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The Influence of Literature on Cinema

A review of Soviet films of the past few years

by

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Opinions and recommendations in this report are the sole responsibility of the author.
Time changes art, its language, style and intonation, putting into it new content and setting it new tasks. What once seemed forbidden or inconceivable becomes practicable.

"If a film character is shown leaving the house he cannot be shown entering another house in the next sequence for that would contradict the concepts of time and space". This statement, made in a book issued in 1927, belongs to B. Eichenbaum, a keen scholar of literature. (1) Now the hero of any film can leave a house and enter another in two successive sequences without making the audience feel any contradiction. The scholar admitted, incidentally, that the cinema was likely to change its style. "All the 'don'ts' are relative in cinema, as they are in any art, and may at any moment turn into 'do's'."(2)

What we now regard as self-explicit will seem archaic in half a century or even a decade. Man changes his views of how literature affects cinema and how the two arts are related.

Cinema emerged as satellite of theatre and literature and reflected the powerful impact of these two senior arts. But after a while it accumulated its own energy and headed for its own orbit.

Pasolini assumes that, since 1936, when the world saw Chaplin's Modern Times, cinema has invariably been taking priority of literature, specifically, in responding immediately to profound social and political processes which affected literature only with some delay. (3)

The assumption contains an exaggeration: I don't think that cinema has invariably taken priority of literature. It all too often lags behind. But the exaggeration is indicative. Apparently, no one would have claimed in the twenties that cinema developed prior to literature.

Pasolini conceives the spectacular rise of film art - the result of progressive social developments in different nations - as an accomplished image which makes him poet, philologist and film master, forget, at least for a moment, the endless flow of commercial or simply poor pictures, that are beneath the level of art.

But Pasolini correctly makes his basic assumption that innovation reaches film art before it reaches other arts and literature. The new film art has been crystallizing its form, or, to be more precise, has been constantly changing its form as well as methods of affecting the viewer.

Changes in the language of literature are less striking than changes in the new art of film-making, which, to a considerable extent, is still in its formative years. New elements in the film art are multiple. They change from country to country and still want a synthetic research.

(2) Ibid., p. 36
A review of the relationship between literature and cinema requires at least a brief survey of the changes in the making of feature films.

Critics and cinematographers in many countries say that film-making now is the art of using a hand camera, which can "bite into" actual life, move about in street turmoil, following the hero, that it is the art of handling a nimble tiny microphone which makes it possible to record an interview with any passer-by who may attract the director, the humming of a big city and the multivocal crowd in the street. Cited among the novelties is improvised filming, whose nature depends less on the script, than on the actual events on the set. Many authors stress the unrestricted freedom of devising the mise-en-scenes, which admits of any negligence. Many say that make-up and scenery are not compulsory elements of film-making. I maintain that these are correct observations and reflect the moods, experiences and gains of some film-makers.

These are important trends, but I find that they are absorbed by other aspects of the cinema today, aspects which cast a different light upon the tendencies indicated.

The basic feature of progressive mid-century films is that they have their own method of investigating life, their own way of treating stirring social, psychological and philosophical problems of our time, and of posing new social problems.

Cranes Are Flying, Ballad of a Soldier, or The House I Live In contain, in addition to presenting, with the help of a film camera, observations of screen writers, film directors, cameramen and actors, a new interpretation of new moral issues. Prior to Cranes Are Flying film characters died, heroines made mistakes, soldiers went into battles, patients behaved in hospitals, family members talked at table as they no longer do, though the films I mean were made in the same country and the protagonists ate the same bread and breathed the same air. The makers of these three above-mentioned films did not break with the traditions of Battleship Potemkin or The Youth of Maxim, yet the three pictures were not a repetition of the past. They responded to changes in their country and yet broke certain old do's and don'ts in screen art. The subsequent good films contain no repetition either.

Young script-writer A. Agababov and director F. Dovlatyan, in Hallo, That's me! present their version of what was treated by Mikhail Romm in Nine Days of One Year. Both films are stories about physicists and have much in common in the material. But the makers of the new film reveal their own approach even to the subject matter. Nine Days of One Year sharply poses the question whether or not Soviet physicists had the right to make atom bombs (the episode of the father's son's talk in the village). The new picture raises no such problems. It is set in war days and its heroes look for effective means of defence. On the foreground is an unassuming but very uplifted situation in which the heroes live and work. Hence, unlike politically acute, direct and openly dramatic Nine Days of the Year, the new film is full of reticence and reserve. The screen writer and director must have meant to evoke in the audience associations which should bring to light the internal logic of dialogue, action and thought.
The Lithuanian picture Nobody Wanted to Die may seem, at first sight, a kind of American western: everybody shoots, all may die and nobody knows what he may die for. But not every picture with shooting is a western. The shooting and pursuit may be either content or a mere form. In this case it renders the complicated picture of class struggle in rural areas of Lithuania after World War Two. Complex problems are portrayed through complex characters. The main personage occupies a major post in the village council after his four predecessors were killed by bandits. He is a most contradictory character. Once in the nationalist underground movement, he terrorized peasants; after having served a sentence he came to represent the government to which he had once been opposed. His hesitations, compromises and search present a picture of the Lithuanian peasant who had to make up his mind whether he belonged to the socialist side or the bourgeois one. The peasants were in two minds so they often found themselves embraced by counter-revolution and faced tragic conflicts.

Of course, the two works are different in size and talent, but I feel I can juxtapose Grigory Melekhov of Quiet Flows the Don and Vaiiku of Nobody Wanted to Die. Both men tried to identify themselves with either part of the split world. Rather modest in comparison with the screen adaptation of Sholokhov's famous novel, Nobody Wanted to Die, concentrates on the same social problems.

Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks contain this statement: "Man's consciousness not only reflects the objective world but creates it as well" (1).

Art, as a form of social consciousness, does not copy the environment mechanically. Instead, it reflects the world and at the same time "creates" it. The artist is not a commentator of truisms, but a participant in the creation of reality. He is able of independent thinking and like a test-pilot goes out to face the unknown. Once the concept of consciousness which reflects and creates at the same time was regarded as inapplicable to screen masters. Film art was considered merely as an art of illustration and not one of research, emotional analysis or crucial problems. Soviet cinema has been in the past an illustrative art but it develops now into an art of social innovations and potentialities.

