiator, it is crucial to analyze how Aniuta's image is juxtaposed with the portrayal of her investigation partner, the insurance company agent Kuzia, who loses his heart to Aniuta, but, due to his lack of physical power, his irresoluteness, and overall "soft" nature, ends up being only an obstacle to her adventurous chase of the criminals. It is noteworthy that, while their "duet" reveals polar opposite physical representations of Aniuta and Kuzia, it also constitutes a gender inversion, in which Aniuta takes on the "masculine" roles, while scrawny and timid Kuzia emerges as highly "feminized." As Kaplan observes, when a woman assumes a "masculine" role, she loses such traditionally "feminine" characteristics as "kindness, humaneness, motherliness," and, consequently, develops such "masculine" traits as being "cold, driving, ambitious, and manipulating" (129). Even though this appears to be true to some extent in Aniuta's character, considering the film and Aniuta's part as a whole, she can hardly be classified as a woman who holds the film's action: her initiative is constantly limited and controlled by a male figure – directly by Major Tanin or indirectly by Kuzia's intervention in Aniuta's investigation.

Aniuta wants to be a superhero, a new type of female protagonist that has never appeared in Russia cinema, but that can be found in Western cinema. If judged by the

finale, the (male) director deprives his female protagonist of the chance to be a superwoman. Her dual power of “masculine” (superior physical skills) and “feminine” (sexuality) natures must be “neutralized,” which the director accomplishes in two ways. First, the scene in which Aniuta and Filemon’s (all male) bodyguards pummel each other produces a strong comic effect: she is literally subdued and tied up by the gang. Secondly, Aniuta fails to solve the criminal case on her own. When Major Tanin and his squad arrest the entire criminal group, they also rescue Aniuta. A medium front shot displays Aniuta’s realization that she made no contribution to the militia’s efforts to capture the mob, which leads to her agonized look in the medium front shot. She says with genuine regret, “So you did it all by yourselves.”<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, the dénouement reinstates the patriarchal authority by proposing that only professionally-trained militiamen are capable of solving crime, while a woman, in fact, nearly ruined their well-planned operation.

The ending serves as a contrast to the beginning: yet again Aniuta begs Tanin to give her a chance to work as a criminal investigator, but this time, overpowered by Aniuta’s persistence and commitment to her dream, he hires her as an intern. Although the film offers some compromise by showing that Aniuta realizes her dream, it also reveals a fundamental gender discrepancy: a woman, even with exceptional (traditionally “masculine”) physical skills and intellect, has to beg for acceptance into “the world of

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<sup>59</sup>“Значит вы всё сделали сами.”

male professions.” In a certain way, the film suggests that Aniuta needs a Father-figure who can accept her, protect her, and, most importantly, grant her the chance to be professionally accomplished in a milieu of patriarchal dominance.

As opposed to *Little Vera* and *Avariia*, *Early Developer* breaks with the tradition of strong negativism in the representation of the young Soviet heroine. While the characters of Vera and Avariia convey repressed images of young women, who, for various reasons, cannot live a life of self-realization, Aniuta is a woman of action whose insatiable craving to pursue her dream career pays off in the end. In contrast to Pichul and Tumanishvili, who offer no positive female figures, Korenev delivers a quite inspiring female protagonist, who, disappointingly, is also marginalized because of the director’s traditional perception of the issue of gender.

Yet, one should credit Korenev with advancing the representation of women by taking an entirely different approach of depicting a woman striving for equality with men in the professional sphere. Aniuta’s “feminize”d portrayal undermines the entire conception of the phenomenon of masculinization as a crucial criterion for a female protagonist to be recognized and to succeed in a system with deeply-held patriarchal convictions.

### **Unhappy and Gullible: Portrayal of the Single Woman in Perestroika Films**

Instead of professional achievements, a satisfying personal life is the ultimate goal for the major female character in Krishtofovich’s *Odinokaia zhenshina zhelaet poznamomits’ia* [A Lonely Woman Looking for a Life Companion] (1987). *A Lonely*



*Woman* is the most remarkable Perestroika film for its projection of the drama and feelings of a single woman – another female type discussed below. The film reveals one episode from the life of a middle-aged Soviet woman, Klavdiia Petrovna, who, despite her successful career and stable financial status, goes through intense misery as a result of her loneliness.

The character of Klavdiia evolves from the “successful, but unhappy” prototype represented by Katia Tikhomirova in Menshov’s *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*. While Katia manages to build a brilliant career, moving up from a factory worker to a general manager, she cries herself to sleep under the pressure of her unattached state. Only upon the appearance of the nearly perfect Gosha in Katia’s life does she finally achieve complete happiness. While advancing the “woman question” by delivering a progressive portrayal of a woman successful in both social and domestic domains, Men’shov, nevertheless, reinforces the idea of patriarchal supremacy through Katia’s willingness to agree to Gosha’s ultimatum, “I’ll always make decisions about everything on the simple basis of being a man.”<sup>60</sup>

The fundamental similarity between the characters of Katia and Klavdiia lies in the fact that they opt for the status of single rather than accept undesirable suitor(s). While Katia is lucky to meet the ideal Gosha, Klavdiia has never been given such a chance. She works as a tailoress, who, ironically, fails to “tailor” her own life. Klavdiia’s anguish over her unrealized personal life is conveyed in the opening scene through a

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<sup>60</sup>“Всё и всегда я буду решать сам на том простом основании, что я мужчина.”

gloomy atmosphere, manifested in pouring rain (clearly symbolic of her “crying” soul) and dark, deserted streets (suggestive of her singleness), while she is posting ads in search of a life companion.

In response to the personal ad, Klavdiia has to deal with a homeless drunkard, Valentin, who shows up at her door the same night. He happens to be a former circus acrobat who now lives solely on his disability pension. Ironically, his name evokes Saint Valentine,<sup>61</sup> a possible suggestion that he is the one who might give Klavdiia the love she is so desperately seeking. Nevertheless, the moment Klavdiia sees Valentin, she rejects him as an unsuitable match for her.

Eventually, either out of despair or a strong feeling of compassion, Klavdiia becomes receptive to Valentin, in spite of the disapproval of her coworkers and friends who regard him as a “social misfit.”<sup>62</sup> Yet, Klavdiia responds to all of them that “a drunkard is also a person.” Undoubtedly, one thing brings them together – both of them are very lonely, and no one needs them. One day, Klavdiia even buys new clothes for Valentin and invites him to stay over and sleep in her kitchen.

In the scene that follows, a long shot reveals them walking together as a couple. Obviously, Valentin walking her to work makes Klavdiia feel awkward, if not embarrassed, since she asks him not to escort her to the point where her coworkers can see them together. Not surprisingly, Klavdiia’s colleagues (whose ideological upbringing

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<sup>61</sup> Saint Valentine’s Day was a well-known holiday in Russia in the late 1980s and, though it is not an official holiday, it has been widely celebrated by Russians since the early 1990s.

<sup>62</sup> “отброс общества”

is still intact during the early years of Perestroika) refuse to recognize this relationship. Klavdiia's supervisor scolds her severely for being involved with a man with a shady reputation and, at the same time, accentuates the fact that Klavdiia's mature age and status as a single woman are no excuse for disgracing herself and the collective in which she works.

Under the pressure of public condemnation and her own conviction that she deserves a better suitor, the relationship between Klavdiia and Valentin takes on an 'on-and-off' pattern. Each time Klavdiia's personal drama reaches its peak, she acts graciously towards Valentin. In a scene in which several pioneers visit Klavdiia in order to offer their help, Klavdiia experiences an emotional breakdown. Having read her personal ad, the pioneers decided that Klavdiia meets the criteria for people they look after: "We should help sick and unhappy people... You're unhappy!" The camera cuts to Klavdiia, exposing her hysterical laughter at finding herself in the position of a senior citizen.<sup>63</sup> The director turns to a slightly high angle medium shot to enhance the sense of Klavdiia's sorrow and humiliation.



Figure 28. Krishtofovich's *A Lonely Woman Looking for a Life Companion*

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<sup>63</sup> During the Soviet era, one of the functions performed by the pioneer organizations was taking care of old people (e.g. pioneers helped them with domestic chores, shopping, etc.)

