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Author(s)	Jay Leyda Sonia Volochova
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# The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

11 West 53 Street, New York, N. Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

October 2 - November 18, 1975

DON DIEGO AND PELEGEYA

## SOVIET SILENT CINEMA

### Part 2: 1926-1927

By special arrangement with Gosfilmofond, the Soviet State Film Archive, and the Pacific Film Archive of the University Art Museum at Berkeley, the Department of Film will present the second of a three-part retrospective of Soviet cinema in its silent period. This program is the most comprehensive ever mounted outside the U.S.S.R. of the classic and revolutionary films of the Soviet Union. Part I, comprising 29 titles, covered the years from 1918 through 1925, and was presented in 1974 from March 7th through April 15th. Part 2 limits itself to the two peak years, 1926 and 1927, and will include forty titles to be exhibited from October 2nd through November 18th. Part 3, completing the silent years of Soviet filmmaking, will be announced in the future.

The works in the retrospective were selected from a list of surviving Soviet silents in the Gosfilmofond Archive by Professor Jay Leyda in consultation with Victor Privato, Director of Gosfilmofond, and Tom Luddy, Program Director of the Pacific Film Archive. Professor Leyda is the author of the definitive text in English on the history of Russian and Soviet cinema, Kino.

The majority of the prints in Part 2 will contain only the original Russian intertitles. Some of the films which will complement the program will be from the Museum's own collection, and many of these will have English intertitles. Almost all the films will be in 35mm.

Synopses and detailed information will be distributed at each screening. The documentation for the notes has been supplied through the generosity of Gosfilmofond, Jay Leyda, the Pacific Film Archive, Jacques Ledoux of the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique (Brussels), Vlada Petric and Andy McKay. Additional information is also drawn from the Museum's own Study Center files. The Department of Film owes a special thanks to Sonia Volochova who is not only translating from original Russian sources but who is assisting in the compiling of these notes as well.

Friday, October 24 at 2:00

Sunday, October 26 at 5:30

With the showing of four Protazanov films (THE FORTY-FIRST, DON DIEGO AND PELAGEYA, THREE THIEVES, and THE MAN FROM THE RESTAURANT) on three successive days (October 23, 24, 25), and the earlier showings of two others (AELITA, 1924, and THE TAILOR FROM TORZHOK, 1925), we hope to remedy the neglect accorded one of the seminal figures in film history. That Protazanov is known at all is due, in the main, to repeated showings over the years of FATHER SERGIUS (OTETS SERGII), 1918, one of the Film Department's first acquisitions, and to the efforts of Jay Leyda (in his model history of the Russian Film, Kino) to put him in proper perspective. Those who have seen FATHER SERGIUS are aware of its powerful dramatic impact. Two of the films being shown, THE FORTY-FIRST and THE MAN FROM THE RESTAURANT, are also dramas, the other two, DON DIEGO AND PELAGEYA, and THREE THIEVES, reveal this director's flair for comedy.

Properly speaking, Protazanov (February 4, 1881 - August 8, 1945) is, in technique and style, outside the revolutionary mainstream, of the period, more "old guard" than "avant garde." His contribution consists in demonstrating that traditional methods, too, could serve ideological ends.

His traditionalism is not surprising. His career began when the screen was still in swaddling clothes (1907), and he directed his first film, THE PRISONER'S SONG (PESNYA KATORZHANINA), in 1911. The many films that followed revealed an original talent, dramatic sensitivity, and most important, a mind attuned to the potentialities of the fledgling cinema. Of his numerous pre-revolutionary films one is of special interest: DRAMA BY TELEPHONE (DRAMA U TELEFONA), 1914, which exactly follows Griffith's THE LONELY VILLA (1909). Leyda conjectures Protazanov may have copied a Danish or German print of Griffith's original. (*Kino*, p. 143). One of his greatest assets was his ability to entice noted stage players to appear in his films and to exact great performances from them, vide Ivan Mozhukhin in FATHER SERGIUS, Ada Voitsik and Ivan Koval-Samborsky in THE FORTY-FIRST. His films were very popular, and, along with Pyotr Chardynin and Vladimir Gardin, he was one of pre-revolutionary Russia's leading directors.

The economic and ideological dislocations of war and revolution brought an influx of émigrés from the Russian film world to Germany, and, especially, Paris. Protazanov was one to these émigrés.

"A natural interchange of material and techniques took place between the Russian and the French filmmakers. The French avant-garde of the early 1920's found much to admire, imitate and borrow wholesale from the Russian work. Marcel L'Herbier, particularly, demonstrated this influence in his work of that time. When Delluc began direction on his own, his handling of Eve Francis produced results remarkably similar to Protazanov's direction of Natalya Lissenko. On the other hand, Protazanov, now Jacques Protozanoff, politely adapted French literature, Zola's Pour une Nuit d'Amour and Paul Bourget's Le Sens de la Mort for the Thiemann studio. Of the latter film Delluc pointedly said, "Le Sens de la Mort est un excellent film français. Il a été fait par des Russes" Quite aside from the quality of the film, it will probably be remembered solely for the appearance in a minor role of a young actor, René Clair, whose observation of Protazanov at work may well have been a spur to his own talents."

(Leyda, *Kino*, pp. 116-17)

Invited to return in 1924, Protazanov resumed his Russian career with the science-fiction romance AELITA, 1924 (shown in Part I of Soviet Silent Cinema). It was followed by the more "agitational" HIS CALL (YEVO PRISYV), 1925 (U.S. release: Chicago, December 3, 1926, the only Soviet silent film premiered outside New York, for a special audience, two days before BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN). Other important films, in addition to the ones listed above, include: THE LASH OF THE CZAR (BELY ORYOL), 1928 (U.S. release: February 11, 1929); AN HOUR WITH TCHEKHOV (CHEKHOVSKY ALMANAKH), 1929 (U.S. release: September 5, 1933); HOLIDAY OF ST. JURGEN (PRAZDNIK SVYATOVO YORGENA), 1930, TOMMY, or SIBERIAN PATROL (TOMMI, or SIBIRSKY PATRUL), 1931 (U.S. release: May 13, 1932); MARIONETTES (MARIONETKI), 1934 (U.S. release: 1934); WITHOUT DOWRY (BESPRIDANNITSA), 1937; SALAVAT YULAYEV, 1941. His last film was NASREDDIN IN BUKHARA (NASREDDIN V BUKHARE), 1943. Some of the films he directed abroad were DER LIEBE PIELGEFAHRT (Germany), L'AMOUR ET LA LOI (France), POUR UNE NUIT D'AMOUR (France, 1919), JUSTICE D'ABORD (France, 1919), a remake of his 1917 PUBLIC PROSECUTOR (PROKUROR).

He died as he had lived -- working on a shooting script.

DON DIEGO AND PELAGEYA (DON DIEGO I PELAGEYA). 1927. Released on February 24, 1928. Comedy. In six reels. Mezhrabpom-Rus. Russian intertitles. ca. 65 minutes.

Scenario: B. Zorich; Director: Yakov Protazanov; Photography: E. Alexeyev; Design: S. Kozlovsky; Assistant director: Ya. Urinov; Director's assistant: N. Bronitsky.

Cast: M. Blumental-Tamarina (Pelageya Demina); A. Bykov ("Don Diego," stationmaster); V. Mikhailov (Pelageya's husband); I. Levkoyeva (Natasha, Komsomol member); I. Yudin (Misha, Komsomol member); V. Popov (Miroshka, watchman), D. Vvedensky (watchman); M. Zharov (member of rural-study society), A. Gromov.

Golovach, a stationmaster in a lonely village, is infatuated with Spanish romances. He spends whole days in bed, engrossed in the exploits of knighthood's heroes, especially the serial installments of a tale recounting the extraordinary adventures of a certain Don Diego. Alas, he must interrupt his reading; the mail train is coming. The peasant women hurry to bring the simple provisions they offer for sale. Among them is old Pelageya Demina. Like the others, she crosses the tracks, transgressing the law. Golovach incensed at the interruption of his reading, arrests her, then dispatches a report of her "crime," together with the "material evidence"-- a crock of milk and blackberries -- to the railroad's administrative office. There, instead of looking into the circumstances of the "affair" the officials automatically assign the case to court.

Pelageya is summoned to a judicial trial. The summons fails to reach her, and she does not appear in court. The indignant judge orders her to be brought by force and sentences her to three months' imprisonment. Without her, her old husband can't cope with things; their poor household is falling apart. But his appeals to the authorities fall on deaf ears. Eventually the local Komsomol cell comes to the rescue. Two of its members, Misha and Natasha, champion their cause. After much effort, they reestablish justice, with the help of the district Party secretary. Pelageya is freed.

Soviet Fiction Films:  
An Annotated Catalog.  
Moscow, 1961, p. 193.  
Translated and revised by Sonia Volochova

To the higher Soviet echelons, the Komsomols (Young Communist Leagues) were of the utmost importance in "building socialism." They were therefore frequent subjects of films. Some, like Friedrich Ermler's 1927 THE PARISIAN COBBLER (shown on October 4), castigated their moral laxity, others idealized their role in creating a "new life". DON DIEGO AND PELAGEYA is such an idealization. But it is also an expose, in satirical form, of bureaucracy, red tape, and the callousness of man qua man.