

**PERFORMING FEMININITY: WOMAN AS PERFORMER IN EARLY
RUSSIAN CINEMA**

RACHEL MORLEY

Contents

List of illustrations

General Editors' Preface

Note on Transliteration

Acknowledgements

Introduction

1. The Oriental Dancer
2. The Peasant Girl and the Boyar's Ward
3. The Opera Singer
4. From the Oriental Dancer to The Tango-Woman
5. The Gypsy Dancer
6. From the Ballerina to the Early Modern Dancer
7. The Actress

Conclusion

Coda

Notes

Select Bibliography

Filmography

Index

List of Illustrations

Illustrations 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 5.1, 5.2 and 6.1: courtesy of Gosfilmofond, *Rossii*

Illustrations 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 4.6, 7.1, 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5: courtesy of the British Film Institute

3.1. Vera sits alone in her bedroom (Bauer, *Twilight of a Woman's Soul*, 1913)

3.2. Petrov parts the gauze curtains and enters Vera's bedroom (Bauer, *Twilight of a Woman's Soul*, 1913)

3.3. Vera's bedroom, presented naturalistically (Bauer, *Twilight of a Woman's Soul*, 1913)

4.1 As Mary flirts with her admirers, the camera tracks in on an exotic Salome dancer (Bauer, *Child of the Big City*, 1914)

4.2. The Salome dancer (Bauer, *Child of the Big City*, 1914)

4.3. Mary tangoes with her new lover (Bauer, *Child of the Big City*, 1914)

4.4. Mary steps over Viktor's corpse, revealing her tango slipper (Bauer, *Child of the Big City*, 1914)

4.5. Viktor's study (Bauer, *Child of the Big City*, 1914)

4.6. The juxtaposition of idealized aesthetic image and real self-image: the faithless Mary indulges herself in erotic daydreams of Viktor's valet (Bauer, *Child of the Big City*, 1914)

5.1. Lola performs in her Gypsy costume in the privacy of her bedroom (Chardynin, *The Love of a Councillor of State*, 1915).

5.2. Lola attempts to enliven the von Brücks' dull tea party by playing music-hall tunes on the piano (Chardynin, *The Love of a Councillor of State*, 1915).

- 6.1. The vengeful sister performs her Duncan-esque dance (Bauer, *Iurii Nagorny*, 1916)
- 7.1. Zoia makes Andrei the object of her gaze (Bauer, *After Death*, 1915)
- 7.2. The extreme close-up of Vera Karalli as Zoia Kadmina (Bauer, *After Death*, 1915)
- 7.3. Andrei dreams of Zoia (Bauer, *After Death*, 1915)
- 7.4. Zoia recites Tatiana's bold love letter to Pushkin's Onegin (Bauer, *After Death*, 1915)
- 7.5. Surrounded by toga-clad actors, Zoia expires (Bauer, *After Death*, 1915).

3. The Opera Singer

The first professional female performer: Evgenii Bauer's Vera Dubrovskaiia¹

The year in which the sophisticated film *The Incestuous Father-in-Law* was made proved to be a significant transitional year in Russian cinema in other ways, for it was in 1912 that Evgenii Bauer entered the world of film. Since the rediscovery of his films at the end of the 1980s, Bauer has come to be seen as the major Russian filmmaker of his era, and as a figure of fundamental importance not only in the history and development of Russian film, but also in world cinema. Accordingly, his work will be central to this and to following chapters. A student of the Moscow College of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture [Moskovskoe uchilishche zhivopisi, vaianiia i zodchestva], Bauer had worked as an actor, a caricaturist, a satirical journalist and a portrait photographer and was already well known as a theatre set designer when he was engaged, in the autumn of 1912, to design the sets for Drankov and A. Taldykin's production *The Tercentenary of the Rule of the House of Romanov, 1613-1913* [Trekhsotletie tsarstvovaniia doma Romanovykh, 1613-1913, 1913], which was directed by Aleksandr Ural'skii and Nikolai Larin. Bauer subsequently worked as a director both under them and for Pathé before joining Aleksandr Khanzhonkov's rival company at the end of 1913, where he remained until his untimely death from pneumonia in June 1917.² Bauer quickly rose to become Khanzhonkov's leading filmmaker and was reputedly the most highly paid director in Russia. Despite the brevity of his cinematic career, Bauer's output was prodigious. He directed at least 82 films, of which 26 are currently known to be extant. As the following chapters will seek in part to demonstrate, the range and number of Bauer's surviving films make it possible

both to gain a sense of the recurrent features of style and theme that make a ‘Bauer film’ instantly recognizable and to trace the development of Bauer’s method and thematics.³

We are aided in this by the fact that among Bauer’s extant films is his directorial debut for Khanzhonkov, *Twilight of a Woman’s Soul*, which was released on 26 November 1913. Photographed by Nikolai Kozlovskii, the cameraman who in 1908 had worked alongside Drankov on *Stenka Razin*, this film demonstrates how far the new art form of cinema had advanced in sophistication in the five years since the release of the first Russian feature film. It also exemplifies the shift occurring in Russian cinema at this time, with rural settings being replaced by urban settings. But *Twilight of a Woman’s Soul* is notable for another reason: it marks a change in the way the female performer is represented in Russian film, for Bauer’s heroine, Vera Dubrovskaiia (Nina Chernova), takes to the stage of her own volition, thus becoming the first professional female performer in Russian film. This fact is significant for, as we shall see, in this way Bauer is able to invest the trope of performing with alternative meanings from those it was accorded in films made before 1913. In this film Bauer directly addresses the fundamental question that would be made famous by the French feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir in 1949: ‘What is a woman?’⁴ The trope of performing is central to Bauer’s exploration of this question.

‘Becoming’ a woman, 1: objectification, idealisation and enculturation

One is not born a woman: one becomes a woman. No biological, psychic or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female assumes in

society; it is civilisation as a whole that constructs this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called the feminine.

Simone de Beauvoir.⁵

We [women] have been compelled in our bodies and in our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with the *idea* of nature that has been established for us [emphasis in original].

Monique Wittig.⁶

Bauer's Vera does not become a stage performer until the end of *Twilight of a Woman's Soul*. However, from the film's earliest sequences Bauer exploits both the trope of the stage and the idea of performing in more abstract and general terms in his representation of his female protagonist. This is especially striking in the sequence in which he introduces Vera to the viewer. We first meet the young woman in her bedroom, in a carefully constructed shot (Figure 3.1). In recent years, this frame has been the focus of several extended analyses of Bauer's cinematic art, with commentators agreeing that it exemplifies many of the stylistic features that make Bauer's films instantly recognisable.⁷ Perhaps most striking is the extraordinary attention paid to the details of the set design. Even when he worked in theatre Bauer's complex and innovative set designs were his trademark,⁸ and he soon also made the field of cinema set design his own.⁹ Concerned to overcome the flatness of the cinema screen, Bauer constantly experimented with new ways to enhance the depth and stereoscopic quality of his sets by using carefully placed columns, furniture,

staircases, curtains, partition walls or plants to divide the space into different planes, both horizontal and vertical. Indeed, his sets are so distinctive that the Soviet director Lev Kuleshov, who had worked as art director on several late Bauer films, talks of ‘the Bauer method’ of set building.¹⁰ This attention to detail is neither gratuitous nor insignificant. Although no doubt partly intended as impressive backdrop, Bauer’s sets and the objects he places within them are always more than mere ornament; instead they function meaningfully, being used to highlight aspects of character and/or of theme. Bauer’s sophisticated ‘blocking’ and his fondness for treating his actors as one more element of the *mise-en-scène*, to be carefully posed, both in relation to the camera and to each other, are also often mentioned in contemporary reviews of his films.¹¹ We see all these carefully thought-through elements of style at work in this introductory shot of Vera.