While pitying herself, Klavdiia is reluctant and, in fact, even incapable, of saving Valentin, who hopes for nothing but the understanding of a person who might be as unhappy as he is. In the end, Klavdiia does not save anyone; instead, she wants to be saved. And yet, the question arises: Would Klavdiia's acceptance of Valentin save not only him but both of them? We may only speculate why Klavdiia ends up single and lonely – just as we see her at the beginning of the film.

I am inclined to read Klavdiia's rejection of Valentin not only as her refusal to be subjugated by the status of a single woman, but also as the way the director solves a woman's dilemma of accepting unworthy suitors: she would rather choose an undesirable man over singlehood – the core issue, as discussed above, in the representation of the “single woman” type in the cinema of the Thaw. I believe that Klavdiia's recognition of her compatibility with



Figure 29. Krishtofovich's *A Lonely Woman Looking for a Life Companion*

Valentin, of which we see no evidence, would be a driving force in overcoming any social pressure that condemns any relationship with such a “social misfit” as Valentin.

In the final scene, Klavdiia turns her head towards the camera and stares at it directly – the first eye contact she establishes with the viewer. Her watery eyes are full of sadness and hold no hope for a happier life. Notably, the director rarely uses close-up shots of Klavdiia, but makes use of them with great effect when conveying her feelings of

confusion and misery. However, Brashinsky comments on the film's "avoidance of an easy romantic comic ending, in which the woman wins all" (124). The ending is quite predictable within the framework of Perestroika filmmaking: rejection of the former system and values, absolute despair, and no belief and/or alternative in the future.

Despite the failure of Klavdiia's personal life, she is still presented as a strong heroine, at least from the director's perspective. "You are a true heroine!" proclaims Klavdiia's female neighbor once she finds out about the ads that Klavdiia has posted. In the final scene, the neighbor follows suit by posting her own personal ads – an action that represents the reoccurring motive of a single woman looking for a life companion.

The film's overall message falls in line with the traditional understanding of gender dynamics: firstly, a woman's life is supposedly wholly defined by a man's presence in it; secondly, professional success presumably cannot solve the dilemma of a single woman, for it cannot fully compensate for her lack of family life. Even so, Krishtofovich avoids a portrayal of an entirely submissive woman and, in fact, dwells on the strength of Klavdiia's personality; she has enough courage to admit her personal unhappiness publicly and actively to seek a man, thus, assuming the active role in the active/passive gender paradigm.

When juxtaposed with the character of Klavdiia, who chooses the status of a single woman over life with a drunkard, the major female character, Aelita,<sup>64</sup> in Georgii Natanson's *Aelita, ne pristavai k muzhchinam!* [Aelita, Do Not Pester Men!] (1988) strikes the viewer with her ability and willingness to forgive her beloved man any transgressions, even a crime. At first glance, Aelita appears to be an ordinary middle-aged Soviet woman who works at a chemical plant, saves money all her life to buy a TV, and, most importantly, dreams of having a family some day. Nevertheless, as the film progresses, her character is distinguished by her exquisite nature, which is manifested through her invincible faith that one day she will find true love.

Such traits of Aelita's personality as her amorous nature and naiveté lead to the ongoing drama of her being deceived by every man she falls in love with: her boyfriend, Apukin, abandons her for a twenty-two-year-old girl; a swindler, Skameikin, who pretends to be a scientist and a general, sweeps Aelita off her feet with the single purpose of robbing her; and, a cardsharp, Fedia, who plays with Aelita's feelings in order to gain her trust and get hold of the way-bills necessary to steal a tanker filled with alcohol from the chemical plant where Aelita works.

Despite her bitter experience with men, Aelita does not abandon her quest for genuine love, which not only constitutes the meaning of her life, but also helps her to

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<sup>64</sup>The name is taken from Aleksei Tolstoy's novel *Aelita* (1923), also known as *Aelita: Queen of Mars*. The novel tells the story of a young man, Los' (Russian: Лось, literary Elk), traveling to Mars in a rocket ship, where he leads an uprising against the ruling group of Elders, with the support of Queen Aelita who has fallen in love with him after watching him through a telescope. Aelita is on a constant quest for genuine love, as is the heroine in *Aelita, Do Not Pester Men!*.

transcend the triviality of everyday life, “Falling in love raises me to heaven! When I fall in love, I become something special!”<sup>65</sup> Clearly, the film dwells on the subject of a woman’s sentimentality being purportedly the fundamental feature of her nature – a phenomenon of which all men in the film take advantage.

Ironically, Aelita hopes for reciprocal love, but she does not even like herself. Her perception of herself is composed of two incongruent sentiments: conspicuous self-depreciation and the ideal image of the actress she resembles and into whom she has always wanted to transform. Both roles are played by the same actress, Nataliia Gundareva, to produce a mirror effect, albeit between women of two opposite fates.



Figure 30. Natanson’s *Aelita, Do Not Pester Men!*

The very opening scene of the film establishes the idea that Aelita’s individuality is being suppressed by the image of the actress she impersonates. Such a portrayal suggests a lack in Aelita’s personality and conveys an overall impression of women (like Aelita) as being mocked. A front medium shot depicts Aelita with a poster of the actress she resembles. She assumes the actress’s pose and fixes her hair in the style of the actress – all of her actions show her to be merely an object of derision for her former

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<sup>65</sup>“Я когда влюбляюсь, будто бы в облаках хожу...Я когда влюблюсь, я какой-то необыкновенной становлюсь.”

lover Apukin. Furthermore, one of the following scenes depicts Aelita's fantasy in which her role and the actress's are reversed. The scene provides the viewer with Aelita's insight into what real happiness means: to be treated with courtesy by men who admire her. Interestingly, Aelita comments on the drama she reads in the eyes of the actress. Yet her infatuation with the actress is limited to the latter's glamorous outward appearance, which suggests the shallowness of Aelita's character. A series of long shots display the actress dressed all in black (a color symbolic of misfortune) as she watches Aelita dressed all in white (a color suggestive of purity, innocence, and wedding) and walking arm-in-arm with Skameikin.

Significantly, Aelita's individual story pertains to the dilemma of all single women, a dilemma conveyed in the scene of Aelita opening her heart to Skameikin when they happen to share the same compartment on a train. As the two walk through the corridor, Skameikin expresses his opinion regarding a woman's responsibilities, which are limited exclusively to the domestic sphere. The way he recites the domestic chores assigned solely to women shows that these are tasks presumably commonly accepted and their assignment to women is taken for granted by society:



*A wonderful woman has so many responsibilities! She has to give birth to a child, raise the child, provide for her family, cook, love her husband, and not love her husband. On Friday, she should hope that a new life will begin for her on Monday. Then she should hope and wait.*<sup>66</sup>

As anticipated, Aelita's response is in line with the main principles of the ideological upbringing of a Soviet woman (to be a good worker, wife, and mother): not only does she admire Skameikin's speech, she also displays signs of embarrassment for failing in every woman's alleged ultimate mission – motherhood. As she lowers her eyes in evident discomfort, she states, "How well you talk! It's a pity I don't have a child."<sup>67</sup>

Nearly everything in the scene advocates traditional gender roles. A case in point is the *mise-en-scène*, in which the dialogue between Skameikin and Aelita is set. The dialogue and the placement of the characters within the frame indicate the recognition of a woman's primary role in the domestic sphere: as Skameikin and Aelita are moving through the hall (evocative of the road of life), he remains behind Aelita the entire time he is enumerating women's household duties. While one could argue that the positioning of the two characters creates the effect of a woman emerging as a caregiver for a man, taking into account Aelita's bitter experience with men and the hint of cynicism in

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<sup>66</sup>“Сколько занятий у прекрасной женщины?! Она должна родить ребёнка, растить ребёнка, доставать, готовить, любить мужа, не любить мужа. Надеяться в пятницу, что в понедельник у неё начнётся новая жизнь. Потом надеяться и ждать.”

<sup>67</sup>“Как хорошо вы говорите! Жаль, что у меня нет ребёнка!”

Skameikin's voice, I believe that both characters are rather making a mockery of women's submissiveness and men's contentment as they follow the long-established responsibilities of the traditional gender role paradigm.

The film shows men's lives are driven by some social activities, while women's lives and their happiness are subject to a so-called innate mechanism propelled by such (supposedly inherent) instincts as motherly care, the need for a family, and making a home. Therefore, the film reinforces the idea of how crucial it is for a woman that all these supposedly natural feelings find realization in her life. Such a perspective on gender disposition ultimately allows one to essentialize motherhood and justify the assumption that the distribution of gender roles is biologically predetermined.

Unfortunately, Aelita's dream of creating a family remains nothing but a fantasy. She puts all her love and care into a red gardenia (obviously symbolic of love), which she acquires in order to ease her loneliness. The film ends with a close-up shot of the flower, which is depicted as the only life companion Aelita will ever have. The view of the gardenia is accompanied by the audio image of Aelita's voice as she reads her letter to the criminal Fedia, who is serving a sentence in prison. Thus, the ending is paradoxically both conclusive and unfinalized: though Aelita is still burdened with the status of a single woman, she cherishes the hope that one day her love will be reciprocated, in spite of all men's deceptions. As an exemplary carrier of traditional gender responsibilities, Aelita cannot acknowledge any disillusionment with the idea of ever finding personal happiness. Because she values the roles of mother and wife above all, such acknowledgment would

demean and demoralize her very existence. In the end, credulous Aelita decides to live in denial. Even betrayed, deluded, and derided by her criminal suitors, she still has something to live for.

Alternatively, one may view the finale in another light: the ending is suffused with a sarcasm that ridicules the gullibility of Aelita's bad choices in men, as well as her willingness to give a criminal who repeatedly tricked and manipulated her another chance. I believe that such a finale enhances the overall message behind Aelita's story: as much as blind faith may ultimately bring a woman long-awaited happiness, it may just as easily ruin her.

Ruben Muradian's *Odna na million* [One in a Million] (1992) delivers another portrayal of a single woman, Elena Nishcherina, who possesses the exceptional ability to "recognize" her "one in a million" love and keep these feelings alive for the rest of her life. The opening dolly shot of the city reveals a crowd of people rushing to their destinations – a perspective that suggests how challenging it is to find "the one" in this hectic world. As the hand-held camera takes the viewers inside the crowd, we assume Elena's point of view as she sees various faces while moving through the market. Suddenly, Elena is enraptured by one face and it takes only one look at a stranger, the celebrity race car driver Kuznetsov, for her to "recognize" him as her true love.

Henceforth, Elena disguises her feelings for Kuznetsov. Her love is beyond any analysis: she loves the image she encountered once but knows nothing about him besides the fact that he is a race car driver. Elena's one-way love strikes the viewer with its

selflessness: it gives her a reason to live, though she is afraid to seek any reciprocity from Kuznetsov for fear of being rejected and/or even worse of being derided, “I just need to know that he exists, walks, and breathes.”<sup>68</sup>

The sentimentality of Elena’s character stands in contrast to the emotional coldness of Kuznetsov, whose relationships with women are limited to one-night stands with prostitutes and whose mind and passion are entirely engrossed in car racing. Yet, the absence of any kind of judgment of Kuznetsov on Elena’s part indicates the unconditionality of her love. The scene in which Kuznetsov brings his dog, Filemon, into the veterinary clinic where Elena happens to work particularly highlights the disparity of their personalities. Having failed to find a sitter for Filemon during a car race, Kuznetsov comes to the heartbreaking decision to put the dog to sleep. A close up shot depicts Elena’s distress and, at the same time, curiosity as she watches Kuznetsov leaving the dog in the clinic backyard. Noticeably, in the portrayals of the two characters, the director resorts primarily to long shots in the depiction of Kuznetsov, concealing his feelings from the viewer, as opposed to recurring close-ups of Elena, which attach the viewer emotionally to the heroine.

The ice in Elena and Kuznetsov’s relationship is broken by misfortune: Kuznetsov has an accident during the race. Elena’s acts of showing Kuznetsov attention (sending him fruit and flowers) seem innocent at first, but evolve into a real obsession with him. Consequently, Kuznetsov turns to his psychiatrist friend Komarov for help,

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<sup>68</sup>“Мне нужно знать, что он где-то есть, ходит, дышит...”

hoping that the training of a psychiatrist will be an advantage in resolving the situation. Elena's heart-to-heart talk with Komarov encourages Elena to confess her love to Kuznetsov, which ultimately leads to a new, even more painful drama: she suffers a nervous breakdown when she sees her dearly loved man in the arms of another woman (Komarov's girlfriend) and mistakes her for his girlfriend.

As Elena becomes Komarov's patient, his diagnosis is simple and shocking – Elena suffers from genuine love – the kind of love that everyone talks about, but not everyone (as Komarov observes) is blessed to find. While one may acknowledge that only a woman is capable of experiencing genuine love, an ability that all men in the film are deprived of, it should also be recognized that the director reinforces the idea that sentimentality is an inherent characteristic of a woman's nature. Such an assumption makes one believe that the distribution of traditional gender roles stems from the stereotypical conduct of both sexes based on encoded traits distinctive to each gender.

In order to elaborate on the statement above, I would like to refer to a survey conducted by Goscilo in Moscow and Leningrad in 1988 and 1990 on the subject of what constitutes femininity. According to the survey results, women consider such features as “gentleness, sensitivity, maternal instincts, and the capacity to love” to be particularly “feminine” attributes (Goscilo, *Dexehing Sex* 10). In addition, nearly all women opposed the scholar's idea that the traits mentioned above are not “necessarily inborn traits” but rather social constructs (Goscilo, *Dexehing Sex* 10). The film, however, exaggerates these traits to the point of ridiculing a woman's nature.

Furthermore, the film imposes the idea that a woman's love for a man purportedly constitutes the essence of her existence. While unreciprocated love brings Elena emotional torment, taking Kuznetsov out of her life would actually destroy her. The scene in which Komarov offers Elena some medicine that would forever erase all her memories of Kuznetsov demonstrates Elena's conundrum. The camera cuts from a close-up of the pills to a reaction shot of Elena, who cringes hysterically, "Don't you understand?! It's not he who'll die! It's me!"<sup>69</sup>

Elena's admiration for Kuznetsov borders on sick worship, which is masterfully conveyed by the director in the scene of Elena's first meeting with Kuznetsov when he comes to visit her in the clinic. A profile medium shot reveals the two of them alone, instilling a sense of the first interaction between Elena and Kuznetsov and, at the same time, turning the viewer into merely an observer. For Elena, the moment that Kuznetsov gives her flowers, reality and dream come together, which affects her to such an extent that she kneels in front of him and kisses his hands.

Surprisingly, Kuznetsov realizes that he needs Elena as much as she needs him. From this point, the depiction of Kuznetsov shifts from mostly long shots to numerous close-ups that linger on his budding feelings for Elena as he learns to appreciate genuine love and recognizes in her the woman who actually has that feeling for him.

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<sup>69</sup>“Неужели вы не понимаете? Это не его не будет! Это меня не будет!”

An aura of great delight pervades the ending – love triumphs in Elena and Kuznetsov's relationship. The final scene depicts them sitting on two different benches, while the dog, who clearly functions as a liaison between Elena and Kuznetsov, runs back and forth between his two masters. The last shot of Kuznetsov joining Elena alludes to their future life together. This odd ending does not, however, change the overall portrayal of women as naïve. The ending might only justify adding this film to others with idealized images of the woman in Russian culture as discussed by Heldt.

In conclusion, I believe that my analysis of Elena's character suggests two contradictory interpretations: while advocates for traditional gender disposition could view her as a role model for women who prioritize family above all and whose persistence (even when bordering on obsession) and dedication to the men they love succeed in bringing them together, feminists would condemn the heroine's emotional and physical dependence on a man who is far from ideal. The film ridicules women's naiveté and sentimental obsessions, but offers a surprising twist as if to redeem the loving, albeit gullible, nature of the heroine.

