

Salys, Rimgaila (ed.). The Russian Cinema Reader: Volume One, 1908 to the Stalin Era. Cultural Syllabus. Academic Studies Press, Boston, MA, 2013. 303 pp. Illustrations. \$49.00.

Salys, Rimgaila (ed.). The Russian Cinema Reader: Volume Two, The Thaw to the Present. Cultural Syllabus. Academic Studies Press, Boston, MA, 2013. 334 pp. Illustrations. \$49.00.

PUBLISHED as part of the Academic Studies Press Cultural Syllabus series, the two volumes of Rimgaila Salys's The Russian Cinema Reader are explicitly conceived as companion textbooks 'for History of Russian Cinema and for Russian Culture courses that emphasize film' (Vol. 1, p. 8 and Vol. 2, p. 9). They are intended both to complement existing courses and to aid course design: the 32 films included in the Readers have been selected either because they are already 'widely taught', or because Salys believes they 'should be taught' (Vol. 1, p. 8 and Vol. 2, p. 9, emphasis in the original).

As their titles make clear, the Readers are structured chronologically, with Volume One covering 1908 to the early 1950s and Volume Two spanning the Thaw to the near present (the most recent film included is Aleksei Popogrebskii's How I Ended This Summer from 2010). Both volumes are subdivided into three parts, each of which focuses on a defined period within the volume's overarching timeframe. Thus, Volume One encompasses 'Early Russian Cinema 1908-1919', 'Soviet Silent Cinema 1918-1930' and 'Stalinist Cinema 1928-1953', while Volume Two covers 'Cinema of the Thaw 1953-1967', 'Cinema of Stagnation Late 1960s-1985' and 'Perestroika and Post-Soviet Cinema 1985-2000s'. Each of these six parts opens with a period survey, all of which 'provide historical context, outline genres, themes and emblematic aesthetic markers for each era, and give brief information on important films and directors not included in the reader.' (Vol. 1, p. 8 and Vol. 2, p. 9). Written by acknowledged experts in the cinema of each period, respectively Denise J. Youngblood (on both early Russian cinema and Soviet silent cinema), Lilya Kaganovsky, Alexander Prokhorov, Elena Prokhorova, and Vida Johnson and Elena Stishova, these concise surveys provide excellent introductory overviews of the periods in question. Each is followed by a brief list of further reading, mostly in English but occasionally also in Russian.

In each part, the period survey is followed by sections on individual films, which are, for the most part, well chosen and which, taken together, offer good coverage. (Selecting 32 films from over 100 years of Russian cinema is, of course, no easy task, and it is therefore inevitable that those who teach Russian film will have opinions about inclusions or omissions.) As is perhaps unavoidable in collections of this type, there is an emphasis on the acknowledged classics and the established canon. Thus, the Readers include two films by Sergei Eizenshtein and two by Andrei Tarkovskii. There are some surprises as well, however, and the inclusion of less obvious films, such as Vladimir Motyl's White Sun of the Desert and Kira Muratova's The Tuner, is to be welcomed. Also pleasing is the fact that the pre-Revolutionary period is not explored solely through the films of the era's most revered director, Evgenii Bauer (represented by his 1914 film

Child of the Big City), but also through Vladimir Romashkov's 1908 Sten'ka Razin, conventionally identified as the first Russian-made feature film, Władysław Starewicz's animated comedy, The Cameraman's Revenge (1912) and Nikolai Larin's rural melodrama, The Merchant Bashkirov's Daughter (1913). It is, however, disappointing that this part includes nothing made after 1914, the point from which films become longer and increasingly sophisticated.

The sections on individual films take different forms. Some have a brief introduction, which includes information on the director's career and a commentary on the film. Most of these introductions have been assembled by Salys. Additional secondary material is included on many, but not all, of the films. This comprises reprints of already published criticism (excerpts and complete essays) and, occasionally, newly commissioned articles. Unfortunately, the way the material is referenced will make it difficult for undergraduate readers both to identify which entries are new and to locate the full texts from which the extracts are taken: instead of being given in footnotes on the pages where the extracts are reproduced, the references are presented at the front of each volume (Vol. 1, pp. 10-11 and Vol 2, pp. 11-12) in a list of acknowledgements that does not indicate where in the Readers the extracts appear. As most of the contributors to the Readers have authored more than one entry, this system lacks clarity and is confusing.

The reprinted material provides a snapshot of the writing of some of the most influential scholars working in the field of Russian cinema studies in British and American universities. Thus, in Volume One, the reader is offered parts of Iurii Tsiv'ian's seminal text on the specificities of the early Russian film style and Julian Graffy's instructive and culturally informed writing on Abram Room's Bed and Sofa (but not, strangely, his work on the Vasil'ev Brothers' Chapaev (London and New York, 2010), identified as 'the most comprehensive book on the film' in the further reading section [Vol. 1, p. 249]). There is also Salys herself on Grigorii Aleksandrov's Circus, extracted from her meticulously researched book The Musical Comedy Films of Grigorii Aleksandrov: Laughing Matters (Bristol, 2009). And there are extracts from key works by Vlada Petrić (on Lev Kuleshov's Mr West), Vance Kepley, Jr (also on Kuleshov and on Aleksandr Dovzhenko's Earth), David Bordwell (on Eizenshtein's silent films) and Jeremy Hicks (on Dziga Vertov's Man with a Movie Camera). Volume Two notably includes excerpts from previously published scholarship by Alexander Prokhorov (on Thaw-era melodramas and Leonid Gaidai's The Diamond Arm), Andrew Horton and Mikhail Brashinsky (on Vasilii Pichul's Little Vera), Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie, and Robert Bird (all on Tarkovskii), Birgit Beumers (on Aleksei Balabanov's Brother and Nikita Mikhalkov's Oscar-winning Burnt by the Sun), Susan Larsen (also on Mikhalkov), and Josephine Woll and Denise Youngblood on Tengiz Abuladze's Repentance, the only film from a former Soviet Republic to be included in the Readers.

Among the new commissions, of which there are more in Volume Two than in Volume One, readers will find an essay by Joan Neuberger on Eizenshtein's Ivan the Terrible, an analysis of Grigorii Chukhrai's Ballad of a Soldier by Vida Johnson, Elena Prokhorova's introduction to Motyl's White Sun of the Desert, entries by Vlad Strukov

on Timur Bekmambetov's Night Watch and Popogrebskii's How I Ended This Summer and a piece on Muratova's The Tuner by Nancy Condee.

The overall impression created by the Readers, however, is that they are going over ground already well trodden. As noted, this applies, to some extent, to the choice of films, but it is especially obvious in the selection of critical material. The vast majority of the texts from which extracts are taken are easily available to buy or to access online, and they must surely also be held in the libraries of all the institutions that teach Russian film to undergraduates. The few new essays offered in the Readers are all written by scholars who have already published authoritatively on the films they here discuss. Had the Readers furnished more completely new writing - to complement the influential readings of the academics whose work is included here, not to replace them entirely - their scope would have been broader and their contribution both more interesting and more significant. The focus on the work of academics writing in English is also somewhat to be regretted. Given that the choice of films is in part determined by the fact that they are available with English subtitles (Vol. 1, p. 8 and Vol. 2, p. 9), the assumption seems to be that the students for whom the Readers are intended are unable to function in the Russian language. The Readers could therefore have very usefully included more translations of key critical works by Russian academics and film critics. For example, the usefulness of the section on Balabanov's Brother - a film notorious for provoking vehement disagreements among Russian critics when it was released in 1997 - could have been increased immeasurably by the inclusion of translations of the responses of, for example, Iurii Bogomolov, Daniil Dondurei, Igor' Mantsov and Viktor Matizen, who all published influential articles on this film in the leading Russian cinema journals Iskusstvo kino and Seans. As it is, the Readers include only one translation of a text published in Russian: brief excerpts from Oksana Bulgakova's Fabrika zhestov (Moscow, 2005). The value of reproducing an article that has been published via the online journal KinoKultura (as is the case with Meghan Vicks's piece on Andrei Zviagintsev's The Return) is also questionable, given that this is easily accessible to students all over the world via the Internet.

These observations notwithstanding, undergraduate students of Russian cinema will no doubt find the Readers useful, and the books also have much to offer the general reader, not least the fact that they situate the films they discuss firmly within the specific socio-ideological and cultural contexts from which they emerged.

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