FIGURE 3.1 NEAR HERE

3.1. Vera sits alone in her bedroom (Bauer, *Twilight of a Woman’s Soul*, 1913)

What does Bauer communicate about Vera here? First, he signals her centrality to the film and his concerns. As the figure placed in the centre of the frame, it is clearly Vera on whom Bauer intends the viewer to focus. In addition to her positioning, Vera’s motionlessness enables, indeed encourages, the viewer to observe her closely: it is again a scopophilic camera that here presents Vera to the viewer. Although somewhat distant, separated from the viewer by the flimsy gauze curtains that are drawn almost completely across the set, she is on display, there to be looked at, a fact Bauer emphasises by having his cameraman hold the shot for almost ten seconds.

Moreover, the frame is structured according to a specifically male gaze, with man as the (active) spectator and woman as the (passive) ‘spectacle’; Vera is here ‘taken as an object’ and ‘styled’ to reflect the ‘phantasies’ of the ‘determining male gaze’.¹² The nature of these ‘phantasies’ is predictable: Vera here represents a virtual compendium of clichéd, nineteenth-century patriarchal assumptions about woman. In Russia in 1913, the obsession with the figure of the eternal feminine – expressed perhaps most fully in the early verse collections of the Symbolist poet Aleksandr Blok – had peaked and was, for many artists, a legitimate target for satire. The Futurist poets Aleksei Kruchenykh and Velimir Khlebnikov had, for example, recently written in a poetic manifesto the disparaging comment that ‘Lately, people have sought to transmute woman into the eternal feminine, the Beautiful Lady; in this way, *a skirt* has become something *mystical* [emphasis in original].’¹³ And indeed, posed in the middle of the extravagant ‘kingdom of gauze and lace’ that is her bedroom,¹⁴ this is indeed how Vera is represented: beautiful, passive, chaste and pure, she is the embodiment of the ‘passivity, submissiveness, pliability, softness’ that, for the future Soviet politician and sexual theorist Aleksandra Kollontai, was the essence of the outdated image of the ‘eternal feminine’.¹⁵

The gauze curtains drawn across the middle of the set serve to emphasise Vera’s detachment from the outside world, the sphere of public activity. They evoke ‘the veil of the hymen’,¹⁶ and they also stand as a literal representation of what Luce Irigaray describes as the ‘metaphorical veil of the eternal feminine’.¹⁷ The lighting is also evocative: as the space in front of the curtains is in complete darkness, in contrast the well-lit background where our heroine sits appears even brighter, and Vera is bathed in an unearthly light that suggests her ethereality. Her delicate, virginal nature is

further suggested by the fragile, transparent curtains themselves and by the diaphanous gown she is wearing. The whiteness of the curtains, of the bed linen and of Vera's dress also evokes associations of purity and innocence, as do the vases of flowers that decorate her bedroom. Vera is transformed into a 'woman in white'. Thus, from the very beginning of the film, and long before we see the male protagonists' responses to and treatment of her, Vera is represented both as a mysterious and enticing object of erotic contemplation and as the epitome of nineteenth-century male fantasies of the perfect woman. She is held in a state of what Simone de Beauvoir would later term 'immanence': a closed-off, dead-end interior domain in which women are passive, static, and imprisoned.

Subsequent sequences set in Vera's bedroom offer similarly idealised and abstracted images of the young woman. Thus we watch Vera as she sleeps and dreams. Although Vera's erotic appeal is heightened in this sequence – her thick black hair cascades down her back – her loose white nightgown is, for all its vague sensuality, a reminder of her virginal purity. This is emphasised when, at one point, Vera kneels by her bed and appears to pray; this pose, combined with her attire and the bright lighting, lends Vera an aura of saintliness. When she takes to her bed through illness, she is also depicted in the same evocative poses and attire, pale, wan and vulnerable but no less beautiful and desirable. Later in the film, Vera is also shown before her mirror, contemplating her beauty and daydreaming of her lover, Prince Dolskii, while a maid brushes her hair. Familiar from many portraits of women throughout the history of art, this pose leads the spectator to focus on what the art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn describes as 'the talismanic parts of the female body [...]: eyes, lips, hands, rippling hair.'¹⁸ Again the spectator is encouraged to view Vera through male eyes for, as

Prettejohn goes on to suggest, drawing on the work of the feminist art critic Griselda Pollock, these 'symbols of eroticism' refer 'not so much to the characteristics of the depicted woman as to those of male desire.'¹⁹

These clichéd formulations of Vera's femininity do not express Bauer's directorial perception, however. It is characteristic of Bauer's sophistication that he is able to suggest that these idealised, conventional and out-dated images of femininity exist primarily in the minds of his male protagonists. One way in which Bauer implies this is by introducing a male protagonist in the frame in such a way that his voyeuristic tendencies are highlighted. Thus, as Vera sits daydreaming in her bedroom at the start of the film, she is observed unawares not only by the viewer, but also by the manservant sent to summon her to the ball. The servant enters the dark foreground of the frame and stands silhouetted, his back to the camera, apparently taking advantage of the opportunity to observe Vera for a moment, before eventually making his presence known to her. The fact that he remains in the dark space of the frame throughout the sequence transforms him into a faceless and vaguely menacing figure.²⁰

This technique recurs throughout the film, with a more sinister example occurring after Vera's first philanthropic visit to the workman, Maksim Petrov. Moved by the poverty of his attic garret, Vera had knelt by Petrov's side and bandaged his wounded hand. Struck by her beauty and mistaking her compassion for erotic attraction, Petrov is overcome by desire for the young woman who, even in this early sequence, is identified in an intertitle as the 'victim of deception'. He therefore sets a trap for her: playing on her sympathy, he writes to Vera, announcing that he is near death and

begging her to visit him again. Petrov delivers this duplicitous letter himself, climbing through the open window of Vera's bedroom at night. Unable to resist the sight of the 'sleeping beauty', however, he lingers, looking at the young woman through the gauze curtains, as the manservant had done before him; then he parts the curtains, enters Vera's bedroom and again stands watching her 'unawares' (Figure 3.2). In his violation of Vera's intimate space, Petrov displays the same patriarchal self-confidence as during his subsequent rape of her, an act that is symbolically pre-figured in this sequence.

FIGURE 3.2 NEAR HERE

3.2. Petrov parts the gauze curtains and enters Vera's bedroom (Bauer, *Twilight of a Woman's Soul*, 1913)

Bauer's method in these examples is subtle. In addition to casting the male protagonists as voyeurs in this way, he uses other means to distance himself from the film's initial representation of Vera. Most notably, he self-consciously highlights the stylised and constructed nature of the introductory shot of her in her bedroom by incorporating the trope of the stage visually into his set design (Figure 3.1). The gauze curtains, for example, both recall the stage curtains of any theatre and 'lay bare' the concept of the so-called 'fourth wall', that imaginary barrier at the front of the stage in a proscenium theatre, through which the audience observes the action that is taking place in the fictional world of the performance they are watching. Thus, in addition to their other symbolic values, the curtains also function to draw attention to the artificiality, or the 'constructedness', of both Vera and her surroundings. The way in which the shot is lit, which, as Yuri Tsivian notes, 'is very unusual, even for 1913, the

year in which lighting effects were much in vogue',²¹ also contributes to the creation of this 'theatrical' effect, for it replicates the way in which in a theatre the on-stage performers are illuminated by the footlights, while the members of the audience, seated in the stalls, find themselves in darkness. This stark, theatrical effect is highlighted by the fact that at other times in the film's first reel the same set is, as Cavendish observes, 'presented naturalistically, with the foreground generously illuminated, and the vantage point of the camera slightly altered.'²² (Figure 3.3) Bauer also reproduces the spectatorial and spatial relationship of the theatre audience and the performer in the figures of the men who at various times stand in the dark foreground of the frame, on the other side of the curtains/'the fourth wall', and watch Vera. By incorporating overtly theatrical elements into his set design for Vera's bedroom in these ways, Bauer further emphasises that what he is offering to the viewer is not an objective, 'truthful' representation of this young woman, but rather a reconstruction of how she appears when viewed through the prism of the male protagonists' subjectivity. In other words, Bauer here creates a representation of Vera as a social, cultural and ideological gender construct. This is what, to use the terminology proposed by Simone de Beauvoir, woman had 'become' in Russia at the start of the twentieth century: a passive, pure and idealised object of erotic contemplation, a locus of male fantasies about perfect femininity: or, in Monique Wittig's words: 'only a myth'.²³

FIGURE 3.3 NEAR HERE

3.3. Vera's bedroom, presented naturalistically (Bauer, *Twilight of a Woman's Soul*, 1913)

‘Becoming’ a woman, 2: agency

The women of today are actively overthrowing the myth of femininity; they are beginning to affirm their independence concretely.

