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HUNTING FOR THE NATIONAL IDEA:
THE TV MINISERIES *DR. ZHIVAGO* AS NOAH'S ARK

Besides its entertaining and commercial aspects, television has, through the years, become an important tool of political influence. As Spanish sociologist Salvador Giner states: "Of all contributions made by Roman thought and imagery to what would later become the mass society outlook, probably the most important was the belief that the multitude must be fed bread and cheap entertainment if it was to be kept quiet, submissive and loyal to the powers that be." (23) In Russia these powers have recently been searching for a national idea that would unite various groups of the society and fill a black hole left after the dissolve of Soviet ideology. A focus on national culture can be seen as one of the possible solutions for the dilemma of the construction of a new and unified national identity, as illustrated by Joseph Brodsky's idea that Russia realizes itself through culture. But the dichotomy between 'high' and 'popular' culture in contemporary television turned into a flamboyant conflict in Russia. Since the 1990s, Russia has turned into a "nation of videots,"¹ and people spend a significant part of their life watching someone else's version of reality, and, ultimately, exchanging their private space for a dominant one. For several years Russian television, with the exception of Channel Kul'tura, nearly avoided its educational potential, and claimed that culture is not a commercial topic. Instead, people consume or, in colloquial Russian, 'digest' (*xabaom*), only entertainment.

At the same time, some television companies tried to exploit cultural elitism by elevating their 'bread and circus' programs to higher levels of art. The recent boom of Russian classic literature adaptations on television is proof of this trend. This boom started with the success of the serial, *The Idiot*, in 2003. This successful example fueled the marketability of adaptations of classical novels and was an ideal representation of bridging high and popular cultures by attracting contrasting social groups of spectators.

¹ The expression came from Jerzy Kosinsky's novel *Being There* (1972).

When we follow Brodsky's idea of national analysis through cultural representation, in this case in terms of an adaptation of classical literature, there are two possibilities for the direction of discussion: from the point of view of reception, and from the point of view of production. As a specific example, the very idea of the television adaptation of Boris Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago* (2006) was a pretext for ardent discussions even before its screening. Indeed, journalists, film and literary critics, and Pasternak's family² each had conflicting opinions about the series. All this conversation created preconceptions and orchestrated the reception of the series on the NTV channel in May, 2006. It is hard to say now whether these preconceptions were created by a spontaneous cultural discussion, by rivals' serials production companies, or by competitive television channels that disseminated negative information.³ Because of these preconceptions, and also because of unclear information about the rating of the series,⁴ market oriented public relations press releases and post-screening articles, the analysis of the reception of the film cannot be viewed as objective.

Therefore, in viewing and analyzing a production, critics rely mostly on their subjective vision. Post-screening critical responses were summed up in the article by the author of the prize winning biography of Boris Pasternak, Dmitrii Bykov:

The country enthusiastically discussed the better than average and close to the text serial *The Idiot*, but *Doctor Zhivago* of Aleksander Proshkin and Iurii Arabov received low ratings and bad press. It was boring for a common spectator. The high-brow intellectual is searching for the borrowings from other works, for the arbitrary departures from the canon and for anachronisms. Lara is not the way she should be, Iurii is not the way he should be, Gromeko merged with Vedepianin, and Dudorov has disappeared somewhere altogether. Pasternak's Christian pathos, as one clever woman writes, was replaced by Arabov's intel-

² The series has failed to win the approval of Pasternak's son, Evgenii, who picked up the Nobel Prize for literature on his father's behalf in 1989. "An attempt has been made to create a version closer to the novel, but it has failed," he said. "It is a caricature. ... This film is about the end of a person named Zhivago who has nothing to do with his namesake in the novel." (Quoted in Blomfield)

³ There is a reason to speak about the war between different TV channels in connection with *Doctor Zhivago*. The film was ready for showing in December, 2005 but was not shown till May, 2006 which is a rare situation in Russia where they start showings even if the last series have not been edited yet, as in case of Solzhenitsyn's *First Circle* (*В круге первом*). The First Channel showed a British version of *Doctor Zhivago* just a few months before the premiere of the Russian series. In addition, the film was stolen and appeared on DVD before its screening on TV. This became the reason that, for the first time in Russia, the company had to release the copyright version before the television showing. When the film was finally shown on NTV, there were about eighteen advertisement minutes during one series.

