

UDC 372

“The Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin”: the Novel and its Adaptation to Media Education Lessons in the Student Audience

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ABSTRACT. The study of the media culture, the virtual world requires human knowledge and skills analysis of media texts of different levels of complexity. The article explains the technique of analysis of media texts detective-fiction genre as an example of the screen adaptations of A.N.Tolstoy (1883-1945) novel – "The Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin" (1927) in the context of media education. The author believes that the technology fits into the basic range of media education goals of higher education (especially in the training of future cultural studies, art historians, sociologists, linguists, psychologists, teachers).

Keywords: analysis; media texts; media competence; media education; media literacy; media culture; students; university; film; cinema; Alexey Tolstoy.

INTRODUCTION. As we know, the demand for this or that literary material for film adaptations depend on many political, social and cultural factors. In this regard it is curious to conduct a comparative analysis of screen interpretations of a popular novel by Alexey N. Tolstoy (1883-1945) “The Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin” (1927) in the context of media education. Here we shall use the methodology developed by U. Eco [Eco, 1998, p.209], A. Silverblatt [Silverblatt, 2001, p.80-81], L. Masterman [Masterman, 1985], C. Bazalgette [Bazalgette 1995], based on such key concepts of media education as media agencies, media/media text categories, media technologies, media languages, media representations and media audiences, because all these concepts are of direct relevance to value, ideological, market, structural and substantive, audio-visual, spatial and temporal aspects of the analysis of media products. It should be noted that this technology fits into the basic range of media educational goals of higher education, especially when training future culturologists, art historians, sociologists, linguists, psychologists and educators.

Author’s ideology and moral principles in social and cultural context, market conditions that determined the concept and the process of creation of the media text (the dominant concepts: media agencies, media/ media text categories, media technologies, media representations, media audience).

After returning from a short emigration (1918-1923) “Red Count” A.N. Tolstoy apparently posed two main problems before himself: to earn positive reputation with the communist regime and significantly improve his financial situation in a fairly short period of time (and the NEP gave a lot of possibilities here). The trilogy “The Road to Cavalry”, started in 1922, was being written for a long while. And it was necessary to urgently publish some less ambitious though commercially attractive things. That’s how his fantastic story “Aelita” appeared (1923), quickly filmed by Y. Protazanov in 1924. The ideological function was indicated clearly – the communists are able to organize revolution not only on Earth but also on Mars...

Since the second half of 1925 A. N. Tolstoy began publishing another fiction adventure work in a magazine – the novel “the Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin” [Tolstoy, 1925-1927], which was apparently designed for the subsequent screen adaptation as well. The ideological background was similar to that of “Aelita”: firstly the exposure of the bourgeois world of “yellow devil”, and then the revolutionary uprising against the dictatorship of the technocratic maniac Pyotr Petrovich Garin. In 1927 the ending was remade: in the first version [Tolstoy, 1927] after the miners’ revolt under the leadership of Shelga the beauty Zoya dies and Garin disappears without a trace, whereas in the second version after the revolutionary uprising Zoya and Garin meet on the yacht “Arizona” and sail towards new adventures...

Later A.N. Tolstoy repeatedly changed the novel with perseverance worthy of a better use: in 1934 he partially shortened the text (in the edition of 1925-1927 there were lots of technical terms and blueprints), in 1936 he released an adaptation for children (with no mention of a brothel on Garin's island and other "adult" details). In 1937 the novel was revised again with the radical changes in the ending: the yacht "Arizona" suffered shipwreck and Garin and Zoya found themselves on an uninhabited island...

It seems that from the ideological point of view A.N. Tolstoy did all he could: now after the uprising of the "working masses" Garin didn't sail away with his beloved, but in retaliation had to while away the rest of his life feeding of seaweed and fish on a small piece of land in the middle of the ocean. But no: in 1939 the final edition of the "The Hyperboloid" was published [this "canonical" text is preserved in the edition: Tolstoy, 2007], in which the author forced Garin to steal the idea of the "apparatus" from engineer Mantsev thus even more increasing the negative image of Garin...

Meanwhile despite all the efforts to adapt the novel to the ideological "agenda", the Soviet filmmakers of the 1920-1950s were not interested in it. It would seem that the plot of "The Hyperboloid..." is cinematic in Hollywood style: the colorful characters are depicted vividly and brightly, the action takes unfolds rapidly in a mixture of detective, science fiction and parody genres.