Simone de Beauvoir.²⁴

If gender is the variable cultural interpretation of sex, then it lacks the fixity and closure characteristic of simple identity. To be a gender [...] is to be engaged in an ongoing cultural interpretation of bodies and, hence, to be dynamically positioned within a field of cultural possibilities.

Gender must be understood as a modality of taking on or realizing possibilities, a process of interpreting the body, giving it cultural form. In other words, to be a woman is to become a woman; it is not a matter of acquiescing to a fixed ontological status, in which case one could be born a woman, but, rather, an active process of appropriating, interpreting, and reinterpreting received cultural possibilities.

Judith Butler.²⁵

Bauer also shows, however, even in the film’s earliest sequences, that there is more to Vera herself than this fossilised feminine image suggests. For it is striking that in addition both to stressing the encultured ‘constructedness’ of Vera’s persona and the state of ‘immanence’ in which she exists, and to characterising this as a male-defined

image, Bauer also takes care to reveal, by various means, Vera's dissatisfaction with her present identity and way of life. Tsivian has analysed, for example, how in the initial sequence in Vera's bedroom Bauer uses light and ambience – and specifically the title metaphor of 'twilight' - to evoke Vera's depressed state of mind, her sense of social alienation and her frustration with the closed-off emptiness of her life.²⁶

Moreover, several times Bauer has Vera walk over to the large window in her bedroom, whereupon she opens the shutters wide, letting light flood in, and gazes out at the world beyond.²⁷ The symbolism is clear: Vera wants to escape the claustrophobic confines of her bedroom, to become something and someone other than a beautiful, trapped object. She wants to explore the world outside her bedroom window. She desires, to use de Beauvoir's terminology again, 'transcendence'.

Bauer also emphasises this by harnessing Nina Chernova's considerable acting talent. Using subtle gestures, body language and facial expression, Chernova effectively conveys Vera's consciousness of existing within the confines of an imposed set of rules and restrictions. There is her reluctance to attend her parents' ball, for example, and her obvious boredom with the social niceties that are required of her once she is there. Although Vera accepts an invitation to dance from one of the many insistent admirers who crowd round her, Chernova's acting makes it clear that she cannot wait for it to be over. Once it is, she excuses herself and retreats behind a row of ornate pot plants, which serve as markers of her parents' wealth and class, to a space that is, as Tsivian observes, 'as solitary as Vera's bedroom had been'.²⁸

Bauer clearly sympathises with Vera in this sequence and he also expresses his approval of her restlessness. Typically, he does so cinematically: by means of a subtle

camera movement that aligns the camera with his heroine; as Vera cannot remain still, neither can his camera. Thus, towards the end of the ball sequence, after Vera has retreated from the public gaze, she sits first on one chair for a moment before standing and walking to another. As the young woman moves, something remarkable happens: the camera – which in 1913 was still almost entirely static, except in a few rare cases – follows her. As we saw in Chapter 2, in *The Incestuous Father-in-Law* the camera's pursuit of Lusha had functioned as a symbol of the way in which the eponymous male protagonist had relentlessly pursued the film's heroine. In this case, however, the camera movement is of an entirely different order. Instead, it is emblematic of the fact that in this film Bauer is concerned to represent the point of view of his female protagonist as the dominant narrative perspective. For, Bauer's camera movement here functions as a gesture of solidarity and encouragement between the director and his female protagonist. As Tsivian puts it: 'We may not quite feel it today, but on the part of the author and therefore the viewer, this was a gentle, sympathetic gesture, as if it were saying: "The others may not know how you feel, but I'm with you; I'm on your side."'”²⁹

Vera's desire to transcend her status as a 'woman in white' and her search for a new identity are also stressed by her enthusiastic acceptance of her mother's suggestion, the day after the ball, that she accompany her on philanthropic visits to the poor. Although philanthropy was one of the few social activities allowed to women by the patriarchal order of the time, Vera's willingness to embrace this social role is significant, for it suggests an alternative understanding of what it means to become a woman, one that is broader and, indeed, more positive than that expressed in the film's early sequences. For, as Judith Butler elaborated, in a series of articles

published in the late 1980s, an important connotation of the verb ‘to become’ is the idea of purposefulness, or ‘personal agency’.³⁰ This interpretation has profound implications. As Moya Lloyd puts it: ‘as a way of thinking, the idea of becoming a gender poses a challenge to the idea that gender is passively produced by patriarchy or forced on subjects by the phallogocentric symbolic.’³¹ Instead, for Butler: ‘To *become* a woman is a purposive and appropriative set of acts, the acquisition of a skill [...] a self-reflexive process [emphasis in original].’³² In other words, ‘becoming’ a woman is a process of self construction and can, therefore, be seen as containing ‘emancipatory potential’.³³

‘Becoming’ a woman, 3: encountering opposition

[W]hat sense does becoming a gender have in a world where gender relations appear to be firmly established and deeply entrenched? What kind of freedom is this?

Judith Butler.³⁴

When Vera sets out into the world that she has so far only glimpsed from her bedroom window, however, Bauer stresses the difficulties she encounters in her attempts to construct an identity for herself and become her own kind of woman; her strength and determination are repeatedly put to the test, to some extent in her relationship with her mother, who fails either to understand or to be sympathetic to her daughter’s desire for something more than marriage and a conventional life, but primarily in her encounters with the film’s two male protagonists. What is striking is the fact that,

although they belong to different social classes, both men are wedded to equally outmoded views of what a woman is and what she should be. Predictably, they both do their best to impose their views on Vera.

Vera and the workman

For the workman Maksim Petrov a woman is a vulnerable sexual object to be used and abused at will. His ‘symbolic defloration’ of Vera in her bedroom has been discussed.³⁵ Consider also the construction of the sequence in which Vera, tricked by Petrov’s claim that he is near death, visits his garret alone. Many elements of the *mise-en-scène* function to characterise Vera as the innocent victim of a dangerous male predator. With her simple dress, shawl-covered head and basket of provisions and medicine, Vera is cast as an urban Little Red Riding Hood, an innocent young girl, threatened by a wolf. Petrov’s predatory nature is further communicated through the various camera angles from which Bauer constructs the sequence, and in this way Bauer again contrives to indicate that this view of Vera reflects not his own perceptions of women, but those of his male protagonist. Thus, the camera stalks Vera (as it had Lusha in *The Incestuous Father-in-Law*), as, keeping close to the wall, she walks nervously along the deserted street towards Petrov’s garret; tension mounts when the camera cuts to Petrov’s leering face, as he leans out of the window to observe Vera’s approach. In the next shot the camera adopts Petrov’s rapacious perspective on the young woman in what Tsivian describes as an ‘amazing, long, hawk-eye point-of-view shot’, looking down on Vera and framing her as his helpless prey, heading unwittingly into his trap.³⁶ Maksim’s lower class status is significant for, as Heide Schlüpmann notes, Bauer thus suggests (surprisingly, perhaps, given the

proximity of the 1917 Revolutions) that in early twentieth-century Russian society, social power is not grounded in class but ‘is defined above all in terms of gender, of sexually specific violence’.³⁷

As Bauer shows us, however, Petrov’s assessment of Vera’s weakness and vulnerability is misguided, for she is made of stronger stuff than he allows: despite appearing traumatised and incapable of action immediately after Petrov has raped her, Vera soon rouses herself and fights back; refusing to be a passive victim, she avenges herself on her rapist by killing him. Significantly, she uses one of his own tools. Thus, in this man/woman encounter, it is the woman who survives.

Vera and the prince

Months pass. Tortured by the memory of these disturbing events, Vera reverts to spending most of her time in her bedroom. Eventually, however, she meets and falls in love with a man from her own class, Prince Sergei Dolskii. Throughout their courtship, Bauer reveals Dolskii’s firm attachment to nineteenth-century assumptions about how women should be. In sound patriarchal fashion, Dolskii believes that a woman should be passive: when Dolskii and Vera first meet she is marginalised visually, invited to sit (passively) on a chair positioned at the very edge of the frame and to watch Dolskii as he steps into the centre to demonstrate his prowess at the (active, if not phallic) male pastimes of target shooting and fencing.

For Dolskii, a woman should also be vulnerable: Vera is at her most appealing to him when she is lying ill and wan in bed. Indeed, her invalidism appears to render her

even more attractive to Dolskii, who visits her sick bed faithfully. In his study of distorted images of women in fin-de-siècle culture, Bram Dijkstra explores the taste for paintings of bed-ridden women and explains the cult of feminine invalidism as a product of male fantasies about the perfect women, for, he observes, there was no ‘better guarantee of purity [...] than a woman’s pale, consumptive face, fading, in a paroxysm of self-negation, into nothingness.’³⁸

Most important, however, a woman, if she is to make a suitable wife, should be pure, both sexually and morally. Laura Engelstein describes how, in the tabloid newspapers that sprang up in Russia in the early twentieth century, widowers would advertise for ‘the perfect second wife (under thirty, “without a past”)’.³⁹ The overriding importance of a woman’s sexual purity is revealed by the fact that in her letter to Dolskii Vera, who is desperate not to have any secrets from her fiancé, omits any mention of her murder of Petrov, simply confessing, euphemistically: ‘Something unspeakably awful happened – I belonged to another.’ The letter remains unread, however, for Dolskii is not at home when it is delivered. The wedding therefore goes ahead and Vera is faced with the task of confessing her past to her husband in person. Again, her account focuses on her rape, of which part is shown visually, as a flashback. Although Vera does subsequently mime the fact that she stabbed Petrov, the damage has already been done by her account of her rape. Dolskii recoils from Vera in horror and revulsion, revealing the emptiness of his repeated promises to her that nothing that had happened in her past could ever diminish his love for her. The reality is that he cannot cope with the fact that the woman he thought he had married – a society *belle* ‘with a spotless reputation’⁴⁰ – is not in fact pure. As Youngblood comments: ‘Dolskii saw Vera’s

victimisation and revenge as moral degradation rather than as moral triumph.’⁴¹ In the eyes of this patriarchal male protagonist, Vera is now a Fallen Woman.

Vera is shocked and stung by Dolskii’s reaction to her confession. Indeed, it is striking that in Bauer’s eyes there appears to be little difference between the physical violence Petrov inflicts on Vera and the psychological suffering that Dolskii causes her: in a telling ‘trick’ shot earlier in the film, he links the two men visually, superimposing Petrov’s leering face on Dolskii’s. Just as she did after her rape, however, Vera again takes her life into her own hands and refuses to be the passive victim of her male counterpart’s prejudices. She responds to Dolskii’s rejection of her with pride and determination, neither pleading for forgiveness nor allowing him to berate her. Instead she takes a step back from him, looks at him for a moment and then pronounces a damning assessment of his conduct: ‘You are pitiful, Prince!’ Then she acts: she puts on her coat and walks away from Dolskii and their marriage. She does not look back.

‘Becoming’ a woman, 4: on stage – imitation, masquerade and performing gender

Dolskii regrets losing Vera almost immediately, and he tries to track her down. All he learns from the private detective whom he hires at considerable expense, however, is that she has gone abroad, and the two years he spends travelling himself also prove fruitless. But Bauer lets the viewer in on Vera’s secret: she has created a new identity for herself, earned fame and, we assume, fortune by building a career as the operatic performer, Ellen Kay [Kei]. The next twist in the plot therefore comes as no surprise

to the viewer. Shortly after his return to Russia, one of Dolskii's friends invites the despondent prince to accompany him to the opera. As Dolskii settles himself in his box at the theatre, he is amazed to recognise Vera in the famous diva he sees on the stage.

In early twentieth-century Russian society and culture, however, the position of the professional female performer was still a conflicted one. It is therefore not immediately clear whether Bauer intends Vera's new status to be seen as the realisation of her desire for a meaningful life, or whether it in fact suggests something less positive about the avenues open to her as a Russian woman at the start of the twentieth century. Indeed, there are several reasons why it is impossible for the viewer not to feel some unease about Vera's choice of vocation. First, performing on stage was not a new sphere of social activity for Russian women, but had, like philanthropy, long been considered an acceptable way for women to participate in public life. As Catherine M. Schuler documents in her study of the Russian actress in the Silver Age: 'Unlike Western European theatre, Russian theatre had never excluded women from the stage on moral and religious grounds or for reasons of social convention.'⁴² Moreover, in the eyes of the early twentieth-century Russian public, the female stage performer was still not completely dissociated from the prostitute and the *demi-mondaine*. Indeed, Schuler observes: 'Russian actresses were more constrained than most by their association in the minds of the public with prostitution.'⁴³ Sexual patronage was still a fact of life for most Russian female performers, even those who received high salaries and worked in the Imperial Theatres, and contemporary Russian critics frequently accused theatre entrepreneurs and directors of treating their female performers like 'living goods' [*zhivoi tovar*].⁴⁴

Indeed, Bauer seems to stress the fact that Vera's new career means that she is destined to end the film as she began it: as an object gazed at by men. This status is suggested by the shot that homes in on five glossy publicity photographs of Vera in her new identity, which emphasises that in becoming a famous female performer she has also become a commodity, or, as Louise McReynolds puts it, 'an article of mass consumption.'⁴⁵ This is also implied by Dolskii's reaction to seeing Vera on stage: in another example of male scopophilia, he seizes his opera glasses in order to observe Vera more closely.

Other, more disturbing, views about why women were especially suited to a stage career were also current in early twentieth-century Russian society. Dijkstra suggests that the sudden abundance of and enthusiasm for starring female performers in turn-of-the-century Europe was due, at least in part, to misogynous beliefs about the nature of sexual difference.⁴⁶ Dijkstra demonstrates how the turn-of-the-century male's belief in woman's 'inherently passive nature' and 'ignorance' led to the conviction that 'it was part of woman's nature to imitate incessantly. Her passive nature made her incapable of original thought or action, but she had a protean capacity to take on whatever form she was given to imitate.'⁴⁷ According to Dijkstra, 'the idea that woman was inherently an imitator, not an originator, [became] one of the most pervasive clichés of Western culture', and it thus came as no surprise that:

Because of her propensity for imitation, the stage came to be seen as the place where woman could best express her contribution to the cultural life of civilised society. For what was acting if not a form of imitation? It is by no means an accident that the years around 1900 were years of triumph

for actresses everywhere. [...] But it was not because they were seen as particularly original that the actresses became celebrated. Instead, they were seen as unusually successful in exploiting the imitative bent of ‘women’s nature’.⁴⁸

While, as Schuler puts it, Dijkstra ‘does not specifically identify Russia as a polestar of international misogyny’,⁴⁹ a significant number of the so-called scientific treatises on the subject of essential sexual difference that Dijkstra cites were translated and sold in Russia during this period.⁵⁰ Moreover, Linda Edmondson has shown that such essentialist attitudes did characterise discourse on emancipation and sexuality in turn-of-the-century Russia and that in their battle against female emancipation and sexual equality, conservative Russian males, like their European counterparts, took to using scientific ‘facts’ about woman’s ‘nature’ as ammunition.⁵¹ A pervasive theory in early twentieth-century Russia, for example, ‘purported to prove the built-in inferiority of women by revealing that the female brain was smaller than the male and that the entire structure and functioning of the female reproductive system negated the possibility of intellectual or artistic effort.’⁵² This, it was felt, ‘denied the possibility of a “true” woman being capable of (or even desiring to be capable of) sustained intellectual endeavour, sound and rational judgement, or creativity in anything other than reproduction, self-adornment and a little music, drawing or needlework.’⁵³

Considered in the light of this socio-cultural background, Vera’s new status as a female performer therefore begins to appear invidious. For it seems that the stage was in fact viewed as one more place in which Russian women could be held in check, contained in an area considered ‘suitable’ for them by patriarchal society, encouraged

to exploit 'essential' feminine characteristics and thereby prevented from entering other spheres of activity traditionally seen as 'male'. That performing is shown to be Vera's chosen way of participating in public life is thus, at least on the surface, highly suspect as a statement of female emancipation.

Moreover, the role in which Vera is cast also suggests her continued imprisonment in outdated male myths of femininity, for she 'imitates' a classic nineteenth-century female protagonist, appearing in Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* (1853) as the eponymous fallen woman, Violetta Valéry, Verdi's consumptive courtesan.⁵⁴ The precise scene that Vera is shown performing is also significant: Bauer chooses to show us the opera's closing sequence, in which Violetta succumbs to her illness in the arms of her distraught lover, Alfredo.

Focussing on the libretti and the plots of key nineteenth-century operatic works, the French philosopher and cultural critic Catherine Clément has argued that nineteenth-century opera - 'this spectacle thought up to adore, and also to kill, the feminine character' which tells and retells the story of women's 'undoing' - is a misogynous art form that perpetuates the pernicious 'models, ideas, feelings, ways of loving' of an outmoded social order, requiring either the domestication or, more usually, the death of the female protagonist, as a way of containing them and thus rendering them innocuous.⁵⁵ McReynolds makes a similar point when she observes that: 'Dying on stage was an especially feminine action.'⁵⁶ Moreover: 'These staged deaths were coded by the dominant morality: sexually innocent women did not perish in this manner.'⁵⁷

Indeed, Dolskii's reaction to seeing Vera on stage appears to confirm these interpretations, for all his hopes of resurrecting his relationship with her are immediately awakened. However, his reaction has little or nothing to do with Vera, the 'real' woman with whom he was once involved, and everything to do with the fictional character he sees her embodying on stage, and all the rich cultural associations of both the life and the death of Verdi's heroine. Susan Sontag has identified the multifarious uses of tuberculosis as metaphor and she summarises the essential contradictions between them, thus:

The metaphor of TB [...] described the death of someone [...] thought to be too 'good' to be sexual: the assertion of an angelic psychology. It was also a way of describing sexual feelings – while lifting the responsibility for libertinism, which is blamed on a state of objective, physiological decadence or deliquescence.⁵⁸

In addition to these central metaphorical uses, tuberculosis was repeatedly represented as 'the prototypical passive death' and 'the disease of born victims'.⁵⁹ It was also seen as 'a redemptive death for the fallen.'⁶⁰ The similarity between these metaphoric associations of tuberculosis and the ideals of womankind favoured by Dolskii is striking. Vera's stage death from this disease thus enables him to see her as he did before her revelations about her past: as passive, vulnerable and, most importantly, pure. In other words, seeing 'Vera' die from consumption onstage confirms Dolskii in all the misguided preconceptions about her nature as a woman that led to their separation in the first place.

Vera's stage performance also enables Dolskii to believe that Vera will be prepared to forgive him for deserting her, in the same way that the character she plays on stage forgives her errant lover. Similarly, other recurrent associations of tuberculosis enable him to believe that she will welcome his declaration of love. For tuberculosis was also understood as 'the disease of love', caused by 'hopes blighted', by 'thwarted' or 'renounced' love, but also by an excess of passion.⁶¹ Tuberculosis was imagined to be an aphrodisiac and was thought to intensify sexual desire.⁶² As Sontag puts it: 'while the standard representation of a death from tuberculosis places the emphasis on the perfected sublimation of feeling, the recurrent figure of the tubercular courtesan indicates that tuberculosis was also thought to make the sufferer sexy.'⁶³

The stage role in which Vera is cast is thus the perfect representation of femininity for Dolskii. It does not represent any challenge to hegemonic gender ideology, nor threaten the established sexual hierarchy. Instead, it centres on nineteenth-century male myths about the nature of woman and 'perfect' femininity. For the various and contradictory applications of the metaphor of tuberculosis enable him to retain his ideals of femininity intact and to believe that, as his wife has been purged of her sin, she is once more suitable for his erotic attentions. It therefore comes as no surprise to the viewer that at the end of the performance Dolskii rushes backstage to Vera's dressing room, confesses undying love and begs her to take him back.

Again, then, it seems that, far from offering the female protagonists a means of escape, the stage functions instead as a bastion of tradition, where women are trapped in the endless representation of male-created images of femininity that reinforce oppressive, patriarchal values and ideals of 'perfect' femininity or represent them in

misogynous and limited (and limiting) terms. Thus, the stage has a ‘comforting’ function for the male protagonists: it ensures that a safe, albeit erotically charged, distance exists between the male protagonists and the female performers to whom they are attracted.

A more productive way of reading Vera’s status as an operatic performer specialising in nineteenth-century roles, however, and one that fits better with Bauer’s own views, is through the prism of the concept of ‘the masquerade’. Elaborated by the psychoanalyst Joan Riviere in 1929 and taken up by the French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan and the thinker Luce Irigaray, ‘masquerade’ refers to the idea that femaleness (‘womanliness’) is a conscious display of conventionally defined femininity that seeks to ‘mask’ a woman’s possession of subjectivity (in Riviere’s terminology, ‘masculinity’) and functions as a form of defence against the ‘reprisals’ a woman expects to suffer (from men/society), if she is found to possess this quality.⁶⁴ Riviere built her theory round the behaviour of one of her female patients, an intellectual who was widely respected for her ability, but who in order to compensate for the supposed (socially understood) ‘masculinity’ of her professional self/identity would, after giving a public lecture, begin to behave in an exaggeratedly ‘feminine’ way towards male members of her audience, ‘flirting and coquetting with them in a more or less veiled manner.’⁶⁵ It may be, therefore, that, like Riviere’s anonymous patient, Vera (who has, after all, suffered at the hands of the reactionary Dolskii, who was unable to value the subjectivity/‘masculinity’ she displayed in defending herself against the rapist Petrov) now seeks refuge in ‘safe’ representations of femininity in order to ‘mask’ the fact that she is not a ‘typical’ (passive, dependent) woman, but

one who can stand on her own two feet and who has successfully built a life of her own.⁶⁶

This may appear to be a gloomy assessment, for as Mary Ann Doane has noted, Riviere does not theorize ‘masquerade’ as something ‘joyful’ or ‘affirmative’, but rather ‘as an anxiety-ridden compensatory gesture, as a position which is potentially disturbing, uncomfortable, and inconsistent, as well as psychically painful for the woman.’⁶⁷ However, there exists a crucial difference between Riviere’s patient and Bauer’s Vera, namely that what the former did *unconsciously* and *in life*, Vera does *consciously* and *on stage*. This difference, of course, highlights the fact that her ‘behaviour’ is clearly marked as an act, a performance. Put simply: *it is not Vera’s real life*.

Parker Tyler has written of the Hollywood actress Greta Garbo that she “‘got in drag” whenever she took some heavy glamour part, whenever she melted in or out of a man’s arms, whenever she simply let that heavenly flexed neck ... bear the weight of her thrown back head.’⁶⁸ While it would of course be an exaggeration to claim that Bauer has Vera ‘get in drag’, she can nonetheless be said to do here what Stephen Heath describes Marlene Dietrich as doing in the numerous films in which she is cast as a cabaret performer, that is: she ‘wears all the accoutrements [of femininity] *as* accoutrements, does the poses as poses, gives the act as an act [emphasis in original].’⁶⁹ In other words, what Bauer shows us in the sequence of Vera on stage as Violetta Valéry is intended to be, as in the film’s second sequence in Vera’s bedroom, another demonstration of an encultured representation of woman.

Bauer alerts the viewer to this fact in several ways. First, he offers an unmediated, ‘factual’ view of Vera on stage that stresses her identity as a performer. Thus, Vera is shown in long shot, a framing that enables Bauer to emphasise not her as an individual, but the whole theatre setting of which she is simply one constitutional part: we see the stage on which she sits, the ‘flat’ theatrical set in which she is placed, the props, the edge of the curtain on the left hand side of the stage and the silhouettes of the conductor and members of the orchestra in their places in the orchestra pit. Bauer also emphasises the artificial, ‘assumed’ nature of Vera’s on-stage character by showing her dressed to play a different role in an earlier sequence when, three times, she steps out from behind the heavy stage curtains to take a bow before her appreciative audience; their figures, as they stand to applaud Vera, are again visible as silhouettes in front of the stage, as the manservant’s and Petrov’s had been in the earlier bedroom sequences. In their design, their construction and their lighting these sequences therefore both recall the film’s second sequence, in Vera’s bedroom; and again they both leave the viewer with the same sense that Bauer is here demonstrating – at a distance – a socially constructed representation of woman. Showing Vera backstage in her dressing room further reminds the viewer that she is a performer, not the character we see on stage.

The ‘factual’ nature of these sequences is further emphasised when the viewer is offered a contrasting point of view on the performer, this time mediated through Dolskii’s perspective. Thus, the initial long shot of Vera on stage in *La Traviata* is immediately followed by a shot seen from Dolskii’s perspective, a fact Bauer indicates by including the outline of his opera glasses in the frame and through the shot’s closer framing, which replicates the magnifying effect of Dolskii’s glasses. The

most striking consequence of this closer framing is that all the naturalistic details of the theatre setting – the stage, the set, the orchestra, the lighting and the curtains – are excluded from the frame, which is filled instead by the figures of Vera and her male counterpart. This is a telling alteration of perspective, for it reveals that, unlike Bauer, Dolskii is incapable of distinguishing between Vera, the woman with whom he was once involved, and Violetta, the woman whom she is ‘imitating’ on stage.

‘Becoming’ a woman, 5: off stage – new womanhood and feminism

‘I am a living human being and I want to live a human life, with all its flaws; I find it unbearable to be looked upon as a sort of abstracted being, albeit the most ideal [...]. You have dragged me away from life and set me apart, somewhere on high, where it is cold, frightening and... boring.’
The Beautiful Lady has rebelled!

Liubov’ Dmitrievna Mendeleeva-Blok in an unsent letter to her husband, the Symbolist poet Aleksandr Blok, 1902.⁷⁰

However, while seeing ‘Vera’ die from consumption on stage confirms Dolskii in all his misguided preconceptions, Bauer suggests something different about her to the viewer. Significantly, the film does not end with Vera on stage. After the performance, Dolskii rushes to Vera’s dressing room and begs her to take him back. The viewer perhaps expects Vera to welcome him back into her life. After all, a previous sequence has stressed her continuing love for Dolskii by picturing her gazing lovingly at his photograph, which she keeps in a locket, worn round her neck even

when she is in costume. Moreover, the acts of forgiving and of gratefully accepting a faithless man's declaration of love are – to use Butler's terminology - two powerful regulatory 'norms' of feminine behaviour, as exemplified not only by the ending of *La Traviata*, but also by countless other nineteenth-century works of art in all media. Vera's actual response is therefore unexpected, for she rejects Dolskii, announcing clearly and deliberately: 'It is too late, Prince! There was a time when I loved you. Now my love has died.'

In going against these nineteenth-century 'gender norms', Vera displays the full extent of her potential for agency and action. Refusing to continue to 'reiterate' outmoded conceptions of femininity, she resists them (without even pausing to consider the potential negative consequences of this refusal) and, as she has done throughout the film, instead follows her own mind. Thus, if Butler is correct that the fundamental character of such gender norms is their 'iterability' in 'the daily social rituals of bodily life',⁷¹ then Vera can be said to have shattered several nineteenth-century gender norms and replaced them with a new norm of feminine behaviour for the new twentieth century, namely that a woman can claim for herself those rights previously reserved only for men by the patriarchal order. In other words, the twentieth-century woman can now start to live, love and work independently, as she herself chooses. Even more significantly, she will not allow her actions to be dictated by her feelings; she will not give in to her love for a man who, she knows, cannot accept her for who she is. As de Beauvoir might have put it, Vera has achieved 'transcendence'. That this is a momentous achievement is a fact of which Vera herself is aware; as Youngblood notes 'although she is emotionally shaken by [Dolskii's] renewed declarations of love, she is proud of her control over her emotions, and her

discipline in refusing to jettison her career for this unworthy lover.⁷² For, as Schuler has documented: ‘During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all but a few Russians accepted without question the notion that gender is determined by nature and therefore immutable.’⁷³ Bauer uses Vera to prove that this majority view is wrong.

The fate of Prince Dolskii is also revealing. Rejected by the self-sufficient ‘Ellen Kay’, he reflects for a moment on his ‘ruined life’ before shooting himself through the heart. Thus, in a final rewriting of the ending of *La Traviata*, Bauer reverses male and female gender roles: in his film it is the woman who lives, and the man who dies. The ending of Bauer’s film also perhaps alludes to one of the best known nineteenth-century male/female relationships in nineteenth-century Russian culture, for it recalls Tatiana’s famous rejection of Pushkin’s Evgenii Onegin, except in one significant respect: unlike Tatiana, Vera has no husband to whom she has to remain loyal. More significant than either Vera’s financial independence or her successful career, then, is the emotional independence she has achieved. As Vera is neither angel nor excused libertine, neither born victim nor redeemed sinner, so she is no man’s wife; instead she is shown by Bauer to be a determined agent of her own destiny. This makes her unique among his female performer protagonists, for – as we shall see - none of her successors acquires both emotional and financial independence and self-sufficiency. In Bauer’s 1916 film *A Life for a Life* [Zhizn’ za zhizn’] an intertitle informs us that: ‘Under the influence of love, a woman forgets everything.’ Vera is the exception who proves this rule, being the only young woman who does not allow love to rule her life. According to Aleksandra Kollontai, this makes Vera a true New Woman. In her 1913 article ‘The New Woman’ [‘Novaia zhenshchina’], Kollontai argued that it was not only traditional marriage and financial dependence that held women ‘in captivity’, but

also women themselves, or, more precisely, the female psychology. As Kollontai saw it, in her quest for liberation the New Woman faced obstacles not only from a hostile social order and the reactionary men who controlled it, but also from her innermost self. The main enemy of the New Woman was, she argued, female heterosexual love and desire: ‘The power of past centuries still has a strong hold even over the soul of the new, free woman. Atavistic feelings interrupt and weaken new experiences, outlived conceptions still hold in their persistent clutches the feminine spirit that thrusts towards freedom.’⁷⁴ This ability for women to ‘put love in second place’ is also the ‘key to happiness’ identified by the popular writer Anastasia Verbitskaia in her blockbuster novel, *The Keys to Happiness* [Kliuchi schast’ia, 1910-13], which had been brought to the cinema screen by the directors Iakov Protazanov and Vladimir Gardin, in a two-part film released just over a month before Bauer’s *Twilight of a Woman’s Soul*, on 7 October and 28 October 1913. However, unlike Vera, Mania - the heroine of Verbitskaia’s melodrama, who is often seen as a quintessential New Woman - proves unable to live by this precept; the film concludes with her suicide, caused in no small part by the death (also by suicide) of the man with whom she is hopelessly in love. ‘The woman in me is stronger than the *artiste*. I am powerless in the face of love’, Mania writes in her suicide letter.⁷⁵

Bauer also stresses Vera’s New Woman status in another way. Vera renames herself, choosing a foreign name – Ellen Kay - to symbolise her escape from her restrictive past. This name is not chosen by chance, however, for it bears an additional layer of significance, containing within it a barely cloaked allusion to a real-life woman, namely the Swedish suffragist and feminist Ellen Key (1849-1926).⁷⁶ In 1911, the Italian poet Ada Negri described Key as the ‘liberator of woman’s soul’.⁷⁷ It can be no

coincidence that Key's monograph, *Love and Marriage* [Kärleken och äktenskapet, 1904, published in Russian as *Liubov' i brak* in 1907],⁷⁸ influenced Kollontai's 1913 formulation of the New Woman, of which Vera stands as a paradigmatic example.⁷⁹ For Vera also displays many of the qualities that her namesake advocated for modern women, specifically: 'A finer knowledge of self, a stronger consciousness of personality [...] this determination of individualism [that] makes it impossible for the modern woman to be fired by the ideal of Griselda, if for no other reason because she feels how all-suffering meekness increases injustice.'⁸⁰ It is, therefore, ironic that the Swedish censors banned Bauer's film, because they were shocked by his portrayal of his female protagonist.⁸¹

Thus, in his first surviving feature film as director, inspired by the example of Ellen Key, a woman ahead of her times in so many ways, Bauer also proves himself to be ahead of his field, not only in terms of his artistic mastery – his consummate use of the expressive potential of all elements of *mise-en-scène* and of cinematic technology - but also as regards his themes and his understanding of the challenges that faced Russian women as they struggled to take advantage of the possibilities for social change offered by modernity. For, in charting Vera's progress as she 'becomes' a woman, asserting her agency and transforming herself from the encultured object of the male gaze to the independent subject of her own freely created narrative, Bauer enthralls his viewers with a 'bravura tale of female independence'⁸² that is already, even at this early point in his directorial career, told in the confident, innovative and specifically cinematic language that would become the hallmark of his distinctive authorial style. Moreover, at the end of this film we are shown an example of a quintessential New Woman, as defined by Kollontai: 'Before us stands woman as

personality, before us stands a human being possessing a characteristic value, with her own individuality, who asserts herself – in short, a woman who has broken the rusted fetters of her sex.’⁸³ In this respect, Vera Dubrovskaja would prove to be an almost impossible act to follow.

Notes

¹ There is uncertainty about the character's surname, with some sources giving it as Dubrovskaiia and others as Dubovskaiia. In favouring Dubrovskaiia I follow the cast list reproduced in V. Ivanova *et al.* (eds), *Velikii kinemo. Katalog sokhranivshikhsia igrovyykh fil'mov Rossii, 1908-1919* (Moscow, 2002), p. 171.

² For biographical information about Bauer, see *ibid.*, pp. 498-500.

³ The term 'Bauer film' was used by Bauer's contemporaries. See Denise J. Youngblood, *The Magic Mirror. Moviemaking in Russia, 1908-1918* (Madison, WI and London, 1999), p. 54. Bauer is the only pre-revolutionary Russian director who is routinely considered to be an *auteur* film-maker.

⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe I: Les faits et les mythes* [1949] (Paris, 1976), p. 11 and p. 13.

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe II: L'expérience vécue* [1949] (Paris, 1976), p. 13.

⁶ Monique Wittig, 'One is not born a woman' [1981] in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (eds), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (London, 1993), pp. 103-09 (p. 103).

⁷ See Rachel Morley, 'Gender relations in the films of Evgenii Bauer', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 81, 2003, 1, pp. 32-69 (pp. 38-39); Philip Cavendish, 'The hand that turns the handle: camera operators and the poetics of the camera in pre-Revolutionary Russian film', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 82, 2004, 2, pp. 201-45 (pp. 214-16); Alyssa DeBlasio, 'Choreographing space, time, and *dikovinki* in the films of Evgenii Bauer', *The Russian Review*, 66, 2007, pp. 671-92 (pp. 683-84).

⁸ On this aspect of Bauer's pre-film theatre career, see Viktor Korotkii, 'Evgenii Bauer: predystoriia kinorezhissera', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 10, 1991, pp. 44-57;

Viktor Korotkii, 'Vozvrashchaiias' k publikatsii o Bauere, ili metodolgiia oshibki', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 12, 1991, pp. 237-43 and Viktor Korotkii 'A. E. Bliumental'-Tamarin i E. F. Bauer. Materialy k istorii russkogo svetotvorchestva', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 56, 2002, pp. 236-71.

⁹ Emma Widdis describes Bauer as 'the only pre-Revolutionary Russian film-maker routinely considered to have attained a high level of innovation in set design.' See Emma Widdis, 'Faktura: depth and surface in early Soviet set design', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3, 2009, 1, pp. 5-32 (p. 9).

¹⁰ Lev Kuleshov, 'The tasks of the artist in cinema' [1917] in Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (eds), *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939* (London, 1988), pp. 41-42 (p. 42). Kuleshov describes the Bauer method as follows: '[to build] cumbersome architectural structures with as many different planes and breaks in the walls as possible to create more effective lighting and thereby achieve greater depth and stereoscopic quality.' For more on Kuleshov's understanding of what he terms the 'Bauer school' of set design, see Lev Kuleshov, 'Evgenii Frantsevich Bauer (k sorokaletiiu so dnia smerti)' [1957] in his *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, R. N. Iurenev et al. (eds), volume 2: *Vospominaniia. Rezhissura. Dramaturgiiia* (Moscow, 1988), pp. 403-09 (pp. 404-05).

¹¹ See, for example, those reproduced in Ivanova, *Velikii kinemo*, p. 499.

¹² Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' [1975] in Constance Penley (ed.), *Feminism and Film Theory* (London, 1988), pp. 57-68 (pp. 59-62).

¹³ Aleksei Kruchenykh and Velimir Khlebnikov, 'Slovo kak takovoe' [1913] in V. Markov (ed.), *Manifesty i programmy russkikh futuristov, Slavische Propyläen*, 27 (Munich, 1967), pp. 53-58 (p. 56).

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- ¹⁴ Yuri Tsivian, 'Video essay' on *Mad Love: Three Films by Evgenii Bauer*, BFI DVD publishing (London, 2002).
- ¹⁵ Aleksandra Kollontai, 'Novaia zhenshchina' [1913] in V. I. Uspenskaia (ed.), *Marksistkii feminizm. Kolleksiia tekstov A. M. Kollontai* (Tver', 2002), pp. 154-91, (p.187).
- ¹⁶ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy. Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London, 1991), p. 145.
- ¹⁷ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* [1974], translated by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY, 1985), p. 82.
- ¹⁸ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Rosetti and His Circle* (London, 1997), p. 26.
- ¹⁹ Ibid. Bauer positions many of his other female protagonists before mirrors, always with the same intent: to present them as their male counterparts perceive them, as beautiful objects to be contemplated and desired. See Morley, 'Gender relations', pp. 40-41.
- ²⁰ See still reproduced in P. Cherchi Usai *et al.* (eds), *Silent Witnesses. Russian Films 1908- 1919* (London, 1989), p. 204.
- ²¹ Tsivian, 'Video essay'.
- ²² Cavendish, 'The hand that turns the handle', p. 215.
- ²³ Wittig, 'One is not born a woman', p. 103.
- ²⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe II*, p. 9.
- ²⁵ Judith Butler, 'Sex and gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*', *Yale French Studies*, 72, 1986, pp. 35-49 (p. 36).
- ²⁶ Tsivian, 'Video essay'.
- ²⁷ See still reproduced in Ivanova, *Velikii kinemo*, p. 172.
- ²⁸ Tsivian, 'Video essay'

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Butler, 'Sex and gender', p. 36. See also the following articles and chapters, all by Butler: 'Variations on sex and gender: Beauvoir, Wittig and Foucault' [1987] in Sarah Salih (ed. with Judith Butler), *The Judith Butler Reader* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 23-38; 'Performative acts and gender constitution: an essay in phenomenology and feminist theory' [1988] in Sue-Ellen Case (ed.), *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre* (Baltimore, MD and London, 1990), pp. 270-82; 'Gendering the body: Beauvoir's philosophical contribution' [1989] in Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (eds), *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy* (London, 1992), pp. 253-62.

³¹ Moya Lloyd, *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics* (Cambridge and Malden, MA, 2007), p. 39. Lloyd provides a useful critical overview of Butler's engagement with de Beauvoir. See *ibid.*, especially pp. 30-31 and pp. 37-42.