⁴ According to *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, *Doctor Zhivago* was watched by 17% of TV spectators. For comparison *Master and Margarita* was watched by 36%, *The Golden Calf* by 21% (*Komsomol'skaia*). According to *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, Moscow rating was 6-7%; Russian rating 4%; Minsk rating 30%; Belorussian rating 45%. (*Rossiiskaia*)

lectual inspiration. Instead of a religious thinker, poet and dreamer we have a burned out skeptic as he is played by Men'shikov. The masses are somehow not right. In general, it is banality and sheer boredom. (Bykov)

Bykov mentions the peculiarity of the reception of this film: it disappointed both common consumers of popular culture and high-brow literary intellectuals (film critics, who analyzed the form rather than the content of the series, were more tolerant to this adaptation of *Doctor Zhivago*). The film's message as to the search for national identity went unnoticed. Thus television here appears only as a distributor, a rare feat, instead of the usual creator of ideological meaning.

This paper will thus analyze this serial version of *Doctor Zhivago* from the production point of view, and will involve the readily applicable concept of multiple authorship. For example, the Central Partnership Company acted as a 'cultural' producer; it did not dominate the work, and after choosing the screenwriter and director, tried to respect their rights by giving them 'auteur' status. In this paper I will talk about the reasoning behind the studio's production of this work, and about the cooperation between the screenwriter and the director, the two people with pronounced ideas who were working for this project.

Despite the fact that director Aleksander Proshkin claimed that it was he who proposed the novel to Central Partnership Company and chose the screenwriter (Maliukova), it was instead a producer who made this decision. Indeed, the studio had the educational, economical, and political impetus to make this film. The eleven part miniseries TV adaptation of *Doctor Zhivago* is not only an adaptation of a classic of Russian literature, but also of a work of literature previously forbidden, and whose appearance on the screens became possible only after *perestroika*. The production company hoped that the film would attract readers, who had read and loved the novel, in addition to those who had never read it. In addition, for the production company, three factors assured the long-time interest and possible recycling of this miniseries on the screen: one, the immortality of work of classical literature; two, an international interest to Russian literature, and, specifically, to this book, a winner of the Nobel prize; and three, the fact that the book is part of the obligatory high school program in Russia.

For all these reasons, the production company saw the film as a quality project and decided to spend more than usual amount of money on it. By an official estimate, each of the eleven parts of *Doctor Zhivago* cost around \$400,000 to make (Danielian), which is at least twice the average published price for a part of a serial in Moscow in 2004. This money was mostly spent on actors, and because of the restrictions in filming locations, such as filming the Siberia scenes in Kostroma, and the Moscow scenes in Yaroslavl or in the Mosfilm studio set, it was hard to

escape an artificial look. Additionally, to maximize the use of locations, they filmed in all weather. (Proshkin)

The film was also made on 16 mm Kodak film, which, on the one hand, raised the price of the project, as most serials are shot on video, but on the other, raised the quality of the picture. This quality is more oriented to the television audiences of large Russian cities and to foreign markets since, according to the Russian TV producer Valerii Todorovskii, the majority of the Russian public does not have color TVs and cannot appreciate the beauty of the picture made on 35 mm or 16 mm. (Todorovskii)

Additionally, in the Russian film and television industry, the length of the dailies ranges between seven minutes for more expensive serials to one full part of a serial per day for the cheaper ones, like the products of Amedia-company *My Fair Nanny* (*Моя прекрасная няня*) (2004) or *Talisman of Love* (*Талисман любви*) (2005). Accomplishing the daily norm depends on the ability of a director, a cinematographer, and an editor to work quickly. A more realistic solution here is the utilization of several cameras with instant editing and a more advanced approach, with carefully *mise-en-scened* long takes with all camera movements planned in advance. The result of this is 'talking heads,' as in *The Idiot*, and thus a conversational serial, is created with major emphasis on dialogues. Film quality is very rare in serial productions because it is expensive and requires skilled directors.

In terms of the production of the serial version of *Doctor Zhivago*, it was difficult to find an appropriate director. The older directors felt it was unprestigious to work in serials or were not able to work under the demanding stress of serial shooting. At the same time the younger generation was so flexible ideologically that it was hard to talk about their point of view, which is important for a director who is adapting such a classic as Pasternak's novel. (Danielian) The production company ultimately chose Proshkin (1940), who started as a television director, and whose professionalism and ideological position was easy to follow in his films, such as *Cold Summer of 1953* (*Холодное лето пятьдесят третьего*) (1987) and *The Captain's Daughter* (*Русский бунт*) (2000).

When asked what his serial film was about, Proshkin answered:

Our adaptation does not just focus on the melodramatic aspects, but strives to answer different questions: Who are we? Where are we from? Where are we heading? ... In a nutshell, the film is about how to survive in Russia, how to remain true to oneself, to keep one's integrity. It is about love as well as a sense of God and motherland. (Quoted in Blomfield)

After ultimately securing Proshkin as director, the studio started the search for a screenwriter. The role of a screenwriter is very important, since a well-con-

structured screenplay can save time and money in the production of a serial.⁵ The production company did not have a particular screenwriter in mind for this project. Aleksander Chervinskii, one of the screenwriters working with Central Partnership Company, was given a choice among three options to adapt for the screen: Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* or Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*. After he chose Dostoevsky, the company asked Iurii Arabov (1954), the screenwriter known for his long-time cooperation with Aleksander Sokurov, to choose between *Master and Margarita* and the Pasternak's novel. Arabov chose Pasternak's novel. Proshkin knew Arabov; in addition to being Proshkin's first choice for *Doctor Zhivago*, the screenwriter had also worked with him on the television production of another serial, *Nikolai Vavilov* (1990).

In his work on *Doctor Zhivago*, Arabov faced four problems — the text itself, two existing adaptations, and his own philosophy of 'mechanics of destinies.' Two film versions, David Lean's (1965) and Giacomo Campiotti's (2002) were known in Russia. As stated previously, the 2002 film had been shown shortly before the screening on television of Proshkin's miniseries, and in the context of the wars of the television channels, it can be viewed as an action against the new production. But both these previous adaptations of the text were melodramas, and Arabov was not interested in this genre. Neither was the studio; the production company did not offer this work to Viktor Merezhko, a screenwriter who was famous for his work in this genre.

The last problem was connected with Arabov's own philosophy. In 1997 he has published a book, entitled *Mechanics of Destinies*, where he applied dramaturgical cause-effect connection to the analysis of biographies of famous people. He saw God as a playwright who tried to create a perfect literary text by putting together and connecting all evident actions and secret thoughts of a human being. Later Arabov wrote on this subject:

Let us interpret destiny from the cause-effect point of view, let us consider that maybe, Pushkin tied knots at the build-up part of the composition of his own life that brought him to the shot on Black River? And if we can do it, we will be able to say that we understand the phrase: "The whole world is a theater." And we could say that in this phrase there is a deeper meaning than what we connect with it, like, there is acting everywhere and all of us are just playing our parts. This is not important. It is not about this. But it is said about our Author from the Kingdom of Heaven, of whom different religions speak differently, but at some

⁵ Shortage of good scripts can be seen as a recurring problem in Russian cinema. Several reasons are worth mentioning: first, traditionally, preference in Russian literature was given to characters rather than the plot; second, there were political circumstances that did not allow writers to write openly; and third, there were also changes in contemporary life that were too quick for a screenwriter to follow and reflect. This shortage could temporarily be overcome by the exploitation of Russian classical texts and that is why in transitional periods the eternal values of classical literature are welcomed.

point all religions that are built on monotheism, connect — that He is partly cognized. He is cognized from the point of view of laws of dramaturgy. (Arabov1)

According to Arabov's philosophy, the fate of Dr. Zhivago is his punishment for his guilt, and it became the screenwriter's goal to see this guilt for which Zhivago is punished. Ultimately, Arabov could find but one guilt present: Zhivago's relationship with the women Tonya and Lara; here one might find some connection with Pechorin from Mikhail Lermontov's *Hero of our Time*, which made the screenwriter enter into a dialogue with the masculine themes of Russian literature of the 19th century. This led to the rewriting of the image of a superfluous man and also the revision of the fathers-and-sons conflict in *Doctor Zhivago*.

This fathers-sons conflict is not an important one in Pasternak's novel but it became a vital question in the contemporary Russian search for its national identity. The fathers-sons relation can be analyzed in the context of the patriarchal society, the society that the new, post-*perestroika* Russia is striving for. The novel starts with Iurii's mother's funeral. Iurii's father's suicide is also mentioned but not described in detail. In its turn, the film starts with Iurii's father's suicide shown on the screen. This change makes Arabov's adaptation a story about Pasternak's Russia as Fatherless Motherland. In this respect it is interesting to note that Iurii Zhivago's fault of leaving his children is not at all noticed by the creators of the film.

In addition, for the screenwriter, the novel was a personal story of the main character, but for the director it was an epic. The screenwriter was interested in creating psychological portraits, while the director, on the other hand, was more interested in the epic mysticism of Russian revolt, "useless and ruthless" («бессмысленный и беспощадный») as Pushkin put it, and his point of interest was the psychology of the crowd, where one cannot find the cause-effect relationship. This difference of approaches created some confrontation at the beginning of their work.

Arabov created a script with contemporary political allusions where the Russia of today could see itself. In comparison with the novel, generational and national characteristics became more important than the social ones. And if Pasternak in his novel speaks of the confrontation of classes, the creators of the miniseries call upon the possibility of peaceful 'family' — style coexistence and the dialectical unity of the opposites.

This concept is clearly seen in the casting of the film. The opposition of main male characters: Komarovskiy, Zhivago, and Antipov, is not shown as a negation in the serial. Those male characters are interpreted by actors from three different generations who are active in contemporary Russian cinema: Oleg Iankovskii (1944), Oleg Men'shikov (1960) and Sergei Gorobchenko (1972). All three actors played the role of a superfluous man in respective social époques: Iankovskii did it in Andrei Tarkovskii's films of the 1970s and 1980s, Men'shikov played the reflexive antihero in *Burn by the Sun* (*Утомленные*

солнцем) in 1994 and Gorobchenko played a contemporary superfluous man in the film *Bimmer* (*Бумер*) in 2003.

The casting of Iankovskii in Komarovskii's part was important for Proshkin and Arabov. Arabov said in the interview:

I perfectly realized that this novel could not be adapted for the screen. One could do whatever one wanted but it was just impossible to adapt it. This smells of mysticism, but I was guided by it. I understood that the adaptation of the material was impossible. So I needed to find a way out from this impossibility. I needed to look for a story that is in consonance with Pasternak's. I think that Pasternak's plot is borrowed from Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* that greatly influenced Pasternak. (Arabov2)

This connection with Dostoevsky is responsible for the enlargement of Lara-Komarovskii's story line that, in the screenplay, became the driving force of the film.

According to the director, if he were to make the film in the 1980s, he would have invited Iankovskii to play Zhivago. In the present version Komarovskii is "smart as a devil, he is Polish, and Zhivago gave him Lara, whom he would have never given if Komarovskii were a shallow person." (Proshkin) To sum up, Komarovskii in Proshkin's version has two characteristics: he possesses some of Zhivago's qualities, and also represents a more pragmatic Western type.

When asked why he chose Men'shikov, Proshkin answered that it was hard to find an actor who was able, instead of playing a character, to remain his true self: "I exploited actors' real personalities, to be sincere in their opposition to acting, and I see this as our important difference from other TV adaptations." (Proshkin) Proshkin had the star cast, but he did not use actors in their stereotypical roles. Rather, he used them as metaphors, as the embodiment of real people, living in Russian society, here and now.

For example, Tarkovskii's actress Margarita Terekhova would have played Lara if Proshkin had directed the film in the 1980s. But since he made this film in 2006, he invited Chulpan Khamatova to play Lara. In some recent Russian films that pretend to be myths, main female characters become metaphorical incarnations of the images from a popular Soviet song — those of the Beloved Bride Russia («как невесту родину мы любим») and Mother-Russia («бережем, как ласковую мать»). In the miniseries *Doctor Zhivago*, this image is also present, but it is projected through the actress Khamatova, a Tatar. This again highlights Proshkin's use of actors as metaphors rather than characters. Lara, while she is born and raised in Russia, is, for Proshkin, a Western woman who in his words possesses "genetic presence of freedom." This explains why Proshkin was searching for ethnographical otherness in an actress. So the nationality of Khamatova became an important issue, in terms of the metaphorical 'otherness' that Lara represents. In contrast, Proshkin said that Tonya in comparison with Lara "is woven from the familiar material, she possesses no secret. She has inner balance and is attractive

by nature, but there is no riddle in her.” (Proshkin) In the context of the film, Lara, who is an incarnation of the cinematic Beloved Bride Russia, became an Eastern, not a Western type, or the familiar Russian type.

Despite the fact that Arabov compares *Doctor Zhivago* to *The Idiot*, Khamatova does not play Nastasia Filippovna’s type, and is instead rather close to Dostoevsky’s other female character, Sonya Marmeladova. One of Khamatova’s frequently played archetypal roles is the holy prostitute, as on the stage of *Sovremennik* theater, where she created such character in *The Naked Pioneer* (*Голая пионерка*), merging in her character purity with seductiveness.⁶

In addition to the selection of actors who themselves acted as metaphor for the underlying themes of the novel, Proshkin also used the cinematic style as metaphor. He invited Kira Muratova’s cameraman, Gennadii Kariuk, to work on this film. The director was afraid of excessive imagery, and wanted to have ‘natural’ cinema language, but on the level of high art. (Proshkin) As a result the series was filmed with lengthy takes, sequence shots employing a mobile camera and wide-angle lenses. Gennadii Kariuk did not film from different angles and did not use shot-reverse shots often. Proshkin decided to escape the hegemony of editing and gave preference to the *mise-en-scene* approach for three reasons: it was cheaper to film (if *mise-en-scenes* are carefully planned), it helped to avoid the image of ‘talking heads’ (and to make the miniseries appear more like feature film), and what is most important, it created the feeling of the real, and not manipulated, time and space. The last reason was not only a technical device but was very significant for the director as well as the screenwriter.

Arabov had worked with Sokurov since their film-school years. Sokurov is known for long takes and his intention of uniting real and cinematic times, as in scenes from the film *Mother and Son* (*Мать и сын*) on which Arabov and Sokurov cooperated. The best example of this approach in Sokurov’s style can be seen in his *Russian Ark* (*Русский ковчег*). This marriage of real and cinematic time in Proshkin’s film, that deals with post-Revolutionary reality, clashed with the avant-garde post-Revolutionary cinema of Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, with their image of reality that is alternated by artists in short cuts. Here Proshkin enters into the dialogue with the cinema contemporary to the world described in Pasternak’s novel, as on the text level Arabov enters in the dialogue with Russian literature of the 19th century to which Pasternak’s novel belongs. As for the use of wide-angle lens, they helped to enlarge interiors, escape claustrophobic feelings in indoor long takes, and create an image of home space as a universe. Filmed with wide-angle lens, the private space became more important than the outside world and this was the main idea of Proshkin’s miniseries.

⁶ Such character was first created on Russian screen by Vera Kholodnaia, who became a star because of her ability to present this national female stereotype.

The adaptation of *Doctor Zhivago* is a series based on the novel. While the film ends with Zhivago's death, it is one of the most positive and harmonious works shown on Russian TV today. The characters in *Doctor Zhivago* are grouped together and are shown as survivors of October Revolution in the novel, while in the film today's spectators see them as their own contemporaries, survivors of *perestroika*, which is perceived as another revolution, a natural disaster, like the Flood. If we follow this parallel, then Noah's Ark, as a private space, with its tolerance and peaceful coexistence, becomes a national idea that is stressed by the Central Partnership Company, which unofficially is called "Armenian studio" and has the mountain Ararat as its symbol. And as we all know the Biblical Noah's Ark finally moored to the mountain Ararat.

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Галина Аксенова

В ПОИСКАХ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИДЕИ:
ТЕЛЕВИЗИОННЫЙ ФИЛЬМ *ДОКТОР ЖИВАГО* КАК НОЕВ КОВЧЕГ

Резюме

Статья пытается разобраться в серьезной философской работе сценариста Ю. Арабова и режиссера А. Прошкина в многосерийном телевизионном фильме *Доктор Живаго*. С точки зрения автора статьи, поиск национальной идеи — главная мысль телесериала. Статья акцентирует внимание на коллективном авторстве фильма, описывает проблемы, с которыми столкнулся сценарист, разбирает, как новая версия соотносится с предыдущими постановками и как сценарий Арабова вступает в диалог с текстами русской литературы. В статье показывается, какие изменения совершает автор сценария по отношению к тексту Пастернака и почему. Объясняется выбор актеров. Описывается, как режиссерская концепция отражается в работе оператора.

Galina Aksionowa

W POSZUKIWANIU NARODOWYCH IDEI:
TELEWIZYJNY FILM *DOKTOR ŻYWAGO* JAKO ARKA NOEGO

Streszczenie

W artykule podjęto próbę opisanego poważnego zamysłu filozoficznego scenarzysty J. Arabowa i reżysera A. Proszkina w telewizyjnym serialu *Doktor Żywago*. Z punktu widzenia autora artykułu główną myśl serialu stanowi poszukiwanie idei narodowej. W artykule podkreśla się kolektywne autorstwo filmu, opisane zostały problemy, z którymi borykał się scenarzysta, przeanalizowane relacje nowej wersji do poprzednich inscenizacji i problem, w jaki sposób scenariusz Arabowa podejmuje dialog z tekstami rosyjskiej kultury. W artykule opisano zmiany dokonane przez autora scenariusza w tekście Pasternaka i podjęto próbę wskazania jaka była ich przyczyna. Uzasadniony został także wybór wykonawców i przeanalizowano sposób, w jaki koncepcja reżysera odzwierciedlona została w pracy operatora.