Besides, the cinema carries today a colossal amount of emotional information.

Film and television screens, especially in large cities, exercise daily a powerful impact on human consciousness. New kinds of on-the-spot reports and popular science films spring up. Scientific films deal with problems that used to be out of reach for cinema. New subjects include the structure of atom, the life of the Universe, the emergence of life. Things that were believed to be non-cinematographic abstractions are taking definite forms on the screen. Abstract thought presented through the medium of cinema might be a formula for this new category of films.

Feature films, too have their share of new cinematic realities. The viewer at times feels annoyed by the author's characters' off-screen voice telling stories, deliberating, commenting or comparing. Some critics reject this method as unnatural. Still such protests are groundless. The off-screen commentary reflects a need to explore the intimate feelings of the heroes.

Another sometimes irritating device is unskilful or pretentious showing of fantastic images or visions. The protest against artificiality is natural, but it is wrong to deny a "raison d'être" to this whole trend, which basically reflects a need to express in film language the spontaneity of emotions, impulses and actions of which the character may be unaware consciously.

In discussing his film Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors, a young film director S. Parajanov, writes: "We sometimes rely too much on experience and forget that we should enter some places with the faith of youth, dissociating ourselves from the customary world so that our presence should not alienate things". (1)

How can the protagonist's or author's spontaneous vision of the world be rendered on the screen?

Reminiscences, visions and so forth, are obviously imperfect means. New Eisensteins and Chaplins will cast off the naive solutions and expand the potentialities of the screen with more discoveries. That, as I see it, may take place in a very near future, maybe even during the printing of these lines. The experimental world of film art has in recent years broken ground for such discoveries.

Stirring social problems of our time and expanded realities of the screen require a new approach to the portrayal of man. Dramatic characterization builds up the pathos of many a film.

Adaptation of important literary works in most cases simplifies the characters: the film makers retain the action, the sequence of events while removing complexity and intensity of thought as well as human values. Such is the inertia of the old illustrative cinema.

Major original films present complex characters, problems and emotions. Film masters are more and more often taking interest in intimate conflicts and contradictions of a social nature. That, in a way, makes up for the lack of deep thought and profoundly delineated characters in some screen adaptations of literary works.

The Soldier's Father might seem somewhat traditional. But, in fact, the film, especially in its first part, presents a wholesome folk character whose moral strength is put to a crucial test at the outbreak of the war. Nor is the protagonist of the Kirghizian film The First Teacher a simple character. Such examples are many in Soviet and foreign films.

Of course, films may have no complex characters or individualized heroes. Dramatization of characters is not a sine qua non of novelty. I am convinced that films may reproduce mere events or authors' observations and speculations provided that the author himself possesses a character and epitomizes and expresses, as a personality, the spirit of his time. Such "heroless" films, too, do represent a cinema of heroes.

Another feature concerns action. Critics say once the cinema was an art portraying action, such as chase, murder, rescues and so forth. This art has died and has been replaced by the art of thought. I find this assumption erroneous. The best films which predominantly showed external events had a definite content. On the other hand, pictures focusing on philosophical ideas require a definite action. Life is more complicated than opportune schemes. Let’s forget about them and consider the evolution of action in modern films.

Action in films has gone through a complicated process; as a result, cinema is developing into an art able to present internal action - unspoken, not fully externalized, not fully stated.

Like all sensible things, this view can be rendered senseless. In my opinion some of my foreign colleagues do so by saying that every spectator is his own director, and that the screen action may, finally have no object. If the author puts into his film no passion, expressed through a certain system of action, then the audience will receive no impulse for self-induced "direction". If the film contains no authors' truth, no element of the artists' sufferings and hopes - everything becomes a senseless, futile play.

A real discovery in cinema consists in finding new combinations of internal and external action. Screen action may take the form of silence, sound pause, a hero's glance, a word he utters together with what is left unsaid.

Many people thought that pictures without dialogue are merely a repetition of silent films. But they were mistaken. In The Island - a sound film without dialogue - the drama of events is complemented in the viewer's mind by the drama of the unshown and unsaid. The Island was brought forth by richness of observations and feelings.

A short film The Wedding, made by young Georgian cinematographers, is far from copying old short comedy films; it represents an original study of human relations. Its content is not exhausted by its external features.

Internal action is present in films with or without dialogue. The dialogue itself changes along with the change of the whole system of means of expression so as to convey the deep sense of the content, that is not directly formulated by words or action.

In Hallo, That's me! the hero lives in a most uncomfortable house, high in the mountains. He asks, if anyone has ever stayed in the mountains at that time of the year. The answer is negative; notwithstanding this he decides to stay being convinced that his experiments are important to his country, fighting a war to protect peace. None of that is formulated in the dialogues but it all follows from the combination of internal and external action.

The dialectics of this combination are almost unexplored in this country though such a study might prove extremely exiting.

There is still another change in contemporary cinema world - I mean the evolution of the spectator. On the one hand, the cinema attracts intensely growing audiences. The newly independent developing nations are building or expanding their cinema facilities for people who knew little or nothing about this
art. On the other hand, veteran film-goers develop a subtler perception of films. They are becoming more receptive of the increasingly complex presentation of subject matter. The audiences become more appreciative of artistic taste, subtlety of presentation, sincerity of emotion and, what I should term, complex simplicity. Poor pictures with a preconceived pattern of action, even if they preach the truth, evoke no interest. Similarly, no interest is stimulated by pretentious directing or screenwriting, by any picture which claims meaning of which it is stripped.

Audiences today keenly perceive the associations which grow out of sincere feeling and freedom of creation.

Finally, every day brings numerous new TV spectators, vividly interested in TV films and shows.

Changes in cinema, induce a change of the viewer. Intellectually and aesthetically enriched, the audience helps to change the film art and encourages innovation. The creator is as independent of the viewer, as he is dependent on him. This "dependent independence" of the viewer and the film maker acquires increasingly complex forms, which are subject to study following the development of film art, if not in parallel with it.

New changes in cinema, caused by reality, lead to a new concept of the reciprocal influence of literature and cinema, but this concept differs from the one that existed some fifty or even twenty years ago. I shall discuss a few recent films produced in the national Soviet republics to show the mechanics of this two-way influence.

Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors, a story written by Mikhail Kotzyubinsky, contains a phrase, which, ostensibly, seems to have no connexion with the plot. And yet ...

"What is our life? A flash in the sky, a cherry blossom". The words are loaded with meaning.

The story contains subtle details of old Guzul life which only an ethnographer or a scholar of the region could know. And yet the author populated the mountains, forests and cabins with fantastic creatures - devils, wood-goblins, mermaids and phantoms. His heroes, plain shepherds or wood-choppers, are capable, as if by magic, of going over from ordinary everyday behaviour to sheer fantasy, of seeing unearthly monsters or wonderful visions.

The real and unreal are united in a complex, intricate relation.

Critics have time and again declared that a symbiosis of reality and fantasy is a discovery of the new cinema. Nonsense! There was nothing new about it already at the time of silent movies. I might remind you of The Earth by Alexander Dovzhenko. In literature it appeared much earlier. Examples are works by Kotzyubinsky, Gogol and even Hoffmann...
Kotzyubinsky says that the hero, named Ivan, grew slowly when he was a baby and cried at nights. His mother was frightened and even suspected that he was not her child. The explanation in the story says that she did not protect herself at childbirth by smoking in her cabin and lighting candles, so the sly she-devil replaced her baby with an imp. It remains unclear whether the explanation is made on behalf of Ivan’s mother or the author. This fantastic thread enters the story in the manner of a fairy-tale giving the impression that the author lives in a world of his own myths and fills the whole story with a light that constantly changes its shades and intensity.

Ivan’s inner world is full of most uncommon ideas, but he speaks of them as if they were nothing out of the ordinary.

When he turned seven, writes Kotzyubinsky, Ivan could find medicinal herbs, knew the meaning of kite cries and the origin of cuckoos. But when he told these things at home the mother cast suspicious looks at her son fearing that it might be the devil speaking. Ivan was convinced that the world was run by the evil spirit, that the forests were full of wood-goblins, that man could hear the voice of the axe there, that all-mighty Chugaystir invited there to dance anyone he met. When he woke up at night, amid what seemed an ominous silence, Ivan trembled with fear.

"The whole world was like a fairy-tale, full of wonders, mysterious, exiting and awesome". (1)

Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors is full of diverse sounds. When man is born into the world he hears songs and from his early days learns tunes, deciphers the sounds of a forest, the way a learned man reads a book, and the sounds make him feel infinitely happy yet utterly fearful.

Once Ivan set down to relax ... The silver-fires were tenderly humming their tune and it merged with the sounds of the river as the sun was gilding the deep valley. He saw a mass of green grass and forgot that he was to go and look after the cows. Then, says the writer, the sonorous silence was broken by lilting music which caused him an ear-ache. Ivan did not know that he was playing. Maybe it was the devil? At first, he was in no condition to run. Then he ran slapdash down the slope and when he fell on the ground, came to himself and calmed down the first thing he did was to take out his instrument - the dentsivka - and, straining his memory, catch sounds. Then a strange song broke out, which no one had ever heard, and Ivan’s heart filled with joy.

Another personage, a little girl Marichka, also enters the story singing a song. The author says that song must have lulled her in her cradle and in the font, so songs arose in her soul the way self-sown flowers sprout in the field and silver-fires grow on mountainsides. Every little event in the story - the loss of a sheep, the love of a lad, the unfaithfulness of a girl, the sickness of a cow, the rustle of a silver-fir - takes the form of a song, light and simple as the old, virginal mountains.

(1) M.M. Kotzyubinsky, Selected Works (in Russian), Moscow, 1939, p.472.
The director of the film Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors, S. Parajanov, writes that the story of Kotzyubinsky seemed to him transfigured painting. I think it might also be called transfigured music.

Pervaded with the light of fantasy, pagan myth, song, resonant stillness, and just as resonant a wealth of flowers changing all possible gamuts of colours, it introduces an atmosphere of real life with its flashes of happiness and tragic falls.

But the earthly subject looks like a legend in the story. At first it seems a Guzul version of Romeo and Juliet. Ivan fell in love with youthful Marichka, a girl of another clan. The clans are divided by a long, bitter feud. As the reader watches the sequence of events he feels as if the romance might cause clashes with even more bloodshed than the clashes of the Montagues and Capulets. But soon the reader feels that he should not have succumbed to the spells of the traditional logic of associations arising from the story. It is not an accident that Kotzyubinsky gives a picture of a fantastic environment, saying that the heroes merge with nature, which is capable of caressing and rearing man yet capable of killing him too. These fantastic paraphernalia are not an adornment in the old tradition but an expression of an artistic idea. Kotzyubinsky has his own way of building the story and his own idea of its moving elements.

An accident took the life of youthful Marichka. Ivan's woe is fathomless when he sees what is left of his bride.

Years pass. Ivan returns to the village with his wife, Palagna. But the image of Marichka remains deep down in his heart. As he weaves his story, the writer keeps linking the usual line of peasant life masterfully depicted in subtle features, with elements of fairy-tale. Now the story has a dividing line between what is real and what is not, now the line is watered down so that the reader does not feel it at all.

Ivan's wife fell in love with Yura, a quack doctor. Kotzyubinsky says that his doctoring killed cattle, that his touch made patients turn black as smoke, that Yura could sow death and give life, disperse clouds, stop hail, burn down enemies with fiery arrows of fortune-telling. Earthly motives lie next to the elements of fairy-tale. Yura's secret meetings with Palagna are contradictory by the everyday standards.

The inner dialogue between Ivan and his dead love - with its inexplicable artistic mystery of art has a shattering effect: through the traditional surface of fairy-tale, a flame of human tragedy - the death of Ivan and the triumph of low and shame love of Palagna and Yura - gushes forth like a torrent of incandescent lava. Their life is more than "a flash in the sky" or "cherry blossom". It is something infinitely more intricate and significant.

All I said about Kotzyubinsky's story is true of the film. The director has created whole fireworks of flowers of every possible colour and all the colours and their combinations are as pure as they are in the story. Parajanov gave up the standards of film fairy-scenes with their operatic style as well as mechanical coupling of everyday episodes and fantasy.
The director and the cameraman, Y. Ilyenko, replace the mechanical coupling by natural passages from fairy-scenes to pictures of reality and vice versa because "unreality" - the extent pagan beliefs, myths, ceremonies - in both the story and the film, is also reality, part of people's life at a certain stage of history.

Unlike many screen adaptators, the makers of Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors did not strive to present the subject at the cost of losing the imagery of the original work. They looked for cinematic equivalents that could render the artistic structure of the story. The picture's dramatic form is a marriage of reality and legend, presentation of everyday life and fictional elements. The picture owes a large part of its success to the participation of Guzul non-actors who unconsciously followed Kotzyubinsky's stylistic design.

The director tells this typical episode:

"We brought a few Guzuls to the studio to record them play the trembitas. They refused to play unless they were allowed to put on their costumes and decorate their instruments with fresh flowers". (1)

Likewise, the Guzuls refused to exercise the mourning ceremony at an empty coffin and only when they saw Peter in it did they cry: Oh! Petriku! Petriku!

The picture incorporates many of the story's dialogues as well as the language and song improvisations which sprang up on location. The sound technician recorded choruses and live talk to make a natural picture of people's life. That was included in the sound-track parallel with the action.

The film makers proved faithful to the source, but faithful as innovators would, without copying.

The picture's style reveals the individuality of the director, cameraman, composer, M. Skorik, sound technician S. Serghienko, and set designers M. Rakovsky and G. Yakutovich. Their audio-visual artistic vision of the world, comes through the music and painting, the keenness of original solutions of composition and the search for colour.

Few pictures impress upon the viewer the individuality of the artists as strongly as Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors. That, above all, is true of the director. The film has a remarkable structure. The script writers - S. Parajanov and I. Chendey - rejected the method of strict illustration of the episodes which lend themselves to superficial filming. Both have proved innovators of screenwriting, directing, dramatic composition, colour and sound.

A basic law composition is a system of reiterations based on similarity or contrast. It may be revealed by juxtaposing two episodes focused on Ivan. The first is an episode of ablation, in which he gets ready for the wedding. Everything is simple, monotonous, usual and nothing makes it stand out of all the other episodes. But as the picture draws to a close Ivan cannot endure the loss of Maritchka. No new love comes in place of the old. Ivan dies. In compositionally the same context, with the mise-en-scene almost fully repeated, the action goes through a scene of ablation again, an ablation of Ivan's dead body.

(1) S. Parajanov. Ibid.
The two episodes which are hundreds of metres of film come immediately together in the viewer's mind, producing a kind of tremendous electrical discharge. Within an instant the spectator reviews the whole of Ivan's tragic life. Aristotle would have called this catharsis. I shall attempt no name. Argument runs rife over old terms and too few ones are introduced. Anyway, it is through a discharge that the tragedy reaches directness of form.

Not everything in the picture is expressed to such an extent of emotional precision. It was difficult to show Palagna walking from her home naked and her meeting with the quack. Kotzyubinsky gives a very candid picture and this candidness is very poetic. (1)

Palagna woke up at the first streak of daylight. Isn't it too early? she thought aloud and immediately recalled that it was holiday. She threw off her warm blanket and got up. Ivan lay asleep. The black hole of the stove was breathing in the corner and beneath it a cricket was lazily chirping. Palagna unbuttoned her shirt, dropped it off, stood naked for a while and, fearfully looking at Ivan, went to the door. It creaked and her body felt the breath of a morning cool. The mountains were drowsing, and the silver-firs stood sleeping stern as monks, and the grey spires slept enveloped in a fog. A cold mist was rising from the valley reaching out with its shaggy white paws toward the black silver-firs while the river Cheremosh was telling its dreams to the pale blue sky.

Palagna was walking on the wet grass slightly trembling in the morning cool. She was sure that no one would see her. And even if someone did, what of it? Of course she wanted her fortune-telling to materialize. But she did not think that it might not. Back on Annunciation Day she dug some salt, a roll of bread and a necklace into an ant-hill and now she was going to undig it all. Palagna's body was slowly getting used to the cool air. Her resilient body, which had not yet experienced motherhood, was freely and proudly floating through the wet grass-grown meadows, it was pink and fresh like a gilded cloud, pregnant with spring rain. At last she stopped under a beech-tree but before opening the ant-hill she raised her arms skywards and stretched her whole body with pleasure so as to even hear her bones crackle. Suddenly she felt she was losing strength and feeling unwell. Palagna helplessly lowered her arms looking in front of herself and all of a sudden felt that she was falling down into a black flaming abyss which kept sucking her in.

Yura, the quack, was standing on the other side of the pole looking at her.

She wanted to shout at him and could not. She wanted to cover her breasts with her hands and felt she had no power to raise them. She tried to run away but stood stock-still. She was aghast, powerless, stubbornly looking at the two black glowing pieces of coal which deprived her of strength.

Finally she grew angry. Her fortune-telling proved wrong! She made an effort to whip up her anger and shouted: Why are you gazing at me like this? Haven't you ever seen a woman?

Without lowering his eyes, which held her powerless, Yura bared his shining teeth: Honest to goodness, I have never seen anyone like you. And he threw his leg across the pole.

M. Kotzyubinsky, Tbid. pp.503-504.
CS/0866 - CLT. 86-11
She clearly saw the two flaming pieces of coal which were turning her will to ashes, yet she could not budge, full of sweet, shy expectation.

The extract conveys the absolute naturalness of Palagna and the malice she bore to Yura. Yet it says, however darkly, that something in Yura attracted and spellbound her.

The film renders this nearly as the story does. But something is amiss. It isn't the acting of T. Bestayeva, even though she apparently could not decide whose experience she should follow and whose to reject and how to play the scene. After all, the film was not intended to be a Soviet version of Western strip-tease! The filming of nature as a background is quite credible in this sequence. So where is the flaw?

The first Soviet film to show a naked woman was Dovzhenko's Earth. A naked young peasant woman was rushing to and fro in her cabin. Just as the dying old man embodied the naturalness of death, this scene was geared to show the naturalness of youth with its bodily overflowing health.

Only a formal and platitudinous eye could view it in the base light. And yet, unlike the death scene, the episode failed to live up to the director's expectations.

Eisenstein attributed that to a mistake in the composition of the background for this episode. To render the abstract idea of the triumph of flesh and fullness of life the naked woman should not have been filmed against a background of rough benches, oven-forks, pots and pans. Such an environment detracts from the organic abstract picture. Instead, there should have been a more stylized background.

In the death episode the events and the whole atmosphere are cohesive. The good old man is parting with life in stylized natural surroundings. The sky, the tree and the famous apples are depicted by Dovzhenko in a poetically uplifted manner, too.

The episode with the naked woman should have been built on similar lines.

As I looked back on Dovzhenko's experience I thought: aren't the grass and hoardings which Bestayeva passes by (incidentally, to hide Palagna's body) too photographic? Doesn't nature, which is interpreted in a too down-to-earth manner, weigh down on the events which are tinged with fantasy and fortune-telling?

M. Bakhtin, a scholar of Rabelais, points out two tendencies in depicting the human body. One, termed "grotesque realism", is present in circus and low farce. In Rabelais' work and folklore, says Bakhtin, the grotesque image depicts things as they change, at birth or death, during growth or formation.

The grotesque body "is not fenced off the world. It isn't isolated, nor is it ripe, so it matures till it transcends its own limits. The accent is on the parts which are either open to view, where the world enters the body or bulges out of it, or where the body bulges itself out into the world, that is in the apertures and salient parts, such as the open mouth, genital organ,
breasts, phallus, thick belly or nose ... The body tends to represent and
incarnate the whole of the material world as the absolute bottom, as something
that absorbs and gives birth, as a bodily grave and the field in which nature
sows and which offers ground for sprouts". (1)

The other tendency, according to Rabelais, is represented by the classic
antiquity and the aesthetics of the Renaissance. This system treats the body
as something absolutely complete, closed and sealed off from other bodies.
Inception, pregnancy, childbirth and agony are undisclosed in distinction from
grottesque realism. The age is preferably far from both cradle and grave -
the limits of "individual" life. (2)

Later literature and art developed a different practice of presenting the
human body.

The decadent, commercial bourgeois cinema and television have encouraged
beyond all measure hidden, half-hidden and open pornography and this tendency
is assuming menacing proportions. In the meantime realistic art carries on
the traditions of classical art and folklore. Love of life and openness in the
folklore tradition, the harmony of antique characters are combined with an
emphatic trend toward poetic generalization.

In the Soviet Union this is exemplified by works of Dovzhenko, Parajanov
carries on this line in Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors. Though the episode
with fortune-telling fails to crystallize into a classic image the film-
makers have made an interesting search.

Italian film director Mario Soldati, addressing earlier this year the
Moscow symposium of Italian and Soviet cinematographers said:

"Our erotism is a natural manifestation of old age. It offers repulsive
sights to you because there is a great love potential in each of you. We
are increasingly losing this potential ... When man no longer has love in his
heart and becomes incapable of loving he has to peer through a keyhole"

The historically new film art opposes to the "keyhole aesthetics" its
own aesthetics of full, pure feeling and straight look at life.

Let us get back to the question of "do's" and "don't's" in the literature-
cinema relationship as it manifests itself in Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors.

The whole film has been interpreted in a manner pertaining both to
Kotzyubinsky and Parajanov. It serves as a perfect illustration for the
above stated "dependent independence" of cinema.

Kotzyubinsky’s story dazzled the film-makers by giving them the decisive
impulse an artist needs - obsession and, at the same time, put them on their
own orbit where they felt free and saw far. I see a shortcoming of this
talented film in the excessiveness of picturesque elements and cinematic
imagination. However such a feast of imagination did not destroy the film. The
intonation is very true-to-life where it shows people.

(1) M. Bakhtin, The Work of Francois Rabelais and the People's Culture of the
Middle Ages and Renaissance (in Russian), Moscow, 1965, pp. 31-32.
(2) Ibid., pp. 34-35.
CS/0366, CIT. 86-11
A similar redundancy in another situation and another film would prove harmful.

I saw recently the next picture by Y. Ilyenkov, Wellspring for the Thirsty, which he made as a director. It is also brimful of fantasy, bold composition, versatile means of expression and original search. But the literary scenario, by poet I. Drach, lacks plasticity and precision, so the texture of the subject fails to justify the need for complicated compositions. The whole film has become too rational, partly unclear and unjustifiably complicated though many findings of the cameraman and director are as valuable as those in Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors.

Independence is not a synonym of conceit. Cinema is independent of literature yet it depends on it at least in the sense in which Van Clyburn depends on Tchaikovsky.

The romantic folk legend in Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors takes the form of dramatic fresco. The techniques of modern cinema prove highly effective: the film is full of documentary precision due to the records of authentic Guzul speech, songs and music. To this are added unexpected juxtaposition of sound and image, extraordinary visual compositions and expressive colours.

From this I suggest to go over to discussing some other stylistic experiences exemplified by the success and failure of films based on works by Kirghiz writer Chinghiz Aitmatov.

His "Jamila" appeared in 1958, when the author was 30. It won extensive readership in the Soviet Union. After articles by Louis Aragon, who noticed the young prose-writer and liked his "Jamila", Aitmatov became popular in France and other countries.

Several film studios set to work on "Jamila". Students of the screenwriting department of the Film Institute in Moscow also tried to crack the tough nut, but no film has come of it. No cinematographic form, so far, appears to match Jamila's poetic secret. Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors was more lucky.

The difficulty, as I see it, was not in reproducing Jamila's character, however original and difficult for screen adaptation. Nor did it lie in the filming of the events as they go. The succession of events is none too complex. The screen has many times disclosed, emotionally and excitingly, the decline of sham love and the emergence of a new feeling and new relations.

The difficulty was in the cinematic adaptation of the internal drama of characters and the poetic freedom of the story-telling.

Like in many of Aitmatov's works, the story is told on behalf of the protagonist. What makes it original is that the teenage hero has a very distinct character. The youth holds in great respect Jamila, the wife of his elder brother Sadyk, who went to the front in war days. The youthful storyteller must have read Simonov's poem Wait for Me, so it was beyond his grasp that wonderful Jamila could spurn her soldier husband, his own brother. The drama of Jamila makes the drama of the young lad.
The unhurried pace of the story reflects the slow moral evolution of the young hero, a change in his view of the world and of Jamila's attitude toward Sadyk and Danyiar, a man whom she fell in love with.

The youthful hero had to drastically change his views and endure the distrust and condemnation which weighed down on Jamila at the crucial moment of her life. This inner drama did not lend itself to expression in terms of the usual playwriting and directing. The relations between Jamila and Danyiar also present a tangle. Theirs are dramatic and at the same time highly human destinies. The cinematic treatment of these characters requires both precision and poetic inspiration. What is needed is a cinematographic discovery to match the literary discovery of Aitmatov. Only then will Jamila make a good film.

Aitmatov's works attract film-makers just as works by Panova, Aksyonov or Sergei Antonov. Three of Aitmatov's stories have been brought to the screen: My Little Poplar in a Red Kerchief, The Camel's Eye and The First Teacher. Each of the three is instructive in its own way and reflects both new and archaic elements that exist in screenwriting and film art nowadays.

The screen version of The Camel's Eye is called Sweltering Heat. The most significant element in the story is the character of Abakir. The writer described all of his features with absolute precision, extreme definiteness and a full measure of drama.

Abakir is a tractor-driver and works in the virgin Anarkhai Steppes, where man challenges nature amid clouds of dust and intense heat. Abakir works like mad, with complete self-abnegation. However, his behaviour is largely motivated by greed and cruelty. There is something beastly in his bitter self-denial. He despises all that is related to intellect and romance, takes no interest in the past or future, spares neither himself nor anyone who works next. Abakir treats women with the same fierce obsession and is full of scorn for the young lad Kemel, who also comes to work on virgin soils. When Kemel is appointed coupler of his tractor their duel lasts day and night.

Abakir's character culminates at the end of the story when he chances upon a bullion of gold. The man is blinded into forgetting his tractor, the work he does, his woman and friends and, led only by a blind instinct and fury, runs away hoping to become the owner of an untold wealth. And it is not the youth who came to work in the same harsh conditions and whom he kept flouting in every way, saying that no intellectual being can stand the stress of life in a wild steppe, but it is Abakir himself who makes a getaway.

His senseless desertion exposes his greed and anti-intellectualism. As it often happens, the two qualities go together.

Some places in the story are relatively weak. Abakir is too monotonous in reproaching the youth of being a learned man. Women's characters follow a somewhat preconceived pattern. But the story boldly attacks the evil. Only a writer who has an infinite faith in communist ideals could tell so scathing a story about Abakir, a story with so much sincerity and passion.

The film Sweltering Heat is an independent interpretation of the original.
In both the story and the film Abakir shuns people, is angry and unattractive. But such is his character. His greed, beastly manners and extreme moral vacuity are all weakened and watered down in the film. The problem emphasis is shifted. The film-makers were attracted by the subject of sham work records and various forms of wool-pulling in both work and morality; they present it all as an acute matter in a regular publicistic way.

The picture is not at all an academic dispute geared to expose secondary aspects of life. The film-makers fight complacency and eyewash - these evils which are still strong and prevent building a new society.

In the story Abakir and youthful Kemel are capable of killing each other, which is hardly so in the film. The screen-writers must have liked another aspect of Aitmanov's characters. The story says that Kemel took pity on Abakir, "with his frenzy of malice and hatred for all that lives a life different from his". The film renders Kemel's scorn for and pity of Abakir.

The principal events are adapted for the screen with expression and temperament. There are no film tricks in the episode in the steppe, when Abakir sits in his tractor cabin and Kemel in the trailer. Both are silent. All the viewer sees is a plough cutting into the ground, the tractor caterpillars, the dust which rises to hide the horizon and the faces of the characters.

Very well made is the episode in the tent, when unbridled, conceited and self-reliant Abakir forces shaken Kalipa to undress in the presence of other people. That is his savage way. Abakir does not want anyone to read when he wants to sleep. Since everyone obeys his will he gives rein to his unbounded brutality. Kalipa's chastity in her duel with Abakir is conveyed with brightness and precision.

Many findings in the film are very impressive. Its visual quality and techniques are on the level of the best modern films. The cameramen are Y. Sokol and V. Arkhangelovsky and the cutting is by L. Felonov, a perfect master, former fellow-worker of E. Shub and teacher of a great many film directors. He has done a perfect job.

The making of Sweltering Heat matured the director L. Shepitko, a young graduate of the Film Institute (her next work was The Wings) and Kirghiz actors - B. Shamshiev (Kemel), N. Zhanturin (Abakir), K. Yusupshanova (Kalipa) and K. Dosumbayeva (Shaishen), to mention but a few.

The filming of Camel's Eye is an example of how a story and a film produce a conflict, in which either side is right in its own way.

The conflict between a literary work and a film may bear no fruit. This is evidenced by The Mountain Pass, a film based on Aitmatov's story My little Poplar in a Red Kerchief.

The story has an unusual structure. It brings together two accounts of the same event, one is made by driver Ilyas the other by road-builder Baitemir. Aitmatov begins by describing his meeting with the driver somewhere on the roads of Pamir. Baitemir and Ilyas relate the same events yet in very much their own ways. Each reveals his own attitude toward the drama.
There was a tragedy in Ilyas' life. He deserted his beloved wife Asel for another woman, Kadicha, who probably loved him very dearly too. With a great many self-imprecations but unable to go back, he left Asel and his son to set out with Kadicha for the Anarkhay Steppes, the scene of The Camel's Eye. In a few years he returned to learn that Asel had married Baitemir, who had adopted her son and loved him like his own. Nothing indicates whether or not Asel loved Baitemir. I should say her heart still belonged to Ilyas. Apparently, Ilyas loved her as before. But the author changes nothing in the new situation, and the reader believes that this is the truth.

Ilyas' story is full of details of his tragedy. He tells a story of his whole life.

Baitemir gives his view of the story. He met Asel roaming with her son she knew not where. Baitemir began by offering the deserted women shelter. Later he suggested that they should form a family, though perfectly aware of how difficult it was.

The Great Comforter, an early sound picture by Kuleshov, and Rashomon, a production by Kurosawa, reveals that a film can be made up of the heroes' monologues. The makers of The Mountain Pass replaced this basic compositional device of the original story with their own, rather simplified approach.

The simplification affected the quality of the picture. In it Ilyas, renamed Danyiar, married another woman. He does it too fast, so the picture partly produces an impression of a hackneyed pattern. Danyiar's decision to leave Asel looks unconvincing. While the story is rich in subtle nuances and details, the speedy film action makes for too much straightforwardness. On the contrary, the story's minor aspects are unduly dramatized. Kadicha's jealous admirer, who dislikes her infatuation with Ilyas, is primitivized into an image of a plain movie evil-doer.

Aitmatov gives a good picture of how Ilyas tried to drive heavy trucks with trailers through a mountain pass - an impossible thing - and how he failed. The author, most tactfully, says that after a long absence Ilyas returned to his job in the mountains and, quite incidentally, heard that the drivers were already taking trucks with trailers through the pass. The reader concludes that the hero's failure taught others. What is secondary in the story became vital in the film. The conflict is stripped of its human content and put on the foreground in a most stereotyped fashion. That gives it no additional significance in the eyes of the film audiences. On the contrary, the boring similarity of the pattern to hackneyed pictures, like any out-of-place element, causes an unpleasant reaction.

Toward the end, like in all primitive drama, the conflicts wind up, some in a most artificial manner.

In the final episode Baitemir tells Danyiar with a smile: You now have a son. Everything is blotted out with a stroke of a pen - years of wanderings, the hero's dramatic unfaithfulness, his moral redemption, tragic separation and dramatic meetings with his son to whom he dares not say that he is his
father. To camouflage all this simplification the hero, at the end of the picture, runs out toward the pass to declare his admiration for the mountains. Strictly speaking, this final scene of inspiration is unsubstantiated. After all, the hero's life turns out as a series of poor misunderstandings instead of tremendous experiences.

What makes The Mountain Pass antiquated is not the direction, camerawork or acting - these are all professional enough. The trouble is that the makers refuse to grapple with the problems raised in Aitmatov's story, that they do not present life as it is, with its beauty and complexity, that they revert to the method of plain illustration instead of exploring the unknown.

The style of The First Teacher, directed in Kirghizia by A. Konchalovsky, a graduate of the Moscow Film Institute, is extremely sharp, eye-catching and basically undocumentary.

The documentary method of presenting reality in feature films has lately become widespread in the Soviet Union and abroad. This method was used, for instance, in the film Time, Forward March 1, a screen adaption of a novel by Valentin Katayev. The film opens on newsreels dating from the first five-year plan period, which convey all the romantic mood of the epoch. The documentary gradually develops into a regular feature film. Thanks to the amazing skill of the cameraman the changeover is imperceptible. The rest of this two-serial film was acted out by professionals after a scenario but the tone was set by the opening documentary sequences.

The makers of The First Teacher have a different approach. Instead of the newsreel-type "neutrality", the film strikes with convincing, open acting, that shuns no naturalistic exaggerations. The sharpness at times becomes even unpleasant. It disagrees with the viewer to the extent that he distrusts the acting. Opening on poetic scenes of vast Kirghiz flatlands with their rustling poplars symbolizing the fertility of the soils, the film ends in a picture of the poplars ruthless destruction. This cannot be justified by considerations of either sense or form and style. Brutality and sharpness without justification strip the film of much of its appeal.

Without agreeing with the naturalistic exaggerations and unjustified cruelty of the style, I must say that the film as a whole is impressive and its main episodes are even more so.

Made by a young director, it gives the impression of an independent, individual artistic manner, whether the spectator likes it or not.

Some sequences remind of the work of Buñuel or Wajda, but this similarity is fortuitous and superficial. The picture has its own style and develops its own pace.

The style, I feel bound to say, is rather different from that of Aitmatov's original story, which represents two internal monologues, one built into the other. The first speaker is an artist who dreams of making a picture of his first teacher and recalls his early years. The monologue is then taken over by one of the main characters - Altnmai, once a fifteen year old girl and later a renowned scientist and chair holder. She tells most of the story. In My Little
Poplar in a Red Kerchief the internal monologues of Ilyas and Baitemir were profoundly justified and reflected two different views. What is told by the artist and Altyanai in My First Teacher is a mere framing of the story. In fact Altyanai is a pseudonym for Chinghiz Aitmatov.

Neither framing is carried over into the film. Neither the artist nor the girl tell the story. It has been, so to say, objectivized.

The prosaic story's narration is less catching than the style of the film. At times the director even seems to abandon the literary source and give free rein to his own cinematic imagination. The First Teacher is a perfect example of how cinema asserts its "self-determination".

Yet as well as the original literary source makes for the originality of the film Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors, the events, people, ideas and emotions come to the makers of The First Teacher straight from Aitmatov's story.

The overriding feature of the protagonist, the teacher Dyuishen, is obsession. In The Camel's Eye Abakir is obsessed with greed, fanaticism, and bears strong but powerless malice to people. In this story Dyuishen is obsessed with the idea of serving people and fearlessly strives to change the world. It seems that he needs nothing for himself. If there is no school-building he teaches children in a stable. If there are no desks and benches the pupils sit on straw with planks in their laps. If an icy stream blocks the way to the school the teacher himself drags big, heavy stones to make a passage. He believes in people and wants their help. When they do not help he does things himself braving hunger and cold. If someone wants to kill him he fights. If his life is needed he is ready to sacrifice it. Dyuishen is capable of convincing, pitying and patiently explaining. He loudly urges action. But if an adherent of the old world opposes his cause and idea he will fight the man to the last. Even if he has to fight a whole ten he is unafraid. It seems as if he might fight a whole army to protect his cause. After he saved Altyanai by abducting her from the landlord Dyuishen felt like staying with her till the end of his days. But he knew that he had to send her to study in town. After all, they both needed it.

Critics say that Dyuishen resembles Sholokhov's Nagulnov. Both have absolute dedication to an idea. But they are different characters. Dyuishen has no levity, no sense of humour, no outward temperament which are present in Nagulnov.

Dyuishen resembles somewhat Gubanov of the Kommunist, a film by Yuli Raizman. Both characters are capable of self-denial and self-sacrifice. Gubanov chops wood when no one cares to get fuel for the steam locomotive. Dyuishen carries rocks to make a bridge for the schoolchildren to come to school. But he has a greater degree of selflessness and greater ability for self-sacrifice than Gubanov. Dyuishen is more nervous, prone to anger, sharp and, I should say, inspired.

Aitmatov's story has a compelling dramatic situation and fearlessly reveals clashing contradictions.
When schoolgirl Altynai first disobeyed her parents it seemed as if she were openly challenging all the gods worshipped by her forefathers. "I saw a bright sunshine in the silvered buttons of my long patched coat but I kept running ahead cheerfully, saying to the earth, the sky and the wind: "Look at me! See how proud I am!" (1)

The First Teacher is set in the twenties, when the landlords still wielded power in Kirghizia, when class battles still ran rife in this country. The writer is unafraid of depicting the full scope of evil in action. The formula saying that the dead snatch at the living is skilfully conveyed in the story. A fifteen year old girl, Altynai is forced out of school and the lonely teacher is given short shrift. The girl is taken to the landlord's, sustains gross violence and utter humiliation. Altynai was to remain a lifelong inmate in the harem of her owner. Her drama is presented without understatements both in the story and film. Just as expressive as in the story the active power of good. In an unforgettable scene the shaken teacher tells his little pupils about Lenin's death. Humanity and pathos merge to move the reader and the viewer.

In his ragged greatcoat, stripped of all outward signs of heroism, Dyuishen, however, incarnates revolutionary passion and humanity as Aitmatov and the film-makers take him through severe trials and tribulations.

In distinction from Sweltering Heat, the psychological and dramatic characterization of the heroes is not a bit watered down. No character is showy, the drama does not turn into a pretence of it, and the poetic impact of the film comes from more than the sight of rustling poplars and gurgling mountain streams - there are plenty of similar sequences in poor films too. The authenticity of the tragic and dramatic tie-up and of the change of the characters' fates is complete.

The viewer watches bubbling passions as the characters display an indomitable will to make life pure and just, in the spirit of the 1917 October revolution. Aitmatov's story brings home the pathetic atmosphere of the epoch and it goes straight to the actors, cameraman and director, who make this feeling their own and set it to work.

In the story the earthly and the poetic elements combine most naturally to make realistic the characters and the most involved situations in their lives.

Released from the landlord's harem, Altynai returns humiliated but retains every ounce of purity. Here is the picture of a halt in which Altynai and Dyuishen get off their horses and Dyuishen suggests bathing in the river.

"... when Dyuishen stepped aside I took off my clothes and gently stepped into the water. White, blue, green and red stones looked at me from the bottom. A swift light blue stream was bubbling and gurgling at my ankles. I scooped handfuls of water and threw it on my breasts. Cold streams ran down my body and I involuntarily laughed - for the first time in those days. It was a pleasure to laugh! I poured more water over my body again and again and rushed where the river was deep. The current threw me headlong on a bank, and I rose and threw myself again into the wild, splashing stream.

Water, wash away all the dirt and scum of these days! Make me as clean as yourself! I laughed I knew not why. (1)

Despite her tragedy Altyana remains single-hearted and believes in good. That was what her epoch made of her. That was how she was seen and understood by Dyuishen, a character who admits of no compromises.

The need for a passionate, uncompromising character who takes no pity on himself and others is extremely great in the socialist nations and the rest of the world. We do not regard as our hero the ignorant, downtrodden peasant, who is bent down to earth by a load of prejudices in the Brazilian film The Promise. But we admire his singleness of purpose. We do not admire his fanatical prejudices (strictly speaking, the Brazilian director does not praise them at all either) and the temple to which the wretched parishioner comes as he would to the Calvary, carrying a huge wooden cross, overstraining himself and dying. On the contrary the viewer sees the church in that tragic scene as a force, dark and obsolete just as the peasant's prejudices. Despite the involved religious shrouds which cloud his image the peasant strikes us as a human being who no longer reconciles himself with the unending poverty and tragically gropes for a way out. With all his integrity and originality he reflects the class conflicts which run rife in his semi-colonial country.

The doctor of Kurosava's Red Beard is another hero. The picture is made in another style and another country. Whoever saw that astonishing film is sure to remember the man with a red beard, who began to work in a hospital for the poor and turned poor himself. Fanatically ascetic, his all-pervading passion infects his young friend, whose ambition was the career of a well-paid court doctor.

Kurosava's doctor can cure only physical ailments. He is in no condition to cure his society of its besetting social vices. But the way he associates himself with the poor and desperate, his moral purity and loyalty to his ideal makes the spectator trust him and admire the great artistic integrity of the film director.

It is a deeply-set tradition of the Soviet cinema to depict a hero obsessed with an idea and serving it. Chapayev and Maxim are characters delineated in this lofty tradition which takes many forms. I attribute much of the success of The Soldier's Father to the fact that the film meets the requirements of the Soviet viewer, who needs films with strong, human heroes, cheerful and fearless, versatile and purposeful.

The First Teacher, which a graduate of the Film Institute began to make as a student film convincingly portrays a character obsessed with a lofty revolutionary passion. The film does much credit to the very new cinema of Kirghizia. It is the proof of an extremely fast progress of cinema as an independent art.

Literature and theatre are not losing their dignity by borrowing the cinematic style.

(1) Ch. Aitmatov, Ibid., pp. 299-300
And learning from literature detracts nothing from the purity of cinema. What is more, closeness to literature is a sign of the film art creative maturity of its independence.

The "do's" and "don'ts" of cinema are changing. They are gaining in volume, become unexpected and help the artist to explore human mind and the social and intellectual life in an epoch of social revolutions and unprecedented scientific discoveries. Contacts and conflicts with literature reveal the new trends of the film art which have been discussed in the present paper - penetration into involved characters with their inner dynamics and search for new screen realities through creative analysis (and not illustration) of new problems which present an interest to mankind.