The time for screening "The Hyperboloid" came in the 1960-1970es, at the peak of interest of the national cinema to science fiction, when not only cosmic stories were screened ("Planet of Storms", "Andromeda Nebula" etc.), but also film adaptations of A. Belyaev's novels ("The Amphibian Man", "Air Seller"), and the collections of science fiction stories and novels were selling like hot cakes in bookstores. Science fiction as a genre significantly inhibited by the era of late Stalinism of 1940-es – the beginning of 1950-es once again became not only legitimate, but also officially approved (naturally subject to the rules of the ideological game of the time). So the first film adaptation appeared – "The Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin" (1965) by A. Gintzburg, and later the second one – "Failure of Engineer Garin" (1973) by L. Kvinikhidze.

Of course, ideological clichés of Soviet times didn't spare A. Gintzburg's film as well: for example, the American billionaire Rolling is represented as an embodiment of the "yellow devil" of imperialism, while communist Shelga is a crystal-honest romantic of the Soviet country. However, despite this, the Soviet press of the 1960-s welcomed A. Gintzburg's film very skeptically. For instance, critic V.A. Revich specializing in fiction genre wrote: "In the novel "The Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin" A. Tolstoy perfectly reproduced the era of the 1920-es, the world-view of the writer who took the side of the young revolutionary country. In "The Hyperboloid" not scientific but social aspect is the most powerful: the mechanics of the bourgeois relations, stockjobbing, capitalist morality and economics. But this social aspect fell out of the film, with only simplistic detective aspect remaining [Revich, 1968, p.83]. After 16 years the same author returned to the analysis of this screen adaptation. This time he removed ideological pathos but once again stressed that "despite the eminent cast the film failed. The people who shot the screen version made a typical mistake. The desire not to miss the main story events leads to fluency – a character flashed, an event flew by – and on, and on, faster and faster; there is not enough screen time to peer into the facers, to understand the essence of the events" [Revich, 1984].

However the success with the audience (nearly 21 million people watched it during the first year of distribution) showed that the problems of "speed" of the media text didn't worry the audience. Moreover, perhaps the things that irritated V.A. Revich most in the first adaptation of "The Hyperboloid" served as an additional factor of attraction for the public drawn towards the rapidly developing action, detective intrigue and science fiction which is not burdened by ideology. Of course, at the same time we should keep in mind that the Soviet film market of 1960-es - 1970-es largely isolated the audience from spectacular Western films which gave the domestic entertaining films additional benefits.

Leonid Kvinikhidze's film "Failure of Engineer Garin" (1973) was shot in the format of TV series. Probably they were low on budget so the most expensive episodes (the construction of gold mines on the island, the destruction of the squadron of ships, etc.) were dropped out of the plot, and the fiction line of the novel was clearly in the background. Instead the ideological line of the Nazis who wanted to seize Garin's "apparatus" which was thought up by the scriptwriter S. Potepalov, was brought to the foreground.

It is difficult to judge the success of the “Failure...” because in the 1970-es in our country no “TV ratings” have been recorded. However, due to the fact that the number of TV series was extremely small at the time, there is no doubt that this film adaptation attracted no less viewers than A. Gintsburg’s film.

Narrative structure in the media text (the main concepts: “media/media text categories”, “media technologies”, “media languages”, “media representations”)

During the discussion with the students we can conclude that the novel “The Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin” as well as its screen adaptations is built in the traditional structure of action (fiction, detective) media texts. The plot is clearly divided into the entanglement (in Soviet Russia on the 1920s a series of mysterious events and murders occur, connected with Garin’s machine), the development of action (Garin transports the apparatus to the West, forces the billionaire Rolling to cooperate and meets his kept woman Zoya), climax (in various editions and screen adaptations of the novel it is either the destruction of European chemical plants by the deadly beam, or the construction of the gold mine on the island and destruction of the enemy squadron by the hyperboloid) and denouement (in various editions/adaptations: the rise of “revolutionary masses” on the island and the disappearance of Garin; his readiness for new adventures; the shipwreck of Garin’s yacht near an uninhabited island; and Garin’s death). Psychological and social motivations (in the novel as well as in its film adaptations) are given as a rule without deep nuances (exception – the original interpretation on Garin’s role in “Failure...” by O. Borisov).

