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MOTHER

Produced by Mezhrabpom-Russ, Moscow. Released October 11, 1926; 7 reels, 1,800 meters. Scenario by Nathan Zarkhi, based on the novel by Maxim Gorky. Directed by Vsevolod Pudovkin. Assistant direction by Mikhail Deller and V. I. Strauss. Photographed by Anatoli Golovnya. Art direction by Sergei Kozlovsky.

Cast:

Pelageya Vlasova
Her husband Mikhail, locksmith
Her son, Pavel
Pavel's friend
girl student
police officer
Misha
Strikebreakers

Vera Baranovskaya
A. P. Chistyakov
Nikolai Batalov
Ivan Koval-Samborski
Anna Zemtsova
Vsevolod Pudovkin
N. Videncov
Alexander Savitzky
Viacheslav Novikov
Sovrochin

Though deriving its theme of a mother's revolutionary education from Gorky's novel, a comparison of film with novel reveals an almost total transformation rather than an adaptation. Drawing as well on memoirs of the revolutionary period of 1905-6 (particularly in the city of Tver), Zarkhi created a script that purified and simplified Gorky's novel to an almost classic structure. The character of the father, for example, who illuminates the film both dramatically and socially (and figures importantly in the first three reels), is not in the novel. The dramatization of the trial scene was modelled on the trial in Tolstoy's Resurrection.

In Mother, we discovered the scientific method of the decomposition of a scene into its ingredients, the choice of the most powerful and suggestive, and the rebuilding of the scene by filmic representation on the screen. In this respect I recall the sequence of suspense at the gate of the factory; the gradual assembly of the workers; the feeling of uncertainty as to what was to happen. This was the result of extraordinarily clever construction of shots and of camera position in order to achieve one highly emotional effect. It may, perhaps, appear the simplest of methods, the basis of all filmic representation, but it needs the mental skill of a Pudovkin to extract such dramatic force from a scene. I recall, also, the scene with the falling of the clock; the discovery of the hidden fire-arms under the floorboards; the trial, with the judges drawing horses on their blotting pads; the coming of spring; the escape from the prison; and the final crescendo ending of the cavalry charge. It is impossible to describe the emotional effect of this film. Without hesitation, I place it amongst the finest works in the history of the cinema.

No Soviet film is advanced or "artistic" or even difficult to understand. It is, on the contrary, made for the simple peasant mind. But the Hollywood film man would call Mother an art film, for the reason that it is a more natural state of cinema than the sophisticated movie to which he is accustomed. The primary weapon in the building of scenes is Pudovkin's use of reference by cross-cutting. In Mother, there was the constant inclusion of landscape, of nature, noticeable in every sequence. It was not symbolic, as with the porcelain figures in The Living Corpse,

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But the sheer use of imagery to reinforce drama. The shots of vacant landscape in the opening; the trees and the lake cut in with the boy in prison; the breaking ice, rising by cross-cutting to a stupefying climax in reference to the cavalry charge. It is this breadth of reference that builds up the Pudovkin scene with such force.

Film notes by Stanley Soderstrom

The Film Career of Vsevolod Ilarionovich Pudovkin

In the Days of Struggle	1920	actor
Hammer and Sickle	1920-21	actor
Hunger...Hunger...Hunger	1921	Co-writer, co-director
Locksmith and Chancellor	1922-23	Co-writer
The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks	1923-24	Co-writer, assistant director, art direc- tor, actor
The Death Ray	1924-25	Writer, actor, art director
Mechanics of the Brain	1925-26	Director
Chess Fever	1925	Writer, director
Mother	1926	Director, actor
The End of St. Petersburg	1927	Director, actor
Storm Over Asia	1928	Director
The Living Corpse	1928-29	actor
A Simple Case (Life Is Very Good)	1929-32	Director
Deserter	1931-33	Director, actor
Victory (Mother and Son)	1935-38	Director
Minin and Pozharsky	1939	Co-director
Twenty Years of Cinema	1940	Montage director
Suvorov	1940	Co-director
Feast at Zhirmunka	1941	Director
In the Name of the Fatherland	1942-43	Co-director
Ivan the Terrible	1943	actor
Admiral Nakhimov	1944-46	Co-director, actor
Zhukovsky	1948	Director

Bibliography:

The Film Till Now by Paul Rotha

Index to the Creative Work of Vsevolod I. Pudovkin
by Jay Leyda