While no one disputes the value of Elena's character for promoting such virtues as commitment to true love, life lived in accordance with moral principles, and compassion (virtues that were effaced by the increasing consumerism of Perestroika), even such a favorable representation of the heroine appears rather biased when acknowledging that the realization of Elena's essence is limited exclusively to her personal life. On the whole, *One in a Million* pursues no goal to advance the issue of enhancing women's status either in family or society. Instead, the film evokes and

reinstates the idealized image of a Soviet woman molded and promulgated by official discourse – a fantastic idea for which all women were expected to strive: a good mother, a good wife, and a good worker. The integrity of this image had been shattered by women becoming more independent from men through gaining more financial and personal independence in the wake of Perestroika. Thus, I believe that, on the one hand, Marudian's film is filled with a sense of nostalgia for the iconic image of a Soviet woman, while, on the other hand, it is a counter reaction to the social phenomenon of women becoming more self-sufficient during Perestroika and post-Soviet time.

### **Assuming the Role of the Father: The Image of Authoritative Mother in the Cinema of Perestroika**

Krishtofovich's *Adam's Rib*, an adaptation of Anatolii Kurchatkin novella *House of Women* [Babii Dom] (1986), is another film that portrays the miserable existence of women who are desperate to find men, but are unable to build meaningful relationships with them. *Adam's Rib* offers the viewer insight into the lives of three generations of women within one family. Nina, a fifty-year-old twice divorced woman, lives in a cramped Moscow apartment with her paralyzed mother and two daughters, Lida and Nastia, who were fathered by Nina's two husbands. The family is trapped in a daily routine that upends their personal lives.

The opening scene alternates between people's legs moving chaotically and trams running frenziedly, conveying the idea of the trivial circle of events that take place day in, day out in a big city. At the same time, the scene shows a recurring morning scene in



the family's life: a sequence of close-ups of the grandmother's emotionless stare, Nastia's tears, Lida's sorrowful face, and Nina's disillusioned look, all of which express not only the family's burden, but also the sense of a monotonous life.

None of the women is capable of establishing a successful relationship with a man. The younger daughter, Nastia, has a superficial relationship with a "weak, spineless, and not very smart"<sup>70</sup> young man named Misha. Although Nastia becomes pregnant with Misha's child, she sees no future with Misha, who has no occupation and, ironically, struggles with choosing between joining a racketeering group and pursuing a career as a lawyer. The older daughter, Lida, is involved in a romantic affair with a married man and ends up heartbroken after he abandons her for her friend/co-worker. Nina's attempt to have a "fleeting romance" (*romanchik*) with Evgenii, who came to the city on a business trip, and fails because of her mother's interference, the same interference that ruined Nina's two previous marriages. In the scene in which Nina and Evgenii are eager to consummate their relationship, the grandmother persistently rings the bell above her bed, deliberately impeding the couple's privacy. When Nina is walking Evgenii out, a close-up shot depicts her apathetic face in the mirror as she is stating that nothing can happen between them. The close-up evokes Nina's anticipation of such a finale (of their romance doomed from the beginning) during their very first conversation when she warns Evgenii, "I haven't belonged to myself for a long time."<sup>71</sup> The scene above bears out Rimgaila Salys's observation that, in its exploration of

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<sup>70</sup>“слабый, безхарактерный, не очень умный”

<sup>71</sup>“Я уже себе давно не принадлежу.”

traditional gender roles, *Adam's Rib* exposes the inadequacies of Soviet reality in which women, who work low-paid jobs and endure personal sacrifices, like Nina or her older daughter Lida, are exploited and victimized by the system and/or by men (623).

In the following scene, Nina vehemently vents her frustrations, reprimanding her mother for destroying both of her marriages and imposing her way of life on Nina, "You made me live your way! You divorced me with Viktor. You destroyed my life! I don't have any personal life!"<sup>72</sup> And yet, a moment later, Nina consoles her mother and begs her for forgiveness. The camera cuts to a medium shot of the grandmother, her face exhibiting conceit and superiority. Though paralyzed and entirely mute, the grandmother triumphs in this poignant skirmish and continues to maintain control over her daughter's life.

The grandmother, with her ability to manipulate her daughter's and granddaughters' lives, is associated by Jenny Kaminer with the image of a "malevolent maternal figure" in late Soviet film. In her article, Kaminer also discusses the transformation of the "the kindly grandmother of the novella" into a "silent tyrant" who destroys the lives of younger generations (56). In order to underpin her argument, Kaminer makes use of Leonid Bezhin's "wives of the rear" theory. He applies this term to Soviet women who, in assuming the role of the missing father, acquire "aggressive qualities" so inconsistent with their nature. As a result, Bezhin concludes that the mother displays "[sadistic] masochistic tendencies" toward her children (quoted in Kaminer 61).

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<sup>72</sup>"И меня заставила жить так, как ты этого хочешь. Это же ты меня развела с Виктором... Ты мне всю жизнь покалечила! У меня нет никакой жизни!"

While one may agree that the grandmother in *Adam's Rib* represents such a “mother of the rear,” Bezhin’s theory, nonetheless, does not explain why Nina, who raised both of her daughters without her ex-husbands, develops no “[sadistic] masochistic” behavior toward her children whatsoever. In fact, she is portrayed as a mild, caring, and even-tempered mother.

The bell that the grandmother rings every time she demands attention is identical to the one held by her husband in the photograph and functions as a bond with her dead spouse, as well as with her past life. Kaminer argues convincingly that the bell symbolizes “masculine” power and the grandmother is the one who maintains it in the household (62). However, while drawing such a parallel, Kaminer makes no connection between the grandmother’s image as a “silent tyrant” and her embodiment of “masculine” power in the household. Obviously, the fact that she assumes the position of her husband contributes to her portrayal as wielding destructive power.

At this point, I refer to Goscilo’s exploration of the image of the mother in post-Glasnost literature and film. In her comparative analysis of Krishtovovich’s *Adam's Rib* and Liudmila Petrushevskaja’s novell *Vremia noch’* [Time Night] (1992), the scholar draws on the uniformity of depictions of multigenerational families of women and their metaphorical functions in the representation of Russian history. *Time Night* depicts three generations of women trying to survive in impoverished living conditions: a poetess, Anna Andrianovna, whose poetry publications bring scarcely enough money to feed her grandson and herself; her mother, who ends up in a psychiatric home and whose illness instantly evokes the image of the bedridden grandmother in Krishtovovich’s film; Anna’s

daughter, Alena, whose children are conceived from different men and whose character is reminiscent of Nastia (in *Adam's Rib*), who wants nothing to do with the father of her baby.

Goscilo stresses the originality of these female images in their “refurbishment of the maternal trope – now an inimical and destructive force – and, above all, in their concept of Russian history” (*Dehexing Sex* 42). Furthermore, Goscilo argues, viewing Russian history not as a course of time but as “a fundamentally static replaying of the same elements” brings into question Russia’s motherly function. In that case, Russia appears as “the Bad Mother”<sup>73</sup> (42).

Despite the fact the women are closely related, all four are different by nature. One may argue that each woman’s character reflects the nature and the environment of the period in which her personality was shaped. Salys’s and Goscilo’s analyses of *Adam's Rib* place the representations of the four female characters within the historical time frame of the Soviet era. Salys views the characters of the grandmother, Nina, Lidia, and Nastia as a “fleshy allegory of succeeding generations of Soviet society” of the Stalinist, Thaw, Stagnation, and Glasnost’ periods (Salys 626). Within the framework of such an interpretation, Salys suggests that the grandmother figure or, more precisely, the “paralyzed old woman” appears to be the female embodiment of Stalinist values (628).

When analyzing the women’s personalities more closely, one can see an evident connection to the periods they embody. While Nina and the older daughter, Lida, attempt

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<sup>73</sup> The term “the Bad Mother” was introduced by Carl Jung and Melanie Klein, whom Goscilo cites in her examination of the trope of mother as a metaphor of Russian history.

to establish harmony in the relationships of all members of the family, the younger daughter, Nastia, quarrels with nearly everyone in the house. At the same time, the grandmother appears to be the major cause of the ongoing discord and constant frustration in the family. It appears that, amongst the four generations of women, the youngest and the oldest ones emerge as the most aggressive. Needless to say, their forceful and mulish personalities mirror the two relatively chaotic and frenetic Stalinist and Glasnost' periods, during which the country underwent political, economic, and social upheaval, as opposed to fairly stable and tranquil periods of the Thaw and Stagnation.

