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## CLOSE UP

are written; pictures are fabricated. Literary creation is solo work; cinema producing is collaborative, composite, multifarious, and vastly intricate. Many writers are called to Hollywood, but few are chosen. And the elect are content to become and remain, but individual cogs in the giant machinery of picture making. CLIFFORD HOWARD.

## SIX RUSSIAN FILMS

*Two Days (Zwei Tage).*

*The Peasant Women of Riazanj (Das Dorf der Sünde).*

### FIRST TWO OF A SERIES.

*Two Days.*

WUFKU film, directed by Stabavoj. Leading role, F. E. Samytschkowski as the caretaker. S. A. Minin as his son.

Glimpses of large, imposing interiors of a country residence. People hurry down from upstairs, with bags and all the paraphernalia of travel. They make precipitate last minute arrangements, and hasten out to the waiting car. Luggage is being strapped into the car. The master is giving instructions to the old caretaker. A dog and its pup stand by, waiting and wondering. There is much agitation and

## CLOSE UP

anxiety. A heavy suitcase falls. The pup has been killed. But there is no time to waste. The old caretaker watches the car vanish, then picks up the dead animal, and takes it to a coppice in the grounds and buries it. He returns to the house. The departure has been abrupt and many personal effects remain about the rooms. He goes from room to room closing and putting away cigar boxes, trinkets, locking doors and windows, pulling blinds. The family plate he has also carried to the coppice and buried it too. The house assumes more and more an air of desertion and gloom.

Night falls early, and the old caretaker is in his room. His own effects too must be safeguarded. Letters. Gay letters from his son. He looks at the small photograph in gaudy frame of a young man, smiling and handsome. His manner is sad and bewildered. He seems very alone in an atmosphere of heavy quiet and darkness and foreboding.

A figure rushes in the road, and stops, beating and shaking the great iron gates of the garden. The caretaker goes to the window. He sees a youth frantic and desperate, apparently pursued, and in imminent danger. He goes down through the dark house with his candle. The youth beats wildly and frenziedly. Presently he is admitted. It is the son of the house, one of the fleeing family of that same morning. He is distraught and half dead with terror. The Reds are at his heels. The old man locks the gates again, and hurries him into the house, and upstairs to his room. The boy is in a terrible state and almost unconscious. In the coppice outside the mother dog is howling without ceasing. Her mournful howls fill the night.

Almost immediately the Bolsheviks are at the gates, knock-

## CLOSE UP

ing for admission. The boy's fear continues with the same insane energy—a wonderful piece of acting. Again the old man descends. The boy is hidden up in his room. The Bolsheviks are impatient, but the old man goes toward them with his lantern outwardly composed. Go on, he says to them, what's the meaning of this. Get along with you. He is ordered to open, and stands face to face with his son. He angrily rebukes the good-natured greeting. His son listens smilingly to his angry words. Indoors, the tired and hungry men are making themselves comfortable. The old man goes up to his room, outraged and powerless; his life foundations dashed from under him in a moment. The men downstairs seem quiet enough, tired out and sleeping. The boy, exhausted now after his frenzied energy, is put to bed in the old man's bed, and the old man takes pillow and rug and settles himself on the floor.

The howling dog has burrowed in the newly dug soil and exhumed the corpse of the pup. It now howls, crouched over the dead body. The gate sentry, nerves exhausted by the monotonous cries stamps to the coppice to destroy the dog. He finds the plate there, half uncovered in the burrowing; brings companions, and it is borne away to the house.

At dawn the old man descends softly among the sleeping men, and sees his son asleep on a table. He takes food for the boy upstairs, and is detected. Suspicions are roused, and his son and two men mount. They are heard. The boy, his former wild energy returning, is thrust into a long sloping loft. His figure vanishes, falling behind heavy beams and heavy shadow like a startled lizard. The old man is found calmly eating at his table. The search reveals nothing, and

## CLOSE UP

again the son tries to establish a friendly relationship which again his father rejects. There is something fine in the old man's adherence to his beliefs, in his loyalty to his departed masters. He loves his son, and both know it, and the son respects his father, even though he is opposing him in beliefs that are dear to him.

At morning the Bolsheviks depart, and their place is taken by pursuing military. For these people the old man brings out linen and table ware. The son of his masters emerges. Fear having left him he re-establishes himself with cocksure, precocious manner. The old man's son has been followed by him to the cottage where he lives with his wife. It is now easy for him to appear a hero. He has already torn up the son's letters, and the pitiful fragments have been spread by the old man on the bed, assembled but unjoined. Now the security of equals induces him to go further. He calls up the old man. This is his triumph, his statement of being. He strikes him forcefully on the head, calling him traitor. The dazed and astounded old man hears him calling for men to go with him and rout out the Bolshevik son. In course of time he appears bound, and hustled. Again father and son stand face to face. The old man blindly implores mercy from the boy whose triumph makes mercy an impossibility. At nightfall on the second day, the broken figure of the old man is grovelling in the coppice. He has taken the place of the dog, which has vanished. Two naked feet swing above his head. Beside him is the body of the pup.

Presently intolerable grief is replaced by a sudden wild triumph. Again men are asleep indoors, and with them the boy smiling in sleep as he had smiled gratitude the night

## CLOSE UP

before. Content in his belief in right. The old man watches him.

Soon small flames lick the backs of old dry books, of curtains. Smoke wakes the men. Doors and windows are barred. The second day and the second night pass in the blazing of a vast funeral pyre. The old man hurrying away has the majestic pride and gorgeousness of an avenging angel. Dawn of the third day is wet and grey over a winding road, and over flat, wet fields. Face downward in the road is the solitary dead figure of the old man.

This is the story of *Two Days*, tragic beyond endurance, yet by pity and truth not destructive, but rather an inspiration. Its intolerable strength is in its consistency, and the cumulative building of inevitable incident, leading through tragedy to super tragedy. The dawn, and day and night of each day, cheerless, threatening, irrevocable is made to be felt as actual weight of reality. The small personal conflicts, understandings, motives emerge starkly against the dark background. Everything goes to its limit. With a fractionary difference the suitcase falling on the pup might have been almost slapstick. Here it was so inevitable that actual shock of horror came with it. The situation of Revolution and its devastation, of the needs and justification of both sides and the influence of Revolution falling suddenly upon a large country mansion gave an absorbing situation. For the situation was built on reality, and not in any dramatic convention, where revolutionaries, whether Russian, French or Balkan, are shown as sweeping down on everything and leaving only fire and havoc in their wake. How the personal element functioned through the working out of impersonal aims was marvellously shown,

## CLOSE UP

how human met human, not how man met fiend. The parts were flawlessly played. F. E. Samytschkowski as the old man is beyond praise. The son of the house, and his own son were equally, in their places, magnificent. The casting could not, in fact, have been better. It was hard to realise how it *can* have been so good. Technique was stimulating, simple and experienced. *Two Days* once seen can never be forgotten.

*The Peasant Women of Riazanj (Das Dorf der Sünder).*

SOVKINO film. Directed by Olga Preobrashenskaja. *Wassily*, the father, E. Fastrebitzki; *Ivan*, his son, C. Babynin; *Wassilissa*, his daughter, E. Zessarskaja; *Anna*, Ivan's wife, R. Pushnaja; *Wassily's mistress*, O. Narbekowa.

The tremendous sociological importance of this film is in its insistence on the need to recognise the problems arising out of primitive conditions in the villages. Towns carry their own special problems, and the problems of towns are far more well known and recognised, and to a certain extent dealt with. But progress, this film insists, cannot be confined to towns to the exclusion of village life.

It is Spring in Riazanj. Women are washing in the lake, and great stretches of bleaching cloth lie on the grassy slopes. It is a gay and animated scene, and the picturesque peasant costumes, heavy and massive and embroidered, women with skirts fastened back and large bandaged feet, add brightness to a scene already bright. Over the river a cart drives, laden with grain in sacks. The ford is tricky and the cart goes in deep, to the mirth of the women and a

## CLOSE UP

volley of advice. Wassily and his son wade ashore, the cart unharmed. Anna, a young girl, light-hearted with Spring, comes from her cottage. She meets Ivan and the father, both of whom drive on their way, their thoughts occupied with Anna's young beauty.

In an orchard Wassilissa, Wassily's daughter meets her lover, the young smith. They are hidden in dense blossom, but not so hidden that Wassily driving past does not perceive them. Thus, over the morose meal, the family, father, mother, mistress, child, and son await Wassilissa. Ivan's thoughts are dreamily with Anna, his soup spoon dipping in the community dish rests there, and a happy smile reveals his dreamy abstraction. Wassily, profoundly irritated, hits him sharply on the head with the back of his own spoon, and the surprised youth is even more surprised by a spoonful of hot soup dashed in his face. "Wake up, blockhead, it's time you were getting married."

Wassilissa hurries in full of high spirits. The stony silence of her family shows her that they know. Her father's insults and threats fall upon her and she leaves the table.

Anna and Ivan marry. The villagers are already whispering that the old man has manoeuvred this in order that he can have Anna for himself. The wedding feast is full of gaiety and dancing, and the room grow hotter and hotter. The young bride and groom sits mopping exhausted faces. Wassily goes and seats himself beside them, his light caress of the bride's hand has a triumph that does not escape the swift eye of his mistress.

Wassilissa and the smith go out to the quiet shelter of the barn. Wassily finds them there and bursts into fury. You

## CLOSE UP

shall never have my consent to your marriage, he says. His daughter returns his fierce stare. She and the smith go out. Wassily, unsure of himself before her sudden strength, watches them. At the door she says to her lover, "If I come and live with you without marriage will you promise to honour me?" They go off together, leaving Wassily raging, but defeated.

Their life is not so simple, however. Their door is constantly smeared with pitch by angry villagers. The young smith grows despondent, but Wassilissa, helping him at his work, laughs her defiance. Seeing the smeared door, she spits with angry contempt.

At home Wassily has made many advances to the reluctant Anna, who succeeds in evading him. His wife and mistress watch with scandalised eyes, in a conspiracy of rage and avidity, and the atmosphere grows tense and hostile. Their attitude is one almost of eagerness that the thing they have made up their minds is going to happen should do so, thus flooding them with triumph and a virtuous reason for venom. Madame Preobrashenskaja has certainly succeeded in this film in presenting unquestionably the finest studies in feminine psychology that have ever been made, from the sweet, simple Anna, and the strong, loyal Wassilissa to the carnivorous, yet inevitable mistress who left to herself is a harmless great animal, yet whose tenacious brutality and cowardice are the great weapons of her virtue. Indeed, no more scathing, though quite impartial, indictment of so-called virtue has yet been made. Madame Preobrashenskaja's genius is in that her types are never exaggerated, and each has its inevitable *raison d'être*. She does not hate people for

## CLOSE UP

being what they are, but the system which makes them so. The mistress, for instance, though shown up in her true baseness, is no more base and no more shown up than thousands of her type are every day to the observant eye. Not one of her actions, expressions or gestures is strained or over coloured. She has even pathos and a likeability. Chancing to meet her you would find her a cheery, droll and comfortable soul. It is Preobrashenskaja's devilish cunning that has lifted the edge and allowed us to peep beneath at the cauldron-like raging of jealousy and fear.

The War sweeps away the young men. Wassilissa is left standing alone in the half-reaped fields, and sees that now she will be quite alone and without friends. The corn, silver and swiftly undulating in fresh winds, has a beauty and peace where there is suddenly no longer beauty and peace. The corn is luminous and ecstatic, but majestic clouds make the sky darker than the earth. The life of the village goes on, and women take on the men's work.

One day Wassily goes to market. He has promised to bring back presents to the family. Night comes with torrential rain, and in the small room the women are weaving. The wife and mistress and women friends have a conspiratorial, uneasy manner. They weave steadily, the looms and treadles creak, and cover their whispering. Anna, sad, dreaming of Ivan, is yet aware of their hostility. Wassily arrives home drenched, and is much fussed over. But Anna slips away.

He has a shawl for his mistress. She puts it on, flirting, unwieldly and enticing, in front of him. But this second shawl . . . she realises is *not* for her. Her pleasure is short-

## CLOSE UP

lived. Wassily takes no notice of her angry protest, but goes out bearing the shawl. This, indeed, is her defeat. She sits down. This is not a moment for the hard remorseless fighting she has been engaged in. She simply sits down. And gradually her face puckers into a grotesque, miserable dog-like howl.

Presently, however, she is creeping around the house. Where is Ivan and where is Anna? She opens the door to the yard, listening and muttering silently. A curtain of steady rain drips off the thatch in front of her. She tries another door. Darkness and quiet, and the sound of rain. It only remains to confirm the truth. Anna's door . . .

She draws back hurriedly in shadow. Wassily comes out, turns, closing the door and sees her. They stare at each other. The house becomes taut with the destruction wrought. He goes without speaking.

Revolution has ended the War. It is new Russia, and time has elapsed. Wassilissa has joyously greeted the return of the smith. Women come to her. "We need help with the child's home," they tell her. She prepares to go with them. The smith protests. What will I do if you waste all your time up at that place? His manner is new, war-acquired. In just this simple scene Preobrashenskaja has given a vivid cameo of the hardening effect of war. In some subtle way his charm has gone. When he tries to forcibly detain her, she says quite simply, "That sort of thing is finished with. This is the New Russia," and walks out. The "home" is the dilapidated mansion of the late landowner. Hundreds of women and children are clearing and cleaning it up.

A letter has come. The mistress' child comes running,

crying a letter has come. They run indoors, wife, mistress, Anna, the child. Wassily has the letter. News of Ivan. Terror becomes joy, he is returning. They bow down and cross themselves. They turn on Anna: "Now, you with your brat, what will he say now he will find out? We are covered in shame." They moan. The mother screams, "alas that my son should return to this." Anna is driven forth, broken by their violence. She takes the child with her. Wassilissa sees her from the steps of the Home, crying and wretched. They sit together on the steps. Do not worry, Wassilissa comforts her, directly the home is finished there will be a place for your child.

The Spring Festival. Swings, roundabouts, dancing, merrymaking. Anna, the mistress, the wife, are all getting ready in their festival clothes. They sweep out, each tossing her head at the suffering girl. Anna plaiting her hair, goes to the window and sees Ivan returning. Panic overtakes her, she runs away and hides herself in her room. The family come running to Ivan. Where is Anna? The frozen silence is broken by the mother. She has brought shame upon the house. Their hatred is triumphant, and tears of self pity stream down their cheeks. Poor Ivan, poor, poor Ivan. The shocked youth finds Anna in her room, half-dressed, terrified and joyous and tragic. There indeed is the child. Here, too, his posturing is new. In his rejection of Anna he gives himself to his family, becomes one with their baseness. War-acquired. War has not enobled, it has *debased* the men.

The festival is at its height. Maidens throw wreaths into the water—omens for their future. Unseen by the merry-

## **CLOSE UP**

makers, Anna comes wild-eyed along the bank. A hounded, pitiful figure. Soon her 'kerchief is floating with the wreaths, and everybody is running and falling along the steep bank, Wassily, Ivan, the women.

Her drowned corpse is brought home. The family sit around stupid and stupified. Into their midst comes Wassilissa with supreme and noble scorn of them in her bearing: gathers up the child. "Ivan," she snaps at her brother, "your father is the guilty one." She goes out, carrying the child. Leave these people to their crimes and their sins, the child shall not be their victim. And so, the New Woman, free, brave and strong, and the child in her care, and scientific social conditions are shown to be what matters most, and it is upon this note of hope and construction that the tragic story ends. In the new world there will be no victimised Annas, no room for cheap scoundrels or men dulled with outworn prejudice in social and marital matters. Equal chances, vocational training, sex knowledge and understanding, efficient education, hygiene, and common-sense, not only in towns but in every tiny hamlet. Men, honest and decent and straight, and women freed from harmful superstition of weakness and dependability. Comradeship, not ownership. These are the basic principles of Olga Preobrashenskaja's great and first film. A work of genius, of unquestionable beauty, reverent, serious and vital. Her appreciation of picture values alone would entitle her to profound admiration. Her cutting is a miracle, her characterisation can only be wondered at. Every serious man, and certainly every woman will owe a real debt of gratitude to this great director for her contribution to the social problems



## **CLOSE UP**

of to-day in relation to women, and picture lovers will welcome this film for its swift, dramatic action, its fine sureness and poetic beauty.

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**Next Month :**

*Pits (Die Fallgruben des Lebens),*

a new film by A. ROOM.

*Mechanics of the Brain,*

By W. PUDOWKIN & PROF. PAVLOV.