Schematically the peculiarities of genre modifications, iconography, character ethics, problems of the novel “The Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin” and its film adaptations can be represented as follows:

Historical period, scene of action. In general it is the second half of the 1920-es – Soviet Russia, Western Europe (mostly Paris), the seas, an island in the ocean.

The setting, household goods. Modest life, interiors and household goods in Soviet Russia, where the central object is an abandoned cottage near St. Petersburg, where Garin secretly conducts his experiments with the deadly beam. The rich office of billionaire Rolling. Luxurious setting of Garin’s empire on the “golden island”, comfortable yacht “Arizona”...

Audio-visual techniques, iconography. The visuals of color film “The Failure...” (1973) are rather standard, while the first black and white adaptation “The Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin” is remarkable for its exquisitely fine color performed in the spirit of film noir (American and French criminal films of 1940-es – 1950-es with its grim motives of doom, fatalism and the elements of expressionism): play with linear light and shade in night scenes; contrasting variations of black and white in daytime scenes, the use of wide-angle lens, unusual camera angles, etc. I believe that the director Alexander Gintsburg (1907-1972), the former cameraman himself, who shot the legendary film “Two Soldiers” (1943), intentionally set this task to the talented cameraman Alexander Rybin. The fast and nervous soundtrack composed by M. Vaynberg (1919-1996), who was already famous for his music to the films “The Cranes are Flying” (1957) and “The Last Inch” (1958), matches the visual style of the film. I suppose that namely the originality of audio-visual solution was evaluated by the jury of the International Fantastic Film Festival in Trieste (1966), which awarded the Grand Prize to A. Gintsburg’s film.

The characters, their values, ideas, clothing, constitution, vocabulary, mimics, gestures. V.A. Revich justly noted that in the novel “The Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin” we can “clearly trace mockery, ridicule in relation to most characters. Thus Pyotr Petrovich Garin, a “superman”, a dictator and a villain is a typical action adventure character, but his ambition, lust for power, resourcefulness and immorality are served with such excesses that he is perceived as a parody of such character” [Revich, 1984]. Brilliant actor Evgeny Evstigneev (1926-1992) why played the role of Garin in the film adaptation in 1965 removed these excesses making the main character a psychologically convincing fanatic of the idea of conquering the world: intelligent, prudent and persistent, not devoid of irony. His character’s vocabulary, mimics and gestures are laconic and are subject to the pragmatics of plot circumstances. For the time being his clothes are purely functional, and only on the “golden island” Garin allows himself to realize his design fantasies...

Another outstanding master Oleg Borisov (1929-1994) painted his Garin (in the adaptation of 1973) with different colors, which gave rise to the following ironic passage of the critic: “The engineer rants about lust for power, but in the film he turns out to be rather a gentle lad. Thought

he killed two men, it was self-defense. He didn't blow up the plants. Yes, he took away the millionaire's mistress, but we must agree that this cannot be compared with delusional and truly fascist plans of Garin portrayed in the novel. The failure of this Garin and the failure of the small individualist who dreams to become rich with the help of his invention are, as they say, two big differences. Do you want us to see the novel's contemporization in such degradation of the protagonist?" [Revich, 1984].

In my opinion, O. Borisov's work received a clearly distorted assessment here. In "The Failure..." Borisov played not a "gentle lad", but a devilishly clever and shrewd cynic aspiring to conquer the world at any cost. No wonder his character has the ability to appear and disappear mysteriously, possesses the persistence of the tempter and the charm of seduction. Indeed the authors of "The Failure..." removed the "rough edges" of Tolstoy's interpretation of Garin from their adaptation. Not Garin, but Rolling directs the deadly beam at the plants. Garin doesn't abandon Mantsev to die in a distant expedition... Also Garin doesn't create his "golden empire". Facing the fierce and powerful Nazi organization, O. Borisov's character perishes with his apparatus in the ocean...

Playing the role of Garin, O. Borisov demonstrated his rich arsenal of facial expressions and gestures, his unique plasticity and the ability for transformation. Compared to him Garin played by Evgeny Evstigneev is more harsh, cruel and predictable...

As for the main female character, Zoya played by Nonna Terentyeva (1942-1996) from "The Failure..." (1973) looks more spectacular in all aspects than Natalya Klimova in the film adaptation from 1965. Moreover, Zoya in "The Failure..." is presented less schematically than in A. Tolstoy's novel. In L. Kvinikhidze's film the demonic fanