

Document Citation

Title	Poet and tsar
Author(s)	Sonia Volochova
Source	<i>Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	Gardin, Vladimir Rostislavovich (1877-1965)
Film Subjects	Puteshestviye v Arzrum (Journey to Erzurum), Levin, Moisei, 1937 Poet i tsar (Poet and tsar), Gardin, Vladimir Rostislavovich, 1927

Synopsis

Theme: The 1863 uprising of the White Russian peasants led by the national hero Kastus Kalinovsky.

Oppression by both the Tsarist government and the Polish landowning nobility incites a spontaneous peasant uprising. The insurgents waylay and seize the convoys of bread designed for export abroad. Fearing the aroused wrath of the people, the Polish aristocracy assumes leadership of the revolt, with Count Skirmunt at the head. But dissatisfaction grows. The peasants demand land. Having failed to steer the revolt into their own channels, the Polish nobles plead mea culpa and petition the local Tsarist government for help. Heeding their plea, the governor-general sends the Cossacks to quell the rebellion. In the meantime, the insurgents have acquired a leader, Kastus Kalinovsky. Guided by him, the peasants rout the Cossacks. In an effort to convince the Polish gentry to join the peasants in fighting their common enemy, tsarism, Kastus then appeals to Count Skirmunt's son. But the latter has denounced the insurrection, and is held prisoner. However, his sister evades Kastus' watchfulness and helps him escape. The Polish betrayal deprives the insurrectionists of monetary support, causing a split in their ranks. The rebellion is crushed, and Kastus executed.

Soviet Fiction Films:

An Annotated Catalogue, Vol. I.
Moscow, 1961, pp. 200-01, No. 46-4

Translated and revised by Sonia Volochova

POET AND TSAR. 1927. Released September 20, 1927. Historico-biographical drama. 8 reels. Sovkino (Leningrad). Russian intertitles. ca. 90 minutes.

Alternate Russian title: TSAR I POET (TSAR AND POET) or THE CSAR/CZAR AND THE POET.

Scenario: Vladimir Gardin, Yevgeni Chervyakov. Direction: Vladimir Gardin.

Photography: S. Belyaev (exteriors), N. Aptekman (interiors). Design: A. Arapov;

Assistant director: Yevgeni Chervyakov.

Cast: Yevgeni Chervyakov (Alexander S. Pushkin); I. Volodko (Natali (Nathalie) Pushkina); K. Karenin (Nicholas I); B. Tamarin (Baron Dantes); L. Tkachev (the poet Vyazemsky); E. Roziner (Alexandra, Natali's older sister); A. Feona (Zhukovsky); I. Lersky (Bulgari#n); A. Larikov (Pushkin's valet); O. Spirova (Yekaterina, Natali's sister); I. Khudoleyev (Baron Benkendorf); Z. Valevskaya (Poletika, Natali's friend); A. Nelidov (Krylov); F. Lopukhov (Gogol); G. Michurin (Danzas, Pushkin's Lyceum friend); E. Boronikhin (Dal); N. Cherkasov (barber Charl (Charles)); V. Plotnikov (Baron de Gekkeren); M. Dobrova (Smirnova).

Synopsis

Nicholas I is in love with Pushkin's wife, Nathalie. To conceal his infatuation he encourages an affair between Nathalie and the cavalry officer Dantes. His amorous schemes are abetted by Baron Benkendorf. Aroused by the scandal-mongering rumors of a liaison between his wife and Dantes, Pushkin challenges the latter to a duel. To avoid such a duel, which may cost him his life, Dantes proposes to Nathalie's sister. Pacified, the poet leaves St. Petersburg for his estate in Mikhailovskoye. There a series of anonymous letters convince him that his wife and Dantes are still lovers. Again he challenges the latter to a duel. His friends plead with the tsar to stop the duel, but the gendarmes arrive too late. The mortally wounded poet is dying, his sufferings aggravated by a letter

from Nicholas promising "tsarist" care of his family. His coffin is secretly transported to Mikhailovskoye, by orders of the tsar, who fears popular agitation.

Soviet Fiction Films:
An Annotated Catalogue, Vol. I.
Moscow, 1961, pp. 219-20, No. 502

In 1938 another Soviet film with the same title, POET AND TSAR, was shown in the United States. Except for the fact that this film, too, has Pushkin for its protagonist, it bears no relation to the Gardin version. Its correct title is JOURNEY TO ERZURUM (PUTESHESTVIYE V ARZURUM). It was made in 1936, released February 11, 1937, directed by Molisey Levin, and deals with Pushkin's exile to Erzurum for his Decembrist activities.

KASTUS KALINOVSKY and POET AND TSAR are interesting not for aesthetic reasons but as examples of the variety of styles prevalent in the Soviet Union in the twenties, and as the type of film that displeased either the authorities or the public, and sometimes both. KASTUS, reportedly, was banned, no doubt for its nationalist sentiments (Paul Babitsky and John Rumberg, The Soviet Film Industry, p. 142). If so, it must have been banned after, not prior to, its release. At any rate, today it is singled out by the Soviet catalogue of fiction films as one of Gardin's better films. POET AND TSAR was universally disliked and incurred the wrath of Mayakovsky. He called it "bosh" and "a monstrosity," and in his jubilee greetings to the film industry stated: "The best wishes for the Soviet cinema on the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution would be to disown such stuff as POET AND TSAR..." (Jay Leyda, Kino, pp. 229, 237).

The reputation of Vladimir Gardin (January 1, 1877--May 28, 1965), director of KASTUS KALINOVSKY and POET AND TSAR, rests more on his acting, rather than directing, prowess. He was already well known as a theatrical luminary for his work with Fyodor Kommissarzhevsky and Vsevolod Meyerhold when he came to films in 1913 as Yakov Protazanov's co-director of KEYS OF HAPPINESS (KLYUCHI SHCHASTYA). A member of the older pre-revolutionary generation of filmmakers, he was not an experimentalist. His films are conventional in both style and context. In his early days he concentrated on literary adaptations, especially Tolstoy (ANNA KARENINA, 1914; THE KREUTSER SONATA (KREITSEROVA SONATA), 1914; WAR AND PEACE (VOINA I MIR), 1915, co-directed with Protazanov). After the revolution, he was a member of the Cinema Committee and directed some of the first Soviet fiction films, among them an adaptation of Jack London's THE IRON HEEL (ZHELEZNAYA PYATA), 1919, and in 1919 founded the State Institute of Cinematography. In 1921 he gave Pudovkin and Tisse their first opportunities on SICKLE AND HAMMER (SERP I MOLOT) and HUNGER...HUNGER...HUNGER (GOLOD...GOLOD...GOLOD). Soviet film critics consider his two attempts at symbolic drama --A SPECTER IS HAUNTING EUROPE (PRIZRAK BRODIT PO EVROPE; based on Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death"), 1923, and LOCKSMITH AND CHANCELLOR (SLESAR I KANTZLER), 1924--failures. With the coming of sound he reverted to acting, notably in Friedrich Ermler's COUNTERPLAN (VSTRECHNY), 1932, and PEASANTS (KRESTYANYE), 1935; Alexander Ivanovsky's JUDAS GOLOVLEV (IUDUSHKA GOLOVLYOV), 1934; Nikolai Shengelaya's TWENTY-SIX COMMISSARS (DVADSAT SHEST KOMISSAROV), 1933; Vasili Petrov's PETER THE FIRST, Part II (PYOTR PERVY), 1939; and many others.

Sonia Volochova