

# Tolstoy Film Adaptations in Russia, 1909–17

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Adaptations of national literary heritage have been an inseparable part of Russian and Soviet film production up to the present. Although rather neglected elsewhere, because of the apparent centrality of literature in Russian culture, the film adaptation has been a specific genre of Russian cinema (Hutchings and Vernitski 1–24). This tradition goes back through the Soviet years to the dawn of Russian film history, beginning from what is considered the first attempt at a Russian fiction film, an unsuccessful adaptation of Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* made by Aleksandr Drankov in 1907 (Tsivian, “Le premier” 27–31). In the decade preceding the Soviet nationalization of the film industry, 1908–19, most major classics of Russian literature received their first film versions.

Leo Tolstoy has been one of the most adapted authors since Russian cinema took its first steps during the first decade of the twentieth century. He was not the most filmed Russian author: According

to Veniamin Vishnevski's filmography of prerevolutionary fiction films, a few more films were made of Pushkin's, Gogol's and Chekhov's works. But Tolstoy's position was somewhat special; more than was the case in other classics, the specter of Tolstoy the person loomed over the adaptations made of his works. When Russian film history began, Count Tolstoy was still alive. The last survivor of the great Russian realists also became one of the first screen celebrities in Russia. Ever since the first newsreels showing Tolstoy were produced for his eightieth birthday in 1908, film crews were constant—and apparently most welcome—guests at Yasnaya Polyana.

Tolstoy had an ambivalent attitude towards cinema. Although he was far from happy with the films of his time, he was exceptionally interested in the medium itself. Apparently Tolstoy, unlike most, immediately recognized cinema as an independent art form and included it in his program of “art for the people.” After his death, such remarks were

used as evidence that cinema had the imprimatur of the most eminent cultural figure of the nation (Зоркая 85–89; Leyda 41–46).

After the October revolution early Russian cinema was quickly forgotten. Throughout the Soviet years the tsarist period remained a largely unwritten chapter in Russian film history. For a long time it was customary to begin discussion of Tolstoy adaptations, and Russian literary adaptation in general, from the two classics that were produced in the twilight of pre-revolutionary cinema: Iakov Protazanov's *Father Sergei* (1918) and Aleksandr Sanin's *Polikushka* (1919/22). These films deserve their position as important works of the transition period between the tsarist and Soviet cinemas. Their canonical status is, however, largely based on the fact that written film history has tended to be the history not only of masterpieces, but of *surviving* masterpieces.

As listed in the filmography of pre-revolutionary cinema *The Great Cinema* (*Великий кинемо*), all that remains of the Tolstoy films made before the Soviet era is fragments of six films, most without intertitles. That we can no longer see the earliest films does not make them insignificant. From a purely quantitative point of view, the "pre-history" of Tolstoy film adaptations is impressive: The most exhaustive Tolstoy filmography known to me, recently compiled by Valérie Pozner, shows that 26 films, more than half of *all* Russian and Soviet Tolstoy adaptations—later opera and ballet films included—were made before 1918.

In the following I trace how Tolstoy's works were adapted to the screen by his contemporaries, the first Russian filmmakers. I have viewed the surviving film footage, but since the most interesting Tolstoy films from this period are considered lost, my research is based more on film periodicals from the time and film makers' memoirs.<sup>1</sup> Most Tolstoy adaptations were made during more general booms in film adaptation in Russian cinema. The first of these occurred at the turn of the 1910s, and the second in 1914–15. My

focus is on the strategies of adaptation involved in these first two cycles of Tolstoy films, between which film art changed more radically than ever before or since.

### *Power of Darkness* (1909)

In theory, Tolstoy could have seen the first adaptation of his work. The Russian film industry began to develop in the late 1900s; the first fiction films were released in late 1908, and the following three years were marked by competition between Aleksandr Khanzhonkov's company and the Moscow affiliation of the French Pathé. All Tolstoy films produced by both in this early period are considered lost, and we have to settle for other sources, such as synopses and reviews, in analyzing them. But there are enough existing films from both to form some impression of what the Tolstoy films may have looked like.

Pathé's original French *Films d'art* series, introduced in late 1908, had been a sensation in Russia and it set the standard for the earliest Russian fiction films. Like the *Films d'art* productions, these early films were one or two reels long and included few principal scenes of the story; one scene (or a "picture" (картина)) usually consisted of one static shot that was set up in a manner reminiscent of a theater stage and introduced with an expository intertitle. As for their content, most were adaptations of either Russian history or nineteenth century Russian classics. This was due to the overwhelming predominance of foreign films in the Russian film market—the only way for Russian companies to compete was to emphasize the national character of their films (Гинзбург 131).

The first to bring a Tolstoy adaptation to the Russian screen was Pathé with *Resurrection* (*Résurrection*, director unknown) in October 1909. This film was, however, an imported French production from the *Films d'art* series. It was rather poorly received in Russia: the critic "Rozin," writing for the trade journal *Cine-Phono*,

considered the French representation of Russian reality unrealistic (Розин 8–9).

The first truly Russian adaptation of Tolstoy was therefore Khanzhonkov's *Power of Darkness* in the following month. Khanzhonkov had begun to produce fiction films a year earlier, and *Power of Darkness* fell into the first series of Russian classics that the company released in 1909–10. Khanzhonkov used the same ensemble of artists for all their earliest films. These included the cinematographer Vladimir Sieversen and actors of the semi-professional theater, Vvedenskii People's House, one of whom, Petr Chardynin (1873–1934), became the company's leading director. He held this position until the mid 1910s when he was eclipsed by Evgenii Bauer and, embittered, left the company. Chardynin directed all Tolstoy films released by Khanzhonkov in subsequent years.