When taking into account World War II casualties, which resulted in women outnumbering men,<sup>74</sup> and the fact that females still constitute the majority of the Russian population (though their numbers are gradually decreasing), the film creates the image of Russia "feminine" in nature. Therefore, one may argue that, when identifying the major female characters with historical periods, and, thus, with the nation, *Adam's Rib* changes the patriarchal nature of the existing order.

In theory, the female dominance in the house is just as likely to establish full harmony as lead to emotional disputes. Though all of the women are longing for men, males clearly remain outcasts in the homogeneous female family. On the one hand, the deeply-rooted female ascendancy becomes the major cause of the women's desperate

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<sup>74</sup> According to the first population census after the Great Patriotic war in 1959, the sex ratio in Russia was 100 women to 61 men (Rybakovskii 29). However, other sources state that women outnumbered men 1:7, if the age of first marriage was considered. (Spirin, "Svetloe monogamnoe budushchee" *Nezavisimaia gazeta* 22 Feb. 2012. 4 Feb. 2013 <[http://www.ng.ru/science/2012-02-22/14\\_monogamia.html](http://www.ng.ru/science/2012-02-22/14_monogamia.html)>.

need for men. On the other hand, this female ascendancy prevents men from entering the entrenched female union, which, in and of itself, is one of the major barriers to all the women's happiness. We may only speculate that the tradition of female descendants will continue: when Nastia finds out that she is pregnant, she paradoxically wishes for a baby girl, even though she gets along with virtually no one in the family.



Figure 31. Krishtofovich's *Adam's Rib*

The ending is quite unexpected and devastating for nearly all the family members, with the exception of the grandmother. Having been struck by the loosened bell, the grandmother regains her ability to speak and even walk. Ironically, at the exact moment that Nastia is trying to reassure her mother and older sister that one day their suffering will end, they hear the grandmother's singing in the other room and see her leaning toward the table. The camera zooms in on Nina and her daughters' faces, which express distress as they stand in speechless astonishment. The grandmother's recovery implies that she has gained even more control over the house. Therefore, the ending leaves no hope for any kind of positive changes in the lives of Nina and her daughters.

Another portrayal of a highly domineering and ambiguous mother figure is presented by Chukhrai in *Remember Me This Way*. The main protagonist, Mariia

Ivanovna Kireeva, takes a great deal of pride in her revolutionary past and remains committed to the ideals of the Soviet doctrine for her entire life. However, while existing in her own world, utterly elusive for everyone around her, Mariia Ivanovna thoroughly alienates herself from reality, which causes a conflict with anyone she encounters from the real world, especially her family.

Mariia Ivanovna's physical presentation and the arrangement of her apartment filled with antiquated furnishings create an aura of days gone by, when nothing but the revolution mattered. She wears a red dress (the color of the Soviet flag), pays tribute to Kirov and her husband (a Red commissar), and insists on still being called "comrade." Out of a strong feeling of dignity, Kireeva does not accept the veteran food stamps she is entitled to and her overall frugal lifestyle is a sign that she is still confined by the financial hardships of her past life during the revolution.

Unconditional devotion to the common cause, commitment to her family, and a pursuit of nothing but the truth are the main principles that Kireeva attempts to instill in her children over her entire life. On the whole, Mariia Ivanovna appears as a very authoritative mother who has to be in absolute control of her children's lives. Kireeva's daughter Nastia, who has spent her entire life with Mariia Ivanovna and was thus was brought up in accordance with Soviet ideology, emerges in a "mirror effect" of her mother. Such a mother doubling pattern, also visible in *Remember Me This Way*, is explored by Goscilo in her comparative analysis of Petrushevskaja's *Time Night* and Krishtofovich's *Adam's Rib*, referred to earlier in this work. The scholar argues that,

despite the never-ending conflict between mothers and daughters, the younger actually “replicates her mother” and her life experience in general (Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex* 37).

Rather than the ongoing confrontation between the younger and older generations in Krishtofovich’s and Petrushevskaja’s works, the mother-daughter bond in Chukhrai’s film is marked by Kireeva’s authority being balanced with Nastia’s excessive submissiveness. The scene in which Mariia Ivanovna reproaches her middle-aged daughter for carrying lipstick in her purse demonstrates the absurdity of the mother’s intrusiveness in her daughter’s life. The medium shot reveals Nastia in profile in order to strengthen the sense of shame she experiences while being scolded by her mother. The mother, in turn, is depicted in full frontal position, suggestive of her offensive conduct, juxtaposed with the compliance of her daughter who meekly casts down her eyes without a single word of objection.

In such superior-subordinate dynamics in the mother-daughter relationship, Nastia at times emerges as more of a mother figure than Kireeva. Numerous scenes show Nastia caring for Mariia Ivanovna, displaying her motherly care which, in a traditional view of gender role disposition, has never found realization in her life as an old maid. Deprived of any chance for personal happiness, Nastia retains the status of a single woman only to be by her mother’s side – another motherly self-sacrificial act on her part. Immured by her possessive mother, Nastia is caught in the snare of Kireeva’s constructed world. In the end, Nastia’s childless and husbandless existence substantiates the fully destructive nature of Kireeva’s overprotective love, which she identifies with excessive authority in her children’s upbringing, in line with Soviet dogma.



Kireeva is tormented by knowing nothing about the life of her son Andrei, who rarely visits his mother in Leningrad. Having been informed by her ex-daughter-in-law, Lida, about her divorce from Kireeva's son, Kireeva tries to remedy her ignorance by opportunely using her birthday as a pretext for bringing the entire family together, so she can once more gain insight into the details of their lives. The scene in which the wall mirror falls (in slow motion) to the ground and breaks into pieces foreshadows the imminent shattering of Kireeva's hopes of seeing the close-knit family she has toiled all her life to create. The act of Mariia Ivanovna cleaning up the broken mirror is concurrent with the panning shot over the family pictures, which reveal the story of Kireeva's life. Sadly, upon the family's arrival, Mariia Ivanovna will learn that the entire family has fallen into pieces much like the shards of mirror she is sweeping from the floor.

Kireeva's intent to compel her children to open their hearts is conveyed by the director in the reoccurring scene of each family member washing his or her hands in the presence of the mother, suggesting that they will come "clean" during the forthcoming and long-awaited family talk, though it is only Kireeva who is looking forward to it. The children's collective hand-washing behavior pattern strikes the viewer with its parallel expression of disconnectedness. While Kireeva is peering into her children's faces seeking heart-to-heart communication, they each avoid direct eye contact with her, the same way they will try to avoid a sincere conversation at the family dinner table.

Yet, the "interrogation," which brings up conflicting emotions of anguish and relief for everyone, takes place. While extracting a confession from Andrei about the break-up of his marriage to Lida, Kireeva attempts to find out who should be blamed for

breaking the family apart. Consequently, Andrei and Lida put up emotional shields and confront the mother about the illusoriness of her imaginary world along with her erroneous and absolute devotion to the common cause. The children finally utter the truth which has remained unspoken thus far, “You raised us on a legend! Real life is nothing like that...”<sup>75</sup>. The tension escalates as Lida criticizes Kireeva for robbing Nastia of her happiness, as well as depriving all of the children of any independence. Kireeva has moved from the position of judge to that of judged. The following medium shot depicts Kireeva with her back to the entire family, revealing her nonacceptance and denial of this criticism, which is declared especially strongly in the following statement, “I don’t know you! You are not my blood!”<sup>76</sup>

Torn by the idea that the ideological upbringing of her children has failed miserably, Kireeva resorts to a radical action that she believes might still unite her family. The final scene reveals the whole family at the table while Kireeva is giving everyone a piece of dry bread, the daily food ration she saved during World War II in case her children were starving. Kireeva kept the bread to the present day as a symbol of the hardships and sacrifices she made in the name of the common cause. A panning shot lingering on each family member accepting his or her piece is superimposed over the audio image of Kireeva uttering her last will and testament when she places the fate of the country in the hands of the younger generation.

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<sup>75</sup>“Вы нас вырастили на легенде! А мы пришли в жизнь и всё другое...”

<sup>76</sup>“Я вас не знаю! Вы не моя кровь!”

In her appeal to her children, as if appealing to the entire nation, Kireeva appears as the mother figure of the country and, thus, she can be identified with Mother Russia. If so, one may pose a question about what kind of mother Kireeva is. Over her years of maintaining a tight grip on her children's lives, Kireeva is guided in the upbringing of her children/*narod*<sup>77</sup> by her "faith in the rightness of the common cause" and "faith in the matter of socialism"<sup>78</sup>. Continuing the association of Kireeva's character with Mother Russia, the manifestation of a dysfunctional country can be symbolized by her dysfunctional family – one big family disillusioned with "the legend" (the idealized Motherland) during the transitional period of Perestroika. The fact that Kireeva is unwilling to admit and, thus, to accept the fruitlessness of the old obsolete methods in building "the bright future" of the country positions her as "the Bad Russia" – a similar image to the domineering mother figures discussed in Krishtovovich's *Adam's Rib* and Petrushevskaia's *Time Night*.

When the film ends in an anticlimax, Kireeva leaves her family and the viewer with some food for thought: while faith gives someone reason to live – the way Kireeva's faith in the Party and in the revolution made her life meaningful – it can also evolve into a destructive force when one refuses to rethink the mistakes of the past and blindly pursues an ultimate goal.

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<sup>77</sup> 'Narod' means "nation" in Russian.

<sup>78</sup> Such phrases as "вера в дело Ленина," "вера в правду народного дела," "вера в дело социализма" became set expressions used often in inspirational ideological speeches by political leaders regarding revolutionary works. Such speeches were supposed to encourage Soviet people to fight for the Revolution and then build socialism afterward.

## **Moving Away from Masculinization: the Representation of the Female Soldier in the Cinema of Perestroika**

The last female type to be discussed is the woman soldier whose representation drastically differs from the images of women soldiers depicted in the cinema of the Thaw. Todorovskii's *Ankor, eshche ankor!* [Encore, Once More Encore!] (1992) depicts the period immediately after World War II and the life of a small military garrison, life in which singing in the army choir and involvement in love affairs are the only ways the residents keep themselves entertained. The film's events are centered around a love triangle: the commander of the military regiment, Colonel Fedor Vinogradov, falls madly in love with Liuba, a much younger woman, and, as a result, abandons his wife and two children to live with his lover. In turn, Liuba's heart belongs to a young Lieutenant, Vladimir Poletaev, who shares her love but fears the dreadful consequences of competing for Liuba with an officer who is much higher in rank.

Structured on a quite straightforward plot, the film allows the viewer to follow the characters' complex internal struggle in which their personal interests and the postulates of the official ideology clash. Constrained by "high ideals" and primarily by the image of the idealized "positive man" (*polozhitel'nyi chelovek*), even such a high-ranking officer as Vinogradov is not in charge of his own destiny and life. In fact, it is precisely his high position in the army that allows no immorality (a divorce, in Vinogradov's case), which presumably sets an unfavorable example for his subordinates.

In the opening scene, the garrison choir is performing a highly patriotic song about Russia's beauty and might, a performance evocative of a big Soviet

family/collective which glorifies its country.<sup>79</sup> The camera cuts to the director's face which expresses nothing but disappointment with choir's poor performance, "It's all terrible! Your singing is garbage."<sup>80</sup> In response, Lieutenant Poletaev comments that the choir will not deliver a decent song until women join the chorus, which consists entirely of men.

When identifying the garrison choir with the nation (*narod*) represented exclusively by men, Poletaev insists that women should be an integral part of it, "The nation consists not only of men, but also women. It appears that only one half of the nation is singing."<sup>81</sup> As soon as women join the group, the same song becomes a success, evident in the close-up of the facial expression of the conductor, who is now wholly satisfied with the superb performance. The choir's initial fiasco could be interpreted as a metaphor for failing the ultimate mission of the construction of "the bright future" by the entirely homosocial (all male) society in which no part is assigned to women. Ironically, while the women's role appears to be merely complementary at first sight, it ultimately performs a truly crucial function in the choir's/*narod's* existence.

Larsen goes further in her symbolic reading of the women's role in the choir's performance by drawing on the connection between "the feminine" and Stalinist "nature" and argues evocatively that the film presents "consistent figuration of women as the principal agents and symbolic representations of Stalinist power" (90). Driven by the

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<sup>79</sup>"Где найдёшь страну на свете, краше родины моей?"

<sup>80</sup>"Нихрена не получается. Не звучит, хоть сдохни."

<sup>81</sup>"А народ это не только мужчины, но и женщины. А у нас получается, что поёт не весь народ, а только одна его половина".

conviction that post-Soviet films convey Stalinist times by way of sexual rather than political discourse, Larsen demonstrates that while *Encore* attempts to “revive the grandeurs of the Stalinist past” through images of such heroes as Colonel Vinogradov and Sergeant Serebrianyi, who manifest such virtues as men’s honor and moral values, the film simultaneously “renounces its political legacy” through sinful female characters, who are associated with the “Stalinist evil” (87). With such a contrast of manifestations, one can speak of a reverse within the “active (male)/passive (female)” pattern, based on Mulvey’s theory of gender representations. This reverse requires a closer analysis of the ways that Todorovskii constructs his female and male characters.

*Encore* portrays various female types whose lives directly or indirectly revolve around army life: the “fallen” wife of a military officer; an insecure female garrison cook; an abandoned wife and mother; and, finally, a single woman soldier who prioritizes family life over army service. All of these diverse female characters share one feature – their family happiness and, for the majority of them, their lives are driven by men. Captain Kriukov’s wife swears that she loves only her husband, while she continually cheats on him and, at the same time, fears that one day he will leave her. The malevolent middle-aged Lieutenant Barkhatova torments Sergeant Serebrianyi by taking advantage of her higher military rank with the purpose of forcing him into a sexual relationship and, once rejected, she sends him to prison by accusing him of anti-Soviet activities. Liuba causes Poletaev to live in constant dread of Colonel Vinogradov’s authority. While all of the women mentioned above in some way jeopardize the lives and/or the military ranks of their men, the only two positive female characters (the wife of Major Dovgilo, Vera,

and the Colonel's wife, Tamara) break the pattern of "predatory female desire," to quote Larsen (93). In fact, these two characters also undermine Larson's hypothesis that the men in the film are always positioned as victims of a woman's "evil" nature. For example, Major Dovgilo victimizes his pregnant wife with his ongoing cheating with Captain Kriukov's wife. Colonel Vinogradov, whom Larsen views as "the chief victim" of women's intrigues, actually victimizes his wife and two children, who endure an unbearable life in a squalid barrack, while patiently waiting for him to come back home.

Among all of the female images depicted in the film, Tamara is the most vivid example of a woman's absolute subjugation brought about by financial dependence on her husband as a consequence of limiting her position solely to the status of a homemaker. Her strong belief in family values along with her submissiveness, brought about by her inferior status, result in her choice to tolerate betrayal, infidelity, and extreme humiliation rather than to break up her marriage.

The character of the nurse Liuba is of particular interest when tracing the shifts in the representations of women soldiers in the cinemas of the Thaw and the transitional period after Perestroika. Unlike the major character Vavilova (in *The Commissar*), whose life is motivated by her unconditional devotion to the common good, Liuba shows no social or political awareness whatsoever. Instead, she desires to leave the army so that she can finally start a happy family life. As she tells Poletaev, "I also dream about

leaving the army.”<sup>82</sup> Her physical representation strongly accentuates her “femininity,” which she employs to allure Poletaev: she wears makeup, dresses in trendy clothes, and her hair is always styled.

The dissimilitude between these two major female characters testifies to the tremendous changes in the representation of women in the cinema of the Thaw and the breakaway from the phenomenon of masculinization of female characters as an unnecessary attribute for those women who are no longer willing to enter traditionally “male” occupations and are reluctant to be involved in social activities. *Encore* suggests that the traditional gender paradigm presumably should resume its normal course, whereby the domestic realm is supposedly intended primarily for women while the political, social, and cultural spheres are allegedly allocated to men.

The scene in which Liuba and Poletaev finally consummate their relationship dwells on the stereotypical behavior assumed by a woman to build a meaningful relationship with a man. Liuba arranges her friend’s place in a very homelike fashion and conspicuously presents herself as a homemaker. Upon Poletaev’s entrance into the room, the camera assumes his point of view, revealing Liuba knitting, a domestic



Figure 32. Todorovskii’s *Encore, Once More Encore!*

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<sup>82</sup>“Я тоже мечтаю уйти из армии.”



handicraft reserved (traditionally) primarily for women. Clearly, Liuba desires more than merely the role of Poletaev's lover – a status she was never satisfied with in her relationship with Vinogradov; she longs for a family and persistently, if not aggressively, pursues that aim.

It is significant that women are generally presented as more resolute and active when compared to the indecisive and passive men. It is Liuba who makes the first move toward the consummation of the relationship when she tells the Lieutenant not to be afraid of her. A close-up shot depicts Liuba grabbing the Lieutenant by the collar and pulling his face toward hers, obviously “inviting” him to kiss her. In the following scene, she is the one who unmakes the bed and unbuttons her shirt while Poletaev pretends to be somewhat nonchalant in order to conceal his perturbation and timidity.

Another female character, Barkhatova, appears as the most aggressive woman, compelling soldiers and those officers who are lower in rank to please her sexually. Further, the “fallen” wife of Captain Kriukov employs her sexuality to charm the regiment's command staff to obtain a promotion for her husband. The only passive female character is the colonel's wife, Tamara, who barely makes ends meet, with two children in a poverty-stricken house as she waits patiently for her husband to come back to his family. Though one may argue that Tamara's patience is the ultimate expression of her willingness to fight for her family (which discredits her passivity to some extent), the finale shows that Tamara's supreme submissiveness ultimately fails her, leaving her with no husband and no place to live.

In conclusion, in contrast to the period of the Thaw, strong female soldiers as characters disappear from the cinema of the early 1990s. As a matter of fact, *Encore* draws a clear distinction between men and women with regard to their engagement in professional activities – the “masculine” occupation of being a soldier emerges presumably as entirely unsuitable for a woman, since it contradicts the alleged “natural order of things,” which is the realization of a woman’s essence through her roles of a mother and a wife.

Though *Encore* offers rather degrading portrayals of Soviet women when providing no social activity for them and reinforcing the idea that a woman’s happiness is dependent upon a successful family life, the film also touches upon the dilemma of excluding women from the social sphere. That exclusion leads to their financial dependence on men, ultimately resulting in their absolute subjugation by them. The case of the colonel’s ex-wife and her two children, who live below the poverty line with no financial support or a decent home, particularly highlights such a predicament.

Lastly, when recalling Krishtofovich’s *Adam’s Rib*, in which the figure of the grandmother is viewed by some critics as a female personification of Stalinist values, two types of female characters that evoke association(s) with the Stalinist era and/or the Soviet leader himself can be determined: an authoritative mother and a sexually-appealing woman, whose destructive natures wreak havoc on their children, husbands, and lovers. The question that arises is: how can the two polar opposite types of female representations be associated with the figure of Stalin or the “Stalinist evil”? One could speculate about the direct correlation between the co-occurrence of destructiveness and

power that these female characters embody, whether it is the power of authority or the power of women's sexuality. Despite the fact that both Todorovskii and Krishtofovich deliver strong and vigorous female images, they can hardly be considered inspiring representations of women on screen during the early 1990s.

## CONCLUSIONS

As opposed to the period of the Thaw, filmmaking during Perestroika and the first half of the 1990s moves away from the excessive use of such formalistic techniques as double exposure, oblique shots, dissolve, spinning camera, etc. The bleak reality of Perestroika, a period inundated with extreme negativity and despair, was revealed primarily by means of realist cinema, which is particularly evident from the cinematic analyses of the *chernukha* films discussed above. One of the objectives that guided my analyses in the present dissertation was to offer a thorough cinematic analysis of the shots, angles, techniques, and narrative employed by the periods' directors in their portrayals of female protagonists. The value of the analyses of such strategic techniques in the given films is the insight that they afford the viewer into the representations of women during the two periods.

Since a single protagonist is nearly always nuanced and “loaded” with varied interpretations, I have endeavored to synthesize diverse interpretations, including my own, in order to deliver a multi-faceted image of the female protagonist as portrayed in each period. At the same time, I have established, as summarized below, the key

transformations that occurred in the representations of comparable female types and the probable societal developments that brought these shifts about from the time of the Thaw and Perestroika through the first half of the 1990s.

While tracing the shifts in the depictions of Soviet women of the Thaw and Perestroika, I have employed Haskell and Rosen's *Reflection theory* in order to construct a comprehensive picture of the female protagonist as portrayed during the two periods. At the same time, using *Reflection theory*, I have examined how female images project themselves on and inflect official discourse, the economic situation, and social reality during the two eras. One may conclude that the Thaw's encouragement of positive images gives way to more antagonistic portrayals during Glasnost'. In his summary of the representations of women characters during Perestroika in comparison to the previous periods, Brashinsky notes that "contemporary Soviet cinema has shifted from false enthusiasm and wooden idealism" (116).

A comparison of female types on the screen during the Thaw, Perestroika, and the early 1990s shows that both periods deliver such tropes as the young woman, the mother, and the single woman. Along with some similarities in the representations of the same type(s) during the two eras, conclusions about certain divergences have been determined in this work.

Based on the cinematic analyses provided above, one may positively assert that, while mirroring for the viewer the position of women in family and society, directors of the two periods seem to work at cross purposes in portraying female images on screen.

While the cinema of the Thaw strives to portray heroines who could be taken as models (particularly in the representation of the young woman), films of Perestroika-era and the first half of the 1990s lean toward a critical/negative depiction of female characters. The purposeful depiction of the model-heroine of Thaw cinema is in line with the ideology institutionalized by the establishment of the day. The negative representation of Perestroika woman, permitted by the policy of Glasnost', is a reflection of the spiritual and societal desolation that viewers were likely experiencing in their own lives. While both periods awaken some hope for the future, Perestroika is filled with wider and deeper revisions of past mistakes, profound cynicism, and disillusionment – all of which are given expression in the given films through the predicament of the “generational conflict,” mainly between generations of grandparents and grandchildren, more “distant in time,” rather than between “fathers and sons.” This distinctive focus in the approach to filmmaking during the two periods ultimately results in often dissimilar female representations superficially similar female type(s) on screen.

In contrast to the cinema of the Thaw, which offers vigorous and ambitious female images, films of Perestroika and the early 1990s portray rather hostile young women deprived of any motivation to reach their life potential. The lack of motivation stems from a strong feeling of rejection of the dreary reality with no alternatives, a lack which blocks female protagonist's potential efforts to achieve a better future. While the young heroine of the Thaw appears as a life companion (for the major male protagonist) and shapes him into a true hero by contributing to his moral improvement, the adolescent heroine of Perestroika and the first half of the 1990s emerges as an instigator of conflict

and passes judgment upon the older generation's past missteps. This heroine, a representative of the younger generation, is incapable of understanding the experience of the older generation and, thus, incapable of forgiving their foibles.

At a time of psychological turmoil driven by the "buying and selling" dynamics in all aspects of life, directors of Perestroika and the first half of the 1990s films utilize the image of the prostitute as a metaphor for the country's victimization and damaged morality. In this respect, the cinema of the transitional period shows a much stronger tendency towards identifying the major female character with Russian womanhood, or, in a broader sense, Mother Russia, especially when conveying the time of emotional turbulence that the nation undergoes during this transitional period.

Representations of the mother (type) in the cinema of Perestroika undergo a shift similar to those of young female characters of the same period. This shift, in most instances, makes a rather unfavorable impression: the self-sacrificial mother of the Thaw period (in *Women*, *The Cranes*, and *Clear Skies*) is superseded by a self-indulgent (for example, in *Avariia*) and/or a highly domineering mother figure (for instance, in *Adam's Rib* and *Remember Me This Way*) in Perestroika films. It seems that, in the case of a self-centered mother, the effect presupposes the cause: the diminishing of the role of the mother elevates the role of the father, an elevation that is manifested in a much stronger (compared to that with the mother) father-child bond, mainly featured within the framework of the Oedipal complex. The presence of very authoritative mothers lends credence to feminist scholars' assertion that "the representation of woman in film does not necessarily position her as a passive object of the narrative" (Creed 84). It is

noteworthy that, along with portrayals of highly authoritative mothers, the cinema of Perestroika also delivers relatively passive mother figures, such as Alla Sergeyevna in *Intergirl* and Vera and Tamara in *Encore*, who could be disparaged by some viewers for their gullibility and acceptance of their husbands' betrayals.

I believe that, on the one hand, portrayals of the caustic mother balance the depictions of weak, at times even aggressive men and fathers who lack authority. Such portrayals are symptomatic of the crisis of masculinity and are indications of the hesitations in the patriarchal order at the beginning of Perestroika. On the other hand, the depiction of the very authoritative, but, to some extent, destructive mothers (labeled in film criticism as "the mother of the rear," "Bad Mother," or "Negative Mother") begs the question of whether the mother can fully and successfully replace the father simply by assuming his position. The reoccurring motif of the dysfunctional family with an absent father figure affirms the statement above. After all, "such exchanges" in roles, Kaplan emphasizes, do not change the fact that "the roles remain locked into their static boundaries" ("Is the Gaze Male?" 129).

On the whole, in the "gender-based metaphorical construction of the country," as suggested by Goscilo, Borenstein, and other critics, Mother Russia and the body politic appear female, while the nation's leaders (or exploiters) male<sup>83</sup> (Borenstein 41).

Furthermore, Borenstein observes that, in times of crisis, Russians turn to "a feminized

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<sup>83</sup> Borenstein cites Aleksei Levinson's "gender regime" which he employs in his analysis of the post-Soviet intelligentsia's hostile response to Western-style television advertisement. The intelligentsia views itself as "feminine" in relation to the "masculine" state structure and, thus, "as a helpless victim of centralized manipulation by broadcasters" (Borenstein, *Overkill* 41).



sense of Russia,” which contributes to the country’s presentation as the victim (*Overkill* 41). Within such an elucidation of gender dynamics, the given portrayals of far-from-ideal father figures, who fail to control their rebellious daughters (often identified with the country/nation) testify to the crisis of masculinity that overtook Russian society with the beginning of Perestroika.

The representation of the single woman during the Thaw is analogous to that of Glasnost’ and the early 1990s: while she is independent financially due to her job security, her life is, in actuality, miserable without a man. Clearly, films pertaining to the predicament of the single woman deliver the following message: a woman’s happiness is presumably complete only when her professional accomplishments are complemented by a successful family life. In fact, all the films discussed in this dissertation reinforce the concept that a woman’s family life should be supposedly prioritized over her career, a reinforcement which can be explained by the male directorship who persistently advocates the traditional take on gender disposition.

While ideally women’s social and personal lives should not be mutually exclusive, the heroines who undertake “masculine” roles, particularly in the cinema of the Thaw, are constantly forced to choose between social activism and personal happiness. Both Vavilova (*The Commissar*) and Petrukhina (*Wings*) chose their “masculine” occupations over family life and are condemned by society (and by some film critics) for failing in their purportedly primary and encoded reproductive role, which is allegedly biologically predetermined.

Nearly all films, which portray maternal figures or the “single woman” type characters during the Thaw or the transitional period after Perestroika, highlight the reproductive function as supposedly the most important in a woman’s life, and thus create the dilemma that a woman’s career should be invariably harmonized with being a mother and a wife – the ideal woman that all directors (regardless of their gender) avoid depicting.

It cannot be overemphasized that when undertaking character analysis, the general impression produced by the same heroine may vary due to the mentality of a given audience, their background, and the timeframe within which the film was created and interpreted. As Chuck Kleinhans points out, the meaning of a film is produced “by the interaction between a text and a spectator” who is understood as a “historical person with social attributes of gender, race, class, age, nationality” that cannot avoid shaping the viewer’s interpretation of the film (109).

By way of example, while one may view Petrukhina’s (*Wings*) “masculinization” and her aspiration to be on par with men as an encouraging example, from a feminist standpoint, of grappling with gender discrepancy, an advocate of more conventional views may see her “masculine” identity as the bane of her family life and the cause of her failing in her ultimate mission of motherhood. Finally, in relation to the present example as well as to this thesis on the whole, the paradox between “the explicit ideological rhetoric of gender equality” and the “implicit patriarchal mythology” should not be underestimated (Mikhailova and Lipovetsky 81). For instance, while the image of the female combatant was promoted by official Soviet discourse in order to advance gender

equality, it was simultaneously suppressed by the two major feminine archetypes of the long-suffering mother and the innocent girl – the archetypes that apparently fit better into the Soviet patriarchal model (Mikhailova and Lipovetsky 82).

If one scrutinizes the changes in the representation of female protagonists reflect the shifts in political, social, and economic contexts from the time of the Thaw to Perestroika and the first half of the 1990s, it becomes evident that while Glasnost dwells more on women's hardships (primarily due to identifying the major female character with the country that is undergoing a crisis), virtually nothing in the depiction of women's status in family and society challenges conventional gender role dynamics. Moreover, I feel strongly that female images as portrayed on screen either during the Thaw or Perestroika suggest that women should adapt to their current situation without questioning their "assigned" responsibilities. While many of the films, particularly of the Thaw era, exalt heroines for enduring "the double burden," they trigger no re-evaluation of traditional gender roles, a re-evaluation which would entail rethinking the roles of both sexes.

Goscilo's discouraging survey, mentioned earlier, shows that many women actually oppose such reconsideration and that some Russian feminists believe that "a woman completely realizes her essence and her destiny only through motherhood" and that household chores are "unfitting for a man" (*Dehexing Sex* 10). Disappointingly, Goscilo concludes, in the hope of achieving better living conditions during Perestroika, women did not stir up any discussion about reframing gender roles and thus "unwittingly reinforced gender stereotypes" (10).

In conclusion, this dissertation provides some questions for further consideration for both filmmakers and critics: while Russian cinema attempts to depart from “repressive” portrayals of women and, in the end, depicts strong and active female figures, their representations, more often than not, are surrounded with an aura of negativity. Strong and authoritative mothers emerge as “Bad Mothers” (*Remember Me This Way, Adam’s Rib*); women who assume “male” roles and are ready to sacrifice their lives in the name of a common cause are condemned for losing their femininity and, most importantly, failing their essential “life task” of becoming a mother (*The Commissar, Wings*); women who possess dual power in the form of their exceptional physical skills and sexuality (*Early Developer*) must be subdued by some sort of male authority. Ultimately, the strong, resolute, and active woman character is discredited and disempowered in three ways: through her failure in her mission (*Early Developer*), in society’s perception of her as a social outcast (*Wings*), or by her death (*The Commissar, Wings, and Intergirl*). As compared to the cinema of the Thaw that portrays such powerful images of heroines with strength of character virtue, such as Vavilova in *The Commissar*, Sasha in *Clear Skies*, Veronika in *The Cranes*, or Al’ka in *Women*, Perestroika and the first half of the 1990s certainly offer fewer heartening female figures.

What is even more disturbing in women’s representations during Perestroika and the early 1990s is that, even though some films deliver positive female portrayals, which I am inclined to view not necessarily as positive<sup>84</sup> but rather as virtuous and victimized (by the system or men), these women emerge as highly *passive* characters or agents of

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<sup>84</sup> In this context, I use the term “positive” interchangeably with “taken as a model.”

reinforcement of the traditional gender role disposition to the point of being ridiculed (the two mothers, Vera and Tamara, in *Encore*; Aelita in *Aelita, Do Not Pester Men!*; Elena in *One in a Million*).

Both Perestroika and post-Soviet cinema failed to produce films that challenged the social construct regarding gender roles being predetermined and thus “assigned.” At the same time, films like *Aelita, Do Not Pester Men!* and *One in a Million* persistently push a woman to the place where she supposedly belongs with the primary function of a wife and homemaker. In conclusion, Russian cinema has yet to offer more encouraging and independent female figures who are not ultimately doomed, socially condemned, or, on the whole, constructed as negative/destructive characters, a construction attributed, as a rule, to the gender inversion in the depiction of the two sexes.

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