³² Butler, 'Sex and gender', p. 36.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁴ Butler, 'Gendering the body', p. 255.

³⁵ This phrase is used in Cavendish, 'The hand that turns the handle', p. 215.

³⁶ Tsivian, 'Video essay'.

³⁷ Heide Schlüpmann, 'From patriarchal violence to the aesthetics of death: Russian cinema 1900-1919', *Cinefocus*, 2, 1992, 2, pp. 2-9 (p. 2). On this general trend in Bauer's films, see Morley, 'Gender relations', pp. 36-37.

³⁸ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity. Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York and Oxford, 1986), p. 23. Dijkstra shows how the male cult of feminine invalidism led to a cult of feminine death, a progression that can also be traced in Bauer's films.

³⁹ Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-siècle Russia* (Ithaca, NY and London, 1992), p. 360.

⁴⁰ Neia Zorkaia, '«Svetopis'» Evgeniia Bauera', *Iskusstvo kino*, 1997, 10, pp. 77-93 (p. 85).

⁴¹ Youngblood, *The Magic Mirror*, p. 135.

⁴² Catherine M. Schuler, *Women in Russian Theatre: The Actress in the Silver Age* (London and New York, 1996), p. 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴⁵ Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play. Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era*, (Ithaca, NY and London, 2003), p. 114.

⁴⁶ Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, pp. 120-23.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Schuler, *Women in Russian Theatre*, p. 9.

⁵⁰ For information about the specific texts that were available in Russian translation before 1900, see Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness*, p. 132, n. 10.

⁵¹ Linda Edmondson, 'Women's emancipation and theories of sexual difference in Russia, 1850-1917' in Marianne Liljeström, Eila Mäntysaari and Arja Rosenholm (eds), *Gender Restructuring in Russian Studies. Conference Papers, Helsinki, August 1992* (Tampere, 1993), pp. 39-52 (p. 41).

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ The continuing interest of Russian film-makers in this persona is evidenced by Kira Muratova giving the name Violetta to the heroine of her *Enthusiasms* [Uvlechen'ia,

1994], and having the character (played by Renata Litvinova) talk about her dead friend ‘Rita Gauthier’, thus linking Verdi’s heroine to her prototype in Alexandre Dumas Fils’s *The Lady of the Camellias* [La Dame aux camélias, 1848].

⁵⁵ Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* (London, 1997), p. 6 and p. 12. Clément’s arguments about the misogynist nature of nineteenth-century opera have been challenged by numerous musicologists, who have argued that in focussing on the operas’ libretti Clément neglects to consider that very feature of opera that makes it opera: the singing voice. Carolyn Abbate, for example, asserts that the presence of a singing woman on stage creates a performance meaning that differs in emphasis from that of the literary plot on which the libretto is based, for the female voice creates ‘a realm beyond narrative plot, in which women exist as sonority and sheer physical volume, asserting themselves outside spectacle and escaping murderous fates.’ See Carolyn Abbate, ‘Opera; or, the envoicing of women’ in Ruth A. Solie (ed.), *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London, 1995), pp. 225-58 (p. 254). There is, of course, a very obvious difference between an operatic performance as such and the representation of the operatic performance that we get in Bauer’s silent film: the lack/absence of that singing voice. Musical accompaniment was an important part of the viewing experience of early Russian films, but, as Tsivian notes, as the music was ‘part of film exhibition rather than film production [...] it was the cinema proprietor who was in charge of the musical side of the business.’ See Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception* (Chicago IL and London, 1994), p. 78. The cinema accompanist might, if skilful enough, have woven themes from the opera into his accompaniment at this point in the film; the proprietor could also have played a gramophone recording of the opera’s closing act or hired a live

singer (ibid., p. 79 and McReynolds, *Russia at Play*, p. 256). All these contemporary solutions seem unlikely in the case of Bauer's film, however, for his interest in this sequence is, like Clément's, in fact purely visual and 'literary': the actors are not shown miming the act of singing; the shot of them on stage is brief and focuses simply on the moment and the fact of Violetta's death.

⁵⁶ McReynolds, *Russia at Play*, p. 127.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (London, 1978), pp. 25-26.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 24-25.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 20-22.

⁶² Ibid., p. 13.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 25.

⁶⁴ As Riviere puts it: 'Womanliness therefore [can] be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she [is] found to possess it.' See Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a masquerade' [1929] in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (eds), *Formations of Fantasy* (London and New York, 1986), pp. 35-44 (p. 35 and p. 38).

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 36

⁶⁶ Butler lists numerous examples of the 'social punishments' that are meted out to people whose behaviour and/or appearance goes against society's 'gender norms'. See Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London, 2004), p. 55. Beth Holmgren suggests something close to this, when she argues that in turn-of-the-century Russia stage actresses could increase their off-stage respectability in the eyes of the public – or, to use Holmgren's terms, could 'expiate' the 'sin' associated with being an actress

- by playing on stage melodramatic roles in works that were usually moralistic and punished their transgressive heroines. See Beth Holmgren, 'The importance of being unhappy, or, why she died' in Louise McReynolds and Joan Neuberger (eds), *Imitations of Life: Two Centuries of Melodrama in Russia* (Durham, NC and London), 2002, pp. 79-98 (pp. 84-85).

⁶⁷ Mary Ann Doane, 'Masquerade reconsidered: further thoughts on the female spectator' in her *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York and Oxford, 1991), pp. 33-43 (p. 38).

⁶⁸ Cited in Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 163.

⁶⁹ Stephen Heath, 'Joan Riviere and the Masquerade' in Burgin *et al.* (eds), *Formations of Fantasy*, pp. 45-61 (p. 57).

⁷⁰ Reprinted in V. Shcherbina (ed.), *Aleksandr Blok. Pis'ma k zhene, Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, 89 (Moscow, 1978), p. 44.

⁷¹ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, p. 48.

⁷² Youngblood, *The Magic Mirror*, p. 82.

⁷³ Schuler, *Women in Russian Theatre*, p. 9.

⁷⁴ Kollontai, 'Novaia zhenshchina', p. 190.

⁷⁵ Anastasiia Verbitskaia, *Kliuchi schast'ia*, Volume 2 (St Petersburg, 1993), p. 482.

⁷⁶ Key's writings on subjects such as human sexuality, family life, ethics, marriage, education, peace, politics and women's suffrage were hugely influential in the first decades of the twentieth century, not only in her native Sweden but also in Western Europe, America and Russia. See Thorbjörn Lengborn, 'Ellen Key (1849-1926)', *Prospects: The Quarterly Review of Comparative Education*, 23, 1993, 314, pp. 825-37 (p. 825). Key's best known work, *The Century of the Child* [Barnets århundrade, 1900], was published in Russia under the title *Vek rebenka* in 1905 and was

considered by the Russian educationalist Konstantin Venttsel' (1857-1947) to be a central work in new education theories. See

<http://partners.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/37731> (accessed 30 January 2016).

⁷⁷ Cited in Louise Nyström-Hamilton, *Ellen Key: Her Life and Her Work. A Critical Study*, translated by Anna E. B. Fries (New York and London, 1913), p. 180.

⁷⁸ http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enc_literature/204/АЛЬМКВИСТ (accessed 30 January 2016).

⁷⁹ Anna Rotkirch, 'New woman with old feelings? Contrasting Kollontai's and Colette's writings on love' in Ebba Witt-Brattström (ed.), *The New Woman and the Aesthetic Opening: Unlocking Gender in Twentieth-Century Texts* (Huddinge, 2004), pp. 137-54 (p. 140).

⁸⁰ Ellen Key, *Love and Marriage*, translated by Arthur G. Chater (New York and London, 1911), p. 293.

⁸¹ Cherchi Usai, *Silent Witnesses*, p. 204.

⁸² Louise McReynolds, 'Demanding men, desiring women and social collapse in the films of Evgenii Bauer, 1913-17', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3, 2009, 2, pp. 145-56 (p. 149).

⁸³ Kollontai, 'Novaia zhenshchina', p. 188.