Aleksandra Goncharova, actress with the Vvedenskii People's House, recalled in an interview years later that the theater was rehearsing *Power of Darkness* in 1908 when Aleksandr Khanzhonkov came to the House for the first time looking for actors (Сосина 21). It is therefore likely that the film was based on this particular stage production. Aleksandr Khanzhonkov later explained that initially the strategy of adaptation was not to reproduce the whole original, but to choose only the most effective scenes and count on the audience to know the story and thus be able to make the connections between the scenes themselves (37). This strategy is well illustrated by such existing examples from the same series as *Queen of Spades* (Пиковая дама) and *Idiot* (Идиот, both 1910), the plots of which would be impossible to understand without being familiar with the story beforehand. In Russian film studies it has been customary to treat this kind of early adaptation as a cinematic equivalent of the Russian tradition of popular print (лубок) (Гинзбург 131; Зоркая 85–89). The лубки were stories told in pictures, with short texts at the bottom; at the end of the nineteenth century they were usually sold to accompany booklets of

popular literature, thus naming the whole literary genre the “literature of lubok” (лубочная литература) (Brooks 59–108). In this context, the film maker's art approached that of a book illustrator.

The published synopsis of *Power of Darkness* clearly reflects this objective, announcing that the film maker's intention has been to produce a good *illustration* of the play, to faithfully reproduce the story and all the characters and details of Russian rural life (“Власть тьмы” 17). This was obviously an ambitious task to fulfill in just 365 meters—twenty minutes at sixteen frames per second—but judging by the exceptionally detailed synopsis, the seven scenes of the film managed to faithfully incorporate the five acts of the play.

We know very little of the film's reception. Like almost all Russian fiction films, it received an encouraging review in the film trade journal *Cine-Phono*. The critic 'С. Л.' praised the film for its acting and cinematography, and did not forget to mention that the decorations and costumes were faithful to the play. He singled out as particularly impressive the notorious scene from the play in which Nikita murders his baby (С. Л. [a] 8). In his memoirs Khanzhonkov includes *The Power of Darkness* among the most successful films of the season of 1909–10 (38).

### Films of the Year of Mourning, 1911

By the time Tolstoy died in November 1910, the film industry considered Tolstoy almost its godfather. The funeral became a media spectacle of sorts, as all major companies raced to produce newsreels of the event. *Cine-Phono* dedicated a special issue (Number 4, 1910) to Tolstoy and cinema, and the topic also surfaced two years later, when Iakov Protazanov filmed his famous semi-documentary on Tolstoy's death *The Departure* (or *Passing*) of a Great Old Man (Уход великого старца, 1912).<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising therefore that 1911 became one of the most productive years for Tolstoy film adaptations.

Pathé began the year in January with their *Anna Karenina*, directed by Maurice André Maître. Very little is known of Maître. He was sent to Russia by Pathé around 1908 to run the company's Russian production. Maître directed about a dozen fiction films under the trademark *Films d'art russe* before mysteriously disappearing from the scene. His specialty was historical drama set in the Russian Middle Ages (Цивьян 513–514). A number of his films have survived, and they show that Maître adopted the French *Films d'art* style—including deep-space *mise-en-scène* and the characteristic waist-level camera angle—for his Russian topics. He also seems to have been more concerned with the coherence of narrative than, for example, Chardynin.

It appears that Maître made no attempt to fit the whole *Anna Karenina* into his single-reel film of 350 meters (nineteen minutes at sixteen fps). The film's synopsis begins rather vaguely with the statement that what is essential in the novel is Tolstoy's portrait of a Russian woman “as an individual and a general concept.” (“Анна Каренина” [a] 20) The purpose of this appears to have been to justify omitting everything from the novel except Anna's story: The plot proceeds from her unhappy marriage and breakup with her husband to her subsequent breakup with Vronsky and the finale with her suicide. The synopsis is not very detailed, but it seems that the story was so stripped down that it was probably understandable even to an audience not familiar with the novel.

Pathé's resources and know-how were on quite a different level than those of early Khanzhonkov. The latter worked with a permanent troupe of semi-professional actors, who were generally left unnamed and modestly referred to as “the finest artists of Moscow.” By contrast Pathé, in accordance with the initial *Films d'art* philosophy, were able to sign artists from the prestigious professional theaters of Moscow. According to the film's advertising, *Anna Karenina*'s principal actors came from the private theaters Korsh (Sorokhtina

as Anna), Fars (Troianov as Vronsky), and Imperial Theaters (Vasiliev as Karenin).<sup>3</sup>

“The names speak for themselves,” wrote the *Cine-Phono* reviewer, probably having in mind the theaters rather than the actors. He also appreciated the “compact and finished” form of the film, referring to the decision to concentrate on the central love triangle, and he singled out two “effective” sequences: Vronsky's horse galloping and Anna throwing herself under a train in the finale (С. Л. [b] 11). This suggests that *Anna Karenina* was a high profile production with outdoor action sequences—something that Khanzhonkov was unable to produce at that time.

Competitive jealousy might explain the exceptionally fierce attack on the film in Khanzhonkov's newly-founded trade journal *Cinematographic Herald* (*Вестник кинематографии*). The reviewer pointed out that Tolstoy's great novels include tens of characters, and that these should not be treated as “some exotic decorations, but as individuals directly and organically connected to the main flow of the work.” In the reviewer's opinion this was neglected in Pathé's interpretation, since not only the secondary characters, such as Levin or Kitty, but also the main characters, Vronsky, Karenina, and Karenin, were “outlined only in faintest contours.” The review ended with a rather uncomplimentary xenophobic appeal: “(...) we are forced to demand that foreign companies, wishing to set Russian life and Russian literature on the cinematic stage, first acquire some basic understanding of one and the other” (“Анна Каренина” [b] 12). This was to be the only time that Russian Pathé adapted Tolstoy, although *Anna Karenina* was apparently a hit.

The story behind the earliest surviving footage of a Tolstoy film is a notorious example of the more questionable side of the Russian film business. Tolstoy had left a play which was to become one of his best known dramatic works, *The Living Corpse*. Tolstoy's heirs gave the rights for its first stage production exclusively to the Moscow

Art Theater and in order to protect these rights the play's text was kept secret. The Russian theater public waited anxiously for the premiere, which was scheduled for September 23, 1911 (OS). In late August a small film entrepreneur Robert Perskii caused a scandal by announcing a film version of the play and promising its premiere before that of the Moscow Art Theater (A. B. 15). Everyone was stunned—since the text had not yet been published, it was assumed that Perskii was basing the film on rumors and descriptions of the play in the press.

Countess Aleksandra Tolstaya wrote a public letter appealing to the film theater owners not to book Perskii's film into their programs before the Moscow Art Theater's premier and the play's publication. This worked: Perskii backed out and rescheduled the film's premiere for four days after the Moscow Art Theater's (Leyda 50; Ianguirov 24–25).

The first reel of Perskii's film has survived.<sup>4</sup> It includes ten scenes, which cover roughly the first two acts of the play. The film clearly belongs to the *лубок* film tradition: The characters and their motivations are not introduced in the film itself. As Tolstoy's play was not known at this point, the film was obviously meant to be watched with the synopsis in hand. The expository intertitles introducing each scene give only an indication of which scene is to follow (e. g., "Fedia Protazov at the gypsies"), and the synopsis, which was published in Perskii's own trade journal *Cine-Journal*, provides the description of the events and dialogue ("Живой труп"). The film and synopsis are close enough to the original play for it to be assumed that Perskii was somehow able to get hold of the entire play, rather than just a description of it (Leyda 50; Ianguirov 25).

The scandal surrounding the film has given it a bad reputation. This is hardly justified by the surviving reel. Despite the apparent cheapness of production, it is a reasonably faithful representation of the events in Tolstoy's play, and the reviews were not unanimously excoriating

either (*Великий кинемо* 80–84). The film's problems lay more in the original play: *The Living Corpse* is a chamber drama of indoor scenes and little action, which provides little visual attraction for a silent film adaptation. This makes it understandable that the play was not filmed again until 1918, when cinema had developed more sophisticated means of narration.

The last and most successful film of the first Tolstoy cycle was Chardynin's *The Kreutzer Sonata*, which premiered just a few days after *The Living Corpse*. The film is lost, but its synopsis suggests that it might have represented a move away from the *лубок* aesthetic towards a more coherent narrative ("Глобус и Сфинкс"). This, however, meant taking more liberties with the original text. Chardynin seems to have left out altogether the important frame story of the novella, in which the murderer Pozdnyshchev tells his story on a night train to a first-person narrator. Missing also is the first half of the story which depicts Pozdnyshchev's youth. Instead the film focused on the main love triangle that led to Pozdnyshchev murdering his wife.

*The Kreutzer Sonata* was released during a period of change in Russian film culture. There are only a few scenes in the plot, but the story was stretched to 570 meters (thirty-one minutes at sixteen fps), which made the film one of the longest in Russia up to that date. In 1911 the era of the one-reeler was coming to an end, and many films released in autumn of that year were exceptionally long—a development that culminated in December with the release of Khanzhonkov's *The Defense of Sevastopol* (*Оборона Севастополя*—partly preserved), the first Russian feature film, reaching an impressive 2000 meters.

Many foreign films seen in Russia that year were characterized by explicitly erotic content, most daringly perhaps the infamous Danish 'white slave trade' films, which, in Khanzhonkov's words, "gorged [on eroticism] in all ways under the mask of the fight against prostitution" (47). And finally, Asta Nielsen's Danish breakthrough film *The Abyss*

(Afgrunden, 1910. Dir. Urban Gad), had introduced Russians to a new kind of subtle psychological melodrama, which was to become the mainstream of Russian production in the following years.

Khanzhonkov and Chardynin probably had in mind something similar to these Danish hits, and Tolstoy's sinister novella of adultery and murder, with a highly psychological character, provided fruitful material.

Whatever the motivation behind the film, *The Kreutzer Sonata* became Khanzhonkov's biggest box-office hit in the autumn 1911 season. *Cinematographic Herald* proudly reported queues outside film theaters throughout Russia, and quoted a Yalta newspaper report that the film was so powerful that the audience sat hypnotized throughout its "one hour" running time ("Отзызвы" 15). In light of subsequent Tolstoy adaptations, the most far reaching impact of *The Kreutzer Sonata* may have been its casting: Ivan Mozzhukhin, who seven years later would play his most memorable role as Father Sergei, made his cinema debut in the role of the violinist Trukhachevskii.

With *The Kreutzer Sonata* the first Tolstoy boom in Russian cinema was over. The only Tolstoy films seen in Russia in 1912 were two rather mysterious films, *Master and Man* and *The Cause of It All*, both released at the same time by a Latvian distribution company, Mintus. Almost nothing is known of them, except that they featured actors of the Warsaw Jewish Theaters (*Великий кинемо* 131; Вишнеvский 22, 24–25). It seems likely that they were not Russian, but made by Polish film companies, whose films Mintus distributed to Russia. A fragment of *Master and Man* survives with some scenes from the end of the story.<sup>5</sup>

### **Tolstoy and the *Russian Golden Series*, 1914**

The next Tolstoy boom occurred at a transitional point in pre-revolutionary Russian cinema.

Between 1913 and 1914 the Russian film industry doubled its production, which is largely explained by the fact that by August 1914 the World War had closed the borders and interrupted the importation of foreign films. By this time Khanzhonkov had gained a new competitor in Paul Thiemann and Friedrich Reinhardt's company. Thiemann & Reinhardt had taken over the position left by Pathé, whose Russian production gradually faded in the first half of the 1910s. Their production, which was known by the trademark *Russian Golden Series*, was directed from the outset towards high-profile adaptations of Russian literature. The films of the series often featured famous theatrical actors, and in the earliest period the company's ensemble of artists had an exceptionally ambitious attitude towards cinema as an art form. At the heart of the collective were its two leading directors Vladimir Gardin (1877–1965) and Iakov Protazanov (1881–1945). Both were dedicated realists, who stood out in the cinema of the early teens for their emphasis on psychological acting.

The second wave of Tolstoy films in 1914–15 was also part of a bigger boom in film adaptation in Russian cinema. As at the turn of the decade, what now attracted film companies to Russian classics was a combination of national and commercial interest. The first Tolstoy films were shot before August 1914, but their release was postponed until autumn. They premiered in an atmosphere of nationalistic enthusiasm that followed the declaration of war, and this no doubt contributed to the success that these Russian films enjoyed—which in turn bred new attempts to capitalize on the nationalist sentiments of audiences.

From the film makers' point of view, there may have been aesthetic motivations as well. A few years earlier film makers had avoided prose sources as much as possible. At the turn of the 1910's cinema was seen as a form of drama, and film makers drew heavily from the theater in terms of formal technique. They were thus more inclined to adapt plays than prose literature, and when filming a

prose work, they often based the screenplay on an already existing theatrical adaptation or an opera libretto (Гинзбург 141–142). Tolstoy exemplifies the pattern clearly: of his immensely prolific prose oeuvres, only two were filmed, but as many as four of his relatively few plays ended up on the screen: In addition to *The Power of Darkness* and *The Living Corpse*, discussed above, *The First Distiller* (1911) and *The Cause of It All* (1912) were filmed. And as there existed stage adaptations of both *Anna Karenina* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*, it is possible that these, rather than the originals, were used as the basis of the respective films.

In 1914 the situation was different. Film art had taken huge steps and developed new means suitable for adapting prose, such as feature length, dialogue titles, and the nuanced acting techniques that characterized early Russian cinema. Instead of theater, literature was becoming the point of reference for cinema, and the process of adaptation from the literary Russian classics became, as the Soviet film historian Semen Ginzburg put it, “an art school for Russian cinema” (346). The time had come for directors like Gardin and Protazanov to take another tour through the national classics.

Among the many Russian classics released in the “Russian Golden Series” in 1914, there were three Tolstoy adaptations. We know practically nothing of Protazanov’s *Devil*, since it was released a month after the war broke out and film journals were not published. But Vladimir Gardin’s *The Kreutzer Sonata* and *Anna Karenina* represent the most interesting Tolstoy adaptations prior to the Revolution.

Gardin is largely a forgotten pioneer of Russian cinema, in the West at least, mainly because none of his pre-revolutionary films has survived in its entirety. He had a background as a stage actor, and since his directing debut *Keys to Happiness* (Ключи счастья, 1913), his film career was in rapid ascent. Six months after his first film Gardin was already one of the most distinguished directors in Russian cinema. *The Kreutzer Sonata*—shot in the spring of

1914—was his fourth film, and the first in a series of adaptations of Russian classics. According to Gardin’s memoirs, the screenplay was written in one evening and the film shot in ten days (63).

The first two reels of the film have survived, fortunately with original intertitles, which gives a fair impression of the entire film.<sup>6</sup> Stylistically, it is a fairly typical representative of a Russian film of its time, with a very slow tempo and tableau staging. Unlike the 1911 version, Gardin’s film includes the frame story on the night train. The film reproduces the structure of the novella in that it frequently returns to the frame story to remind the viewer that Pozdnyshev’s story is not only lived but also recounted, as though in a confessional. An interesting solution is the inclusion of Leo Tolstoy himself in the narrative as the character to whom Pozdnyshev tells his story; in the novella the first person narrator is an unidentified stranger. One possible contradiction of this device arises: In the novella it is arguably the repentant Pozdnyshev who acts as Tolstoy’s alter-ego and utters the moral of the story, while the narrator on the contrary argues with him.

In the film, however, this causes no problem, since Gardin largely leaves out the philosophical content of the original and places the emphasis on the dramatic love-triangle plot. This is surprising to say the least, since *The Kreutzer Sonata* was remembered first and foremost for its provocative moral message, in which Tolstoy condemned sexual passion even between husband and wife and showed murder as a logical culmination of modern marriage. As Peter Ulf Møller has shown, upon its release in 1891 the novella had caused an unprecedented debate on sexual morality both in Russia and abroad. The film, however, coyly skips over Pozdnyshev’s pre-marriage visits to brothels and other acts of youthful “debauchery,” and one embrace between the newly-wed Pozdnyshevs has to substitute for the “abominations of the honeymoon.”

There may be several reasons for these elisions. No doubt the fear of censorship played a role: In its time *The Kreutzer Sonata* had remained banned for two years, a risk which the producers were hardly eager to see repeated. There were grounds for caution. Ever since the initial scandal, the novella had been burdened with a somewhat dubious reputation of “erotic literature” (Engelstein 374–375), and therefore it might be expected that the censors would be sensitive to a film based on a story with such a history. On the other hand, if Tolstoy’s opinions had represented a conservative extreme even in the 1890s, the two decades following *The Kreutzer Sonata* in Russian literature had taken the sexual question to a such an explicit level that Tolstoy’s call for abstinence in marriage must have appeared antiquated (Engelstein 359–420).

It also seems obvious however that Gardin’s interest in the story lay not in its moral, which would have been virtually impossible to bring to the film. *The Kreutzer Sonata*’s message is written into Pozdnyshev’s testimonial monologue, and including even part of it in a silent film would have required a tedious abundance of lengthy intertitles. Very likely Gardin expected the literate audience to know the story well enough to be able to fill in the gaps themselves. His directorial decisions made it possible for the audience not familiar with the novella to enjoy the film for what it was: a well constructed psychological melodrama about a husband murdering his wife.

Narrating the plot was, however, not the limit of Gardin’s ambition. What obviously interested him in the story was Pozdnyshev’s development from a youthful lover to a jealous husband and a murderer. It was very hard to portray character psychology on silent screen before the possibilities of montage were discovered. In the tableau style, where a scene in most cases consisted of one uninterrupted shot, a film maker had basically three ways to go inside a character’s head: intertitles, acting, and trick cinematography.

Gardin uses all three. A typical scene where the three techniques converge is the last scene of the extant fragment: Pozdnyshev, while away on a business trip, reads his wife’s letter and becomes consumed with jealousy. First we are given the text of the letter in an intertitle. After reading it, the actor wanders around the hotel room set and lies down on the bed. A double-exposed image of the wife in Trukhachevskii’s arms then appears in the same frame, a concrete representation of Pozdnyshev’s jealous thoughts.

As banal as it may seem now, the psychology of the film was highly appreciated by a reviewer when the film was released:

The director and the artists have produced what no one has been able to produce here or abroad: a ‘psychological’ film, a film which expresses not only the outer action of the protagonists, but more importantly, clearly and strongly expresses their inner experience. (“Среди новинок” [a] 29)

The reviewer hailed the film for, like Tolstoy’s novella, succeeding in depicting not only how Pozdnyshev murdered his wife but also how he came to it. The reviewer was not at all disconcerted by the fact that the film actually gives quite a different account of this process from the novella.

The psychological technique was further developed in Gardin’s next film, *Anna Karenina*, which became his greatest triumph and one of the best remembered films of pre-revolutionary cinema. The film was a sensation even before it was shot, since Karenina’s role was played by Maria Germanova of the Moscow Art Theater. For one of the first times, an artist from the the most talked about Russian theater—famous for their ensemble trained by Konstantin Stanislavsky—agreed to appear on screen. Germanova explained in an interview that she had agreed because she had long wanted to play the role, but her theater had considered *Anna Karenina* too difficult to produce on stage (И. Н. 32). Gardin later recounted that



Germanova placed unheard-of conditions: She demanded that all scenes be rehearsed in advance, and that she would appear on the set at a given moment and wait no more than three minutes to shoot. In terms of acting in a silent film, her method was clear enough: “You just talk less” (64–65).

Germanova’s appearance attracted special attention to the forthcoming film, and *Anna Karenina*’s production was followed closely in the press. When the shooting was almost over, the producer Thiemann, as an ingenious publicity stunt, invited journalists on location to witness the filming of the suicide scene. Picture magazine *Sparks* published a double-page report of the event with pictures from the location and stills of the film. The text offered the readers a vivid description of how the suicide was filmed: Germanova lay face down on the rails, and a train set off towards her stopping just in time; then Germanova was replaced by a dummy and the train rushed over it throwing pieces of dress and limbs of the dummy all over the set (“Анна Каренина” [c] 156).

Unfortunately *Anna Karenina* is almost entirely lost; only a short fragment of it exists along with the stills published in the journals.<sup>7</sup> I have not been able to find a synopsis, probably because the story was considered too well-known to require one. *Anna Karenina* was the longest Tolstoy adaptation produced hitherto; at 2700 meters (148 minutes at sixteen fps) it was the first to run over two hours. This allowed enough space to include not only Anna’s storyline, but other characters’ as well. Everything that we know of the film supports the promise in the advertising of a “full and accurate illustration.”<sup>8</sup>

The surviving fragment<sup>9</sup> includes three discrete scenes out of sequence, but they are clearly identifiable. The first is an outdoor scene from Levin and Stiva’s hunting sequence (Part six, Chapters nine and ten of the novel) and includes

some charming forest scenery by the cinematographer Aleksandr Levitskii.

The other two offer further luminous examples of Gardin’s directing. The first takes place during the last night of Anna’s life (Part seven, Chapter twenty-six). It shows her in her bedroom, contemplating suicide with opium. Anna, sitting on the bed, fiddles nervously with the bottle of opium in her hand, almost pours a glassful, then changes her mind.

Scenes like this solo by Germanova provide the best testament to the Stanislavsky school of acting in its earliest period. As Anna lies down and closes her eyes, trick cinematography is once again deployed very much as in the aforementioned scene of *The Kreutzer Sonata*: Over an image of Anna tossing and turning on the bed, a vision appears in the background of a curtain hovering over the doorway. The scene is described in the novel thus:

Suddenly the shadow of the screen began to move and spread over the whole of the cornice, the whole ceiling. Other shadows rushed toward it from another side; for an instant they rushed together, but then again they spread with renewed swiftness, flickered, and all was darkness. ‘Death!’ she thought. (741)

The most impressive last scene of the fragment is the earliest in the novel. It features one of the memorable motifs in *Anna Karenina*: the vision of a stooping and battered man hammering iron. The image occurs for the first time in part one of the novel, when Anna and Vronsky first meet at a railway station; it is repeated in both their dreams years later, and finally appears again in Anna’s suicide scene (Nabokov 175–182; Browning 525–536). In this particular scene of the novel (Part four, Chapter three) Anna, pregnant with Vronsky’s child, describes her recent nightmare to Vronsky and claims it portends her death in childbirth.

In the film we see Anna and Vronsky entering a room and sitting down. They chat pleasantly, until Anna starts to recount her dream; while Germanova's performance gradually proceeds from desperation to frantic horror, the background of the picture fades to black, and an image appears of a worker, hammering the wheels of a railroad car.

The vision is somewhat different from that described by Tolstoy in this scene. In the novel the image of the stooping man is transformed in Anna's and Vronsky's minds from the original real-life impressions of railroad workers into a haunting vision of the battered peasant of their nightmares, and back into the railroad worker in the finale. Gardin apparently decided to make things more straightforward for the viewer and stuck to the concrete image of a railroad worker throughout the film. Nevertheless, the inclusion of this rather complex psychological motif in the film testifies to Gardin's wish to produce more than just a replication of the events in Tolstoy's novel.

The film press almost unanimously declared *Anna Karenina* the greatest work that Russian cinema had so far produced. On the other hand, many members of the intelligentsia—especially Germanova's Moscow Art Theater colleagues—considered the psychological treatment of Anna's role banal (*Великий кинемо* 180–188; Tsivian, *Early Russian Cinema*, 137). Gardin's film was, however, one of the first times that the cultural elite paid any attention at all to cinema. *Anna Karenina* was seen as a milestone on cinema's path to full membership among the Russian arts. "Before the war, watching Russian cinema made one sick," wrote the critic I. Mavich in *Cine-Phono*,

now when watching a Russian film one cannot but wonder: When did they become so good? Where did this taste, this instinct, this technique, and this inventiveness come from? But this is easily explained: it did not come from anywhere—it was always there. It is something our very own, a real Russian thing.

The same thing that took our arts to that exceptional level: Russian literature, Russian poetry, Russian music, Russian painting, Russian theater, Russian ballet. This aspiration to psychology and the inner experience is that new and genuine thing which our cinema has for a long time waited. (...) Have you seen "Anna Karenina" with Germanova? Is that not the path that will take cinema to its noble aim: the service of genuine art? (Мавич 24)

### War over *War and Peace*, 1914–15

In May 1914, around the same time that Gardin was finishing *Anna Karenina*, the first news about the ultimate Tolstoy adaptation began to appear: *War and Peace* was going to be filmed.

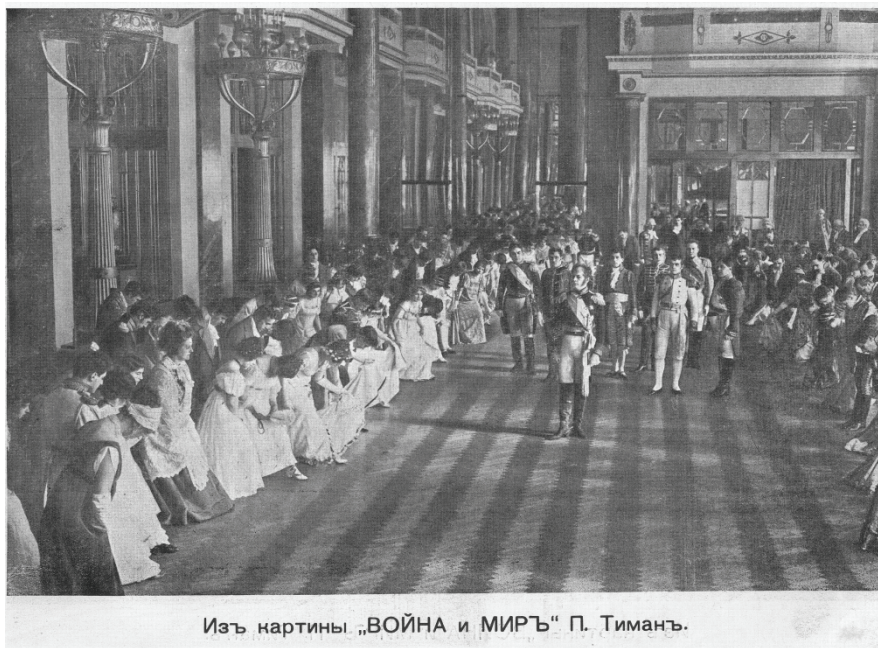
Behind the news was Taldykin, one of the smaller film companies and an unlikely candidate for such an enormous production. It seems nonetheless that they were serious. Advertisements promised a true spectacle: "battle scenes with real army troops," "elegant costumes, and props from the company's own workshops, made especially for this film."<sup>10</sup>

News of the filming trickled in: In mid-May the crew had left for the historical locations to shoot the promised battle scenes, at the beginning of June they were in the Crimea filming scenes amid "rich southern nature," and already a week later in mountain locations ("Хроника" 53; "Москва" 23). Then something seems to have happened. The last report of the production appeared in an advertisement in late June: "Intimate scenes are completed: huge artistic results have been achieved."<sup>11</sup>

*War and Peace* then appeared in every advertisement that Taldykin placed throughout the autumn of 1914, with a vague promise to announce the film's release date later. That day never came. Taldykin's *War and Peace* was never released and probably not even completed. In fact, it is unclear whether there was a film at all; according to Vladimir Gardin, it was obvious from the start that

*War and Peace* was beyond the resources of a company like Taldykin and, aside from grand announcements, the production never even started (83).<sup>12</sup> Some of it was probably shot but the production then ran into difficulties. At least one

before Khanzhonkov's film (Гардин 83–84, Левицкий 64–67). It was not at all uncommon for a film company to steal an idea from a competitor in order to pre-empt a possible block-buster



Изя картины „ВОЙНА и МИРЪ“ П. Тиманъ.  
FIGURE 1: WAR AND PEACE: PART II (1915). PRODUCTION STILL.  
SINE-FONO 1915, NO 11-12, P. 60B. RUSSIAN NATIONAL LIBRARY.

reason might have been the unfortunate timing: in the summer of 1914 the Russian army was beginning to have more urgent business than helping out film companies with battle scenes.

By the end of the year it was clear to everyone that Taldykin's film had come to a dead end. That was the beginning of one of the most colorful episodes in early Russian cinema: Both Khanzhonkov and Thiemann & Reinhardt began to produce versions of *War and Peace* at the same time. Almost certainly Khanzhonkov got the idea first, but very little is known of their film's production history. The Thiemann & Reinhardt side of the story is well recorded in two vivid memoirs: Gardin's and cinematographer Aleksandr Levitskii's.

After hearing of Khanzhonkov's plans, Paul Thiemann invited both directors to the office and gave orders to film *War and Peace* and release it

(Гинзбург 197–198). The bigger and more distinguished studios, such as Khanzhonkov and Thiemann & Reinhardt, resorted to it rarely, but apparently Tolstoy's novel was too big a project to be left to the competitor.

Gardin and Protazanov received a blank check for expenses and set out to do the impossible: To film *War and Peace*—or rather the first of the film's two parts—in a week. Costumes were hired from the Moscow Art Theater, and while there, Gardin and Protazanov assigned the role of Bezukhov to the theater's technical manager. The rest of the casting was decided on the way to an antique shop, where the art director was already buying props for the set.

Then shooting began. Khanzhonkov had by now discovered the competitor's plans and the race was on. It appeared certain that Khanzhonkov would be first across the line, since they had started

earlier and were better equipped, but Thiemann & Reinhardt had two directors. Cameras rolled day and night, Gardin and Protazanov spent their nights in the studio sleeping in turns. While Protazanov directed, Gardin wrote the script, and when Gardin was behind the camera, Protazanov rehearsed with the actors. Gardin also played the role of Napoleon in the film.

Filming was completed in time, but at that point, recounts Levitskii, the company received devastating news: Pathé laboratory could not fit the film into their schedule. At least ten prints of the film were needed for the next morning, or the whole race was lost. Levitskii then asked Thiemann for “a couple of thousand” and dashed off to the laboratory. First he invited the company's French executive for a long lunch, and, being familiar with “the foreign taste,” treated him to caviar and vodka until the Frenchman was too drunk to go back to work. After taking his victim home, Levitskii went back and took over the laboratory. For extra pay the employees were happy to print *War and Peace* overnight (Levitskii 73–77). By this ruse Thiemann & Reinhardt won the race and their *War and Peace: Part I* premiered before Khanzhonkov's *Natasha Rostova*, although both were formally released on the same day, February 13, 1915 (OS). Gardin's and Protazanov's *War and Peace: Part II* came out two months later.

Khanzhonkov was understandably unhappy. *Cinematographic Herald* launched a campaign against Thiemann & Reinhardt's *War and Peace*:

On one hand we have a carefully prepared and thoroughly planned production, which gives an impression of the genial author's intentions (...) on the other a hurriedly assembled potpourri from patches of the novel, which is only intended for cheap profit, and doomed beforehand to an ephemeral existence. (“Война и мир” [a] 14)

*Cine-Phono* took a less partisan stand, conceding that there is enough in Tolstoy's novel for several

adaptations, but that actually both companies had stolen the subject from Taldykin (С. Л. “К вопросу” 38–40).

The case of *War and Peace* raised a wide-ranging debate about the business ethics of Russian film production, and this overshadowed the possible artistic merits of the films themselves. It seems that they differed significantly. Khanzhonkov's *Natasha Rostova*, directed by Chardynin, was very selective: A synopsis reveals that the film cherry-picked from the novel only Natasha and Prince Andrei's tragic love story. The plot begins in 1810 with their meeting (part two of the novel) and ends with Andrei's death (“Война и мир” [b] 57–59). There were few or no mass scenes in the film—at least there are no stills of such among those of the film published.<sup>13</sup> The only short war sequence mentioned in the synopsis—the Battle of Borodino where Andrei is wounded—might even have been presented just through an intertitle. It seems that the film's real spectacle was not in lavish production but in its casting. Natasha's and Andrei's roles were played by actors of the Imperial theaters Vera Karalli and Vitold Polonski, who for a short time became the most popular romantic couple of the Russian screen, and the rising star Ivan Mozzhukhin played Anatolii Kuragin.

I have not been able to find a synopsis of the Thiemann & Reinhardt version. It seems that it too concentrated on the personal lives of the characters, but included more of the novel. Because the war made battle scenes practically impossible to produce, a decision was made, according to Levitskii, to build the film around the stories of the Rostov and the Bolkonskii families and Pierre Bezukhov, and leave the political and war epic in the background (Левицкий 66). Some war episodes would have to be included, so that the “spirit of 1812 would not be lost,” but they would have to be made without mass scenes. There was also another reason to cut the events of the 1812

war to the minimum: Russia and France were now allies in war. “This is no time to show the defeat of Napoleon’s French army, although it is a historical fact,” said Thiemann, who was hoping to get the film sold to France.<sup>14</sup>

A review of *War and Peace: Part II* reveals that it too was largely devoted to Natasha Rostova, that most of the scenes depicted the personal lives of the characters, but that “social life and political events of the epoch are also clearly reproduced.” In the reviewer’s opinion, the second part was an improvement on the first, in which he had noticed evidence of “some haste” in many scenes. He mentions the ballroom scene and the scenes set in the headquarters at Fili as among the most impressive [“Среди новинок” [b] 47–48).

The ballroom scene was the spectacular highlight of the film. Thiemann again invited the press to witness the shooting which was carried out in the great hall of the restaurant Iar during day time. Ballet school students were hired to perform a “gracious and affected *écossaise*,” which was suddenly interrupted as the emperor Alexander I entered from the background. Stills published in *Cine-phono* (Figure 1) show a setting very similar to the corresponding famous scene in Sergei Bondarchuk’s version, as the emperor

benevolently nodding his head passes through the lines of people who bow deep before him, and then gives a sign to continue the interrupted gaiety... A slow and graceful polonaise begins... Thus, accompanied by the rattle of the camera, the fizzing of the floodlights, and shouts of the directors, the beautiful life of days long past is revived. (“На съемках” 78)

None of those who participated in Thiemann & Reinhardt’s *War and Peace* seems to have had any regrets about it. Protazanov in retrospect was particularly happy with the portrayals of Pierre Bezukhov and Napoleon (304). Nevertheless, by the time the second part of the film came out, both

he and Gardin had already left Thiemann & Reinhardt. *War and Peace* had been a triumph for them, but they were not content just to break production speed records and wished to work in circumstances more propitious for creative objectives. In subsequent years both directed many classics, but largely abandoned Tolstoy. Gardin, working in his own company, made only a semi-improvised version of *How Much Land Does a Man Need* (1916) and Protazanov’s impressive lineup of adaptations at the Ermolev studio included only one Tolstoy film, *Family Happiness* (1916), until he triumphantly returned to Tolstoy in 1917–18 with his *Father Sergei*.

### Tolstoy Films at the time of the Revolution

In the spring of 1915 Khanzhonkov released one last Tolstoy film made by Chardynin, *Katiusha Maslova*, an adaptation of *Resurrection*, which followed the one-character model that Chardynin had introduced in the previous film (“Среди новинок” [c] 76). This and the second part of *War and Peace* turned out to be the last great Tolstoy adaptations before the October Revolution. Generally, adaptations of Russian classics were rare in 1916–17. The big studios in particular, like Khanzhonkov and Thiemann & Reinhardt, seem to have lost interest in them altogether. There were, however, quite a few more modest adaptations. These tended to be of Tolstoy’s lesser known educational folk stories, which were adapted to the screen by small film companies. There was possibly a genuine objective aimed at folk enlightenment behind these films, but because of their “B production” status, we know very little about them: They were buried under the avalanche of hundreds of titles produced in the heyday of Russian film production, and apparently enjoyed little success (Гинзбург 267–268; Аннинский 81–84).

Footage of two such films survives. One is a short fragment, identified as an adaptation of *Master and Man*, which was released in February 1917.<sup>15</sup> The more interesting one is *God Knows the*

*Truth But Waits*, the first Russian Tolstoy adaptation that has survived in its entirety, although without intertitles.<sup>16</sup>

The film's release date is unknown, but an advertisement for the film appeared in an issue of *Cine-Journal* (*Кине-журнал* No 7–10; April 30, 1917 (OS)). It was produced by Skobelev Committee, a partly state-run company which generally concentrated on patriotic films. The film presents a very faithful adaptation of Tolstoy's short story, but brings little new in terms of adaptation technique. It is more interesting for political than for artistic reasons, as it reflects the abolition of censorship after the February Revolution. The film was produced only a few months after the revolution, and it must have been one of the first representations of Siberian prison camps on the Russian screen. The strong religious tone in the story would also have made it impossible to produce before the revolution, as the Orthodox church had placed severe restrictions on the representation of religious subjects in the cinema (Tsivian, "Censure Bans" 71–80).

After the October Revolution the tsarist film industry was living on borrowed time, but before its demise it was able to produce arguably the greatest films of early Russian Tolstoy adaptation: Protazanov's *Father Sergei*, Cheslav Sabinskii's *The Living Corpse* (*Живой труп*, 1918—no extant copies known) and Alesandr Sanin's *Polikushka*. All of them were vehicles for the biggest acting names of the time—Ivan Mozzhukhin, Vera Kholodnaia, and Ivan Moskvina, respectively—and in many ways culminations of the psychological school that had developed over the previous decade.

But they opened in a cultural atmosphere that was rapidly growing colder to the tradition they represented. In 1922, when *Polikushka* had its belated premiere, the young Soviet cinema had declared war on the psychologism of the 1910s; filming Tolstoy must have been the last thing on

the mind of a Kuleshov or an Eisenstein, and the next adaptations of his works did not appear until the late 1920's.

"Boredom and pity" overtook the film critic Lev Anninskii when he was shown the surviving prerevolutionary fragments for his book on Tolstoy adaptations. In his eloquent words, even the best of them reflected the "blindness of a culture that catches falling plumage and thinks it is seizing a firebird" (91). It is true that to the modern eye the footage offers little more than museological interest. Not only do the fragments not belong to the canon of Tolstoy adaptations, they also barely rise to the level of those films that caused the biggest sensation in the late 1980's when pre-revolutionary Russian cinema was rediscovered. They lack the visual sophistication of Evgenii Bauer's melodramas and the playful inventiveness of Wladyslaw Starewicz's puppet animations. It is hard not to adopt a condescending attitude towards even the most ambitious 'psychological nuances' in a Gardin film.

Yet my impression of the same material differs somewhat from that of Anninskii's. The history of Russian cinema has been a dialogue between realist and experimental film making. In its first decade cinema, an art form without traditions of its own, turned to the realists of nineteenth-century literature and theater for sustenance. Not only did the filmmakers plunder their wealth of characters and stories, they also brought the authority of that tradition to bear against those who were ready to disregard cinema altogether as lowbrow fairground amusement. Squeezed between the capitalism of the producers and the snobbery of the intellectuals, the pioneers of Russian cinema were somehow able to produce what has to be acknowledged as the first school of realism in Russian cinema. That is a remarkable achievement, even though the tragicomic remnants of it now amount to a collection of anecdotes and a little over two-thousand meters of film, the equivalent of one feature length screening. Against such enemies of

silent films as neglect, fire, and nitrate decay not even Tolstoy's name proved to be sufficient protection.

### Notes

1. Research for this article was conducted at the Russian State Film Archive Gosfilmofond, the Slavonic Library of Helsinki, and the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg. The author wishes to thank their friendly staff, especially Valerii Bosenko, Irina Lukka, and Svetlana Skovorodnikova for assistance.

2. The film is available on a VHS cassette Early Russian Cinema, Vol. 8, (British Film Institute, 1991).

3. Pathé's advertisement in *Сине-фоно* 1910, № 6, no pagination

4. Russian State Film Archive, 35mm: 1 reel / 222 meters. The copy is preserved with original intertitles. The film's filmography length is 600 meters, but the film was likely to have been shorter, since the existing 222 meters already include more than half of the story.

5. Russian State Film Archive, 35mm: 1 reel / 165 meters, preserved with flash intertitles.

6. Viewed from DVD. *The Kreutzer Sonata* is available as a bonus track on the French release of Boris Barnet's film *Дом на Трубной*. (*La Maison de la rue Troubnáia*. Bach Films 2006)

7. A scrapbook, collected by Gardin, which includes 40 stills and newspaper clippings from the film, is preserved in Gardin's archive in the Russian National Library, St. Petersburg, f. 173, ed. hr. 33.

8. Advertisement of "Russian Golden Series" and *Anna Karenina*. *Кине-журнал* 1914, № 18, 40–41.

9. Russian State Film Archive, 35mm: 1 reel / 143 meters. Preserved without intertitles.

10. Taldykin's advertisements in *Сине-фоно* 1914, № 16, 20 and *Кине-журнал* 1914, № 10, 10–11.

11. Taldykin's advertisement. *Сине-фоно* 1914, № 19, 74–75.

12. On the other hand Louis Forestier, cinematographer of the Khanzhonkov company, recounts in his

memoirs, that Taldykin did have a film of some sort, the negative of which he ended up selling abroad without making any profit on it (60).

13. Seven stills of *Natasha Rostova* appeared in the pages of *Вестник кинематографии*, № 4.

14. Levitskii (68) mentions that Thiemann was able to sell a second negative to Pathé, but my Russian sources do not disclose whether or not the film was released in France.

15. Russian State Film Archive, 35mm: 1 reel / 319 meters. Partially preserved without intertitles. The fragment covers the ending of Tolstoy's story.

16. Russian State Film Archive, 35 mm: 5 reels / 852 meters. Preserved without intertitles. The film seems complete except for the beginning of the third reel, from which footage may be missing.

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