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## Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg: *The Youth of Maxim (Extracts)*

Source: G. M. Kozintsev and L. Z. Trauberg, '*Yunost' Maksima*', *Izvestiya*,  
14 December 1934.

Even now we are not ashamed of our past which, though short in years and short on films, means a lot to us.

But one thing has vanished once and for all: our love of side issues and 'lone' heroes.

One thing has not vanished and that is our love of concrete people. And one thing has developed and grown deeper: our strong love of people who do not stand alone in opposition to the social order, people who are creating the new order, Bolsheviks . . .

The film has been finished. The attempt has been made and it is not for us to judge whether it has succeeded.

If it has succeeded, then it is a credit to the people whose lives we found so moving. If it has succeeded, then it is a credit to the people whose opinion of our script – sometimes cutting, sometimes direct, sometimes Bolshevik – taught us to be truthful and to reject digressions that detracted from the main theme. If it has succeeded, even if only in part, then it is a credit to Soviet cinema, revolutionary and impassioned, in whose ranks we have worked, even on our failures.

No Soviet artist can fail to feel a sense of very great excitement and happiness when he sees the excitement, laughter and tears among our audience.

We want to show this audience, half of whom have never seen a tsarist policeman or gendarme, or a shareholder, images of the distant, yet still very close, past. This past is, after all, still the present in other countries.

We want to show the early stages in the life of one of those men who in the very darkest period – the period of reaction – were not afraid to join the party of the proletariat so that, through the years of advance and war, we came to October and to socialism.

We want to show the Party which, through the period of repression and terror, maintained its courage and its will to victory.

These subjects and tasks are so vast that we cannot cover them in a single film or on our own: they are a matter for the whole of Soviet cinema.

But, as far as we are concerned, the image of the underground Bolshevik still preoccupies us. The task has only been set: we want to move on to a new work about the years of advance, the Bolsheviks in the Duma and the barricades on the Vyborg Side.

That is why *The Youth of Maxim* should not finish with the traditional THE END but with a different title: THE SEQUEL FOLLOWS.<sup>185</sup>

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## Vsevolod Pudovkin: *The Youth of Maxim*

Source: V. I. Pudovkin, '*Yunost' Maksima*', *Izvestiya*, 17 December 1934.

We film-makers are living through a joyous period. We are having a great and happy festival. These are remarkable days, not just because the fifteenth birthday of our young Soviet art<sup>186</sup> gives us the right to celebrate an anniversary, but mainly because the anniversary coincides with our greatest victories on the film front. Only the other day the central Party organ *Pravda* devoted its editorial to a film, *Chapayev*,<sup>187</sup> for the first time in the history of Soviet cinema. Only the other

day whole pages in every newspaper were filled with the enthusiastic audience reactions to that film. Only the other day detachments of the Red Army were parading through the streets of Moscow carrying placards proclaiming 'We're on our way to see *Three Songs of Lenin*'.

But perhaps this is just a run of chance successes? I remember how, at the time, Western critics who were disturbed at the world-wide success of *Potemkin* called it a 'chance success'.

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They were cruelly mistaken. Nowadays it is, of course, not a matter of chance success or of the successes of individual masters, all the more so because none of our present artist-victors has come to our art by chance or is new to it. They all have their own 'creative biographies' and the experience of their previous works.

A few days ago I saw the new film, *The Youth of Maxim*, made by the Leningrad directors Kozintsev and Trauberg (film workers with long memories call them 'FEKS' because they once headed the Factory of the Eccentric Actor). The story of this film is simple and clear. At the time of the tsars, in the darkest years of reaction, a young worker is drawn inexorably into the work of the Party. He is pushed and driven in that direction by the savage violence of the hirelings of the bourgeoisie and by his growing consciousness that is assiduously cultivated by his Party comrades. By the end of the film Maxim is already a real Bolshevik.

The enormous difficulty of the task that the directors undertook lay in creating a general lyrical progression that had to imbue the entire conceived work. They have succeeded in overcoming this difficulty. The stern and noble emotion that we experience when we stand to the sound of the funeral march in memory of the fallen warriors of the Revolution, the lyrical feeling that engulfs us when we look at the portrait of the young Lenin and, lastly, the joyful and uplifting feeling of happiness that takes a simple and clear hold on us when we compare what was with what is and what will be – all these emotions derive, not from watered down 'sentimentality', not from philistine 'tear-jerking', but from a natural grasp of life through reason and emotion.

The 'FEKS' have achieved a lyrical progression in the film. I watched the audience talking to the directors after the screening. I saw the inner warmth of the expressions with which excited people greeted the directors. I heard how warmly and how well the Leningrad workers and, in particular, the young factory workers received the film. Yet another success! After the heroic epic *Chapayev* comes the lyric drama *The Youth of Maxim*.

Their progress is quite different from chance successes. We know 'FEKS' of old. They began with *The Adventures of Oktyabrina* in 1924, a film in which the search for cinematic methods

transformed entire objects into Formalist 'eccentricities'. We are familiar with *The Overcoat* and *SVD*, with their elegant bandits and their caricatured officials sporting their shakoes and their Nicholas I overcoats and talking to monuments. *New Babylon* was a turning point in the subject matter of 'FEKS' work. They chose a big subject, an episode in the French Revolution. With their cameraman Moskvina and their designer Enei they gave the film its appearance, which was astonishing in the authenticity and integrity of its external surfaces. But they did not capture the internal essence of the film – the spirit of the French Revolution. A cool aestheticism dominated the film, although this was not the directors' intention. The film did not 'work out'.

Next the 'FEKS' worked on the film *Alone*, taking contemporary figures like a Soviet woman teacher working in the distant Altai mountains. They persistently achieved simplicity and warmth in this story of a Soviet 'unsung hero' but the chilly grandeur of the adventures with the aeroplane, the conventional 'villainy' of the kulak, the refinement of the methods of 'estrangement' [*ostranenie*] overwhelmed the 'unpretentious' teacher and, once again, the film did not work out as the directors had intended. The audience gave it a cool reception.

Finally, we come to *The Youth of Maxim*. The film begins with an explosion of New Year festivities in tsarist Petersburg. Moskvina's stunning camerawork, Shostakovich's music and the brilliant montage create a model of great formal mastery. The film's finale is unusually simple: the hero of the film, a young Bolshevik just released from prison and stripped of the right of residence for almost all the provinces of tsarist Russia, walks away from the camera, descending the hill into a broad ravine. But this shot, which on the surface is straightforward, is profoundly and significantly disturbing. The ravine is Russia, its open space the future and the simple forward movement of the man represents the assurance and the strength of youth. For the first time the directors have demonstrated a profound and real love, not for the external appearance of the heroes, not for the elegance of the plot's construction, not for the brilliance of an unexpected montage blow, but for actual people, their strength and conviction, their courage and their willpower and, lastly, what they fought and died for. The 'FEKS' have captured the essence and



the film has 'worked out'.

This progression from a formally brilliant beginning to the simple inner power of the ending to the film has something in common with the creative biography of the 'FEKS' themselves, and indeed with all our creative biographies. You cannot create a work of art without the wholehearted enthusiasm of the artist. What the artist loves is communicated to the audience. Learning to love the way the masses live and what moves them means becoming a valuable and useful artist.

Our learning process has been difficult and prolonged. We broke heads and hearts and we learned to mend them when necessary.

The wise and firm policy of the Party has guided our work and our education. Members of the Central Committee have viewed unfinished films and played a part in completing and putting

the finishing touches to them. Members of ~~the~~ Central Committee of the Party and ~~the~~ Komsomol have worked with directors on ~~the~~ selection and analysis of scripts. We have developed in the creative sense, not just ~~under~~ the supervision of the Party but through its ~~direct~~ assistance and concern. The results speak for themselves. The films are 'working out' and are receiving a warm and enthusiastic welcome from the audience of millions. If *Chapayev* is a political event now, then what does the future hold! We want very much to define our class *joie-de-vivre* and our faith in final victory through the ~~term~~ 'optimism' but, to be honest, if we are to find a place for the joy of a consciousness of life in ~~our~~ country, a pride in our common victories, a ~~clear~~ and joyful faith in a secure future, we must invent a new vocabulary. The old vocabulary will ~~not~~ sustain our progress.