

Aleksandr Askoldov: *The Commissar*. By Marat Grinberg. Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2016. xxii, 70 pp. References. Notes. Illustrations. \$28.50, paperback.

Sergei Parajanov: *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*. By Joshua First. Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2016. xx, 64 pp. References. Notes. Illustrations. \$28.50, paperback.

Aleksandr Sokurov: *Russian Ark*. By Birgit Beumers. Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2016. xxii, 70 pp. References and Select Bibliography. Notes. Illustrations. \$28.50, paperback.
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These books are the first installments in the new series *KinoSputniks* from Intellect edited by Birgit Beumers and Richard Taylor. *KinoSputniks* continues *KinoFiles*, a series of books on specific Russian/Soviet films that was published by I.B. Tauris in 2000–2010. Like the *KinoFiles*, the new books cover important films: *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1964), *The Commissar* (1967), and *Russian Ark* (2002). Although slightly different in look and format, the new volumes are similar to the *KinoFiles* and contain familiar sections: credits, plot summary, production history, analysis, and reception.

The task of every book on a specific film is to open up the film in ways unattainable in casual viewing, provide essential details on the film's history, and establish the film's significance. The first *KinoSputniks* accomplish these tasks successfully and concisely. Beyond this, each author is allowed to provide his or her own analysis, highlighting those aspects of the film that they consider most crucial. This allows the books to make original contributions to scholarship, without imposing conclusive judgments and leaving the films open to future investigations.

The books' most impressive and original sections are the ones in which the authors address the films' contexts and sources. In *Aleksandr Sokurov: Russian Ark*, Beumers includes a discussion of Marquis de Custine, the French aristocrat who wrote extensively about his travels to Russia in the mid-nineteenth century and whose character serves as the film's guide to St. Petersburg's Hermitage Museum. She then covers the history of the Hermitage itself, starting from its origins as the Winter Palace for the Romanovs and ending with a rich discussion of some of the artworks in its current collection. Beumers focuses on the historical figures and rooms that Aleksandr Sokurov's camera singles out and includes a map of the camera's path through the museum (2). Marat Grinberg argues that Aleksandr Askoldov's four primary intertextual references in *The Commissar* came from literature. They were the authors Vasilii Grossman (on whose short story, *In the Town of Berdichev*, Askoldov based his screenplay), Mikhail Bulgakov (on whom Askoldov wrote his unfinished dissertation at Moscow State University's philology department), Isaak Babel' (whose *Red Cavalry* was one of the film's explicit sources), and Pavel Kogan (whose poem about the Bolshevik revolution, written in 1939–1941, was published in 1965). Perhaps even more strikingly and in contrast to previous writings on Askoldov's film, Grinberg reframes *The Commissar* as a Jewish film.

In contrast to the other two authors, Joshua First does not include a separate section on subtexts. Instead, throughout his narrative he firmly and expertly places his film, Sergei Parajanov's *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, in the context of 1960s Ukrainian cultural politics, as well as concurrent debates on the nature of socialist film art. Parajanov's film partly dictated this choice. In contrast to *The Commissar*, released only in 1987, twenty years after its completion, *Shadows* was shown on Soviet screens and abroad in 1965. Its circulation, as First details in his sections on production history and reception, produced a heated controversy and changed the course of Ukrainian cinema once and for all. As for the legacy of *Russian Ark*, Sokurov's

film emerges from Beumer's discussion, rightly, as a product of its author rather than that of the film's immediate production circumstances. She suggests, if one had to pick one of many themes she addresses, that the film's goal was to offer the Russian answer to the European cultural project.

The most valuable sections for teaching, as was the case with the *KinoFiles*, are those on production history and reception. This is simply because these are the most time-consuming and difficult for an instructor to reconstruct (and they are also the easiest for the undergraduates to relate to). Indeed, some of the most valued insights in these three volumes come from news reports and press releases (Beumers), archival documents (First), and an interview with the director (Grinberg). If anything, in future volumes the editors should not shy away from including more exhaustive production histories. What may be shortened or even skipped are the sections dedicated to analysis, which in the case of these volumes means a reading of the film scene by scene and shot by shot. Although close textual analysis has been a staple of academic writing on film for generations, the tradition to include it developed partly when it was harder than it is today for readers to view older films. Perhaps in future installments it might be possible to recast the close-analysis parts as sections on the film's themes (Beumers includes such a section in her volume), form and structure, cast and crew, and place in world cinema (genres, themes, and stylistic approaches). Also, to avoid squeezed and stretched images, the illustrations should conform to the films' actual aspect ratios.

These and future *KinoSputniks* will be cherished by Russian-film fans and used in courses on Russian cinema and culture. All three contribute not only to the project of writing Russian film history, but also to explorations of Russian/Soviet culture and history. In fact, whether this was intended or not, all three ultimately address the question of nationality and nation in Russian and Soviet culture: the controversial treatment of the Jews in *The Commissar*, the celebration of the Ukrainians in *Shadows*, and the place of Russia vis-à-vis the west in *Russian Ark*.

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Fourteen Little Red Huts and Other Plays. By Andrei Platonov. Ed. Robert Chandler. Trans. Robert Chandler, Jesse Irwin, and Susan Larson. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. Notes. Bibliography. Photographs. \$40.00, hard bound. \$19.95, paper. \$18.99, e-book.

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Robert Chandler's name has long been deservedly associated with those who read and teach Russian literature in translation, particularly the work of Andrei Platonov. Either as an individual or in collaboration with other translators, Chandler has made it possible for those who do not read Russian to become acquainted with works far beyond *The Foundation Pit* (*Kotlovan*), that mainstay of Russian literature classes. One of Chandler's most valuable contributions in expanding access to lesser-known works by Platonov is his translations of many of the great writer's late-career reinterpretations of Russian fairy tales, published in *Russian Magic Tales from Pushkin to Platonov* (2013). In that collection, Chandler does a thorough job introducing the general reader to Platonov through a brief biographical sketch, but also includes in the footnotes a great deal of material that will prove valuable to those who are reading these short tales within the context of longer, more famous works.

Fourteen Little Red Huts and Other Plays provides a service similar to that of *Russian Magic Tales*. In the fullest-to-date collected works of Platonov published by