

Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History. By EVGENY DOBRENKO. Pp. 263. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2008. £60. ISBN: 978 0 7486 3445 3

Evgeny Dobrenko's new book, published by Edinburgh UP and translated from the Russian by Sarah Young, offers an erudite and comprehensive overview of a range of cinematic genres that engaged with the treatment of historical material during the Stalinist period. While the title of the study talks of 'cinema', and 'literature' does not figure in it, this is clearly a work of a literary scholar who brings in a wealth of insights related to the dialectics of literature and film during this ideologically complex period. I would define this work, therefore, as a contribution to Soviet cultural history. It brings to light lesser-known aspects of the work of directors like Mark Donskoi, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Mikhail Chiaureli, Fridrikh Ermler, and many others. Directors here are treated as 'auteurs' and seen as the creative force behind the film, contrary to the view that treats film as a collective art where artistic input is distributed more widely and credited equally to cameramen, editors, and art directors. All ideological messages that are uncovered in the cinema of the period are regarded as the doing of writers and film directors, with occasional contributions from actors.

A large part of the investigation, chapters two through five, is dedicated to adaptations of literary works. Chapter Two deals with adaptations of biographies, Chapter Three — with adaptations of literary classics, Chapter Four — with adaptations of Maxim Gorky's autobiographical trilogy, and Chapter Five — specifically with adaptations of Gorky's novel *Mother*. In this last chapter the investigation goes beyond Stalinism to trace adaptations through to later times, as recent as Gleb Panfilov's version from 1989. These chapters take up the bulk of the text, about 130 pages. As a film studies specialist I wondered how much of this really related to cinema. There was next to nothing about the specifics of the filmmaking process or about the creative devices and language specific to cinema. Apparently, the focus of investigation was on films — yet here films were discussed as works of literature, as novels that put out messages into a public sphere that seems to consist mostly of intellectuals. Unlike literature, however, film is a popular art that targets mass audiences; no acknowledgment of this popular dimension is properly made in the book.

The chapters that made a real contribution to my understanding of the cinema of Stalinism and its idiosyncratic effort in producing history were the first and the last, which dealt, in part, with the work of Eisenstein in representing historical heroes (Aleksandr Nevsky, Ivan) and with films about the revolution itself. In most cases these latter films were not based on literary sources, thus the discussion could not veer away into literature. The focus stayed on cinema in a really productive manner.

The volume is dedicated to film historians Maya Turovskaya (whose work is frequently referenced throughout the book) and the late Neya Zorkaya, two women who have done a lot to highlight the legacy of Soviet cinema. This legacy is kept alive by other recent works — Jeremy Hicks' *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film*, (2007), Elizabeth Astrid Papazian's *Manufacturing Truth: The Documentary Moment in Early Soviet Culture* (2008) — that, like Dobrenko's significant volume, persist in building up scholarship that helps our understanding of cinema of Stalinism.

University of St Andrews

DINA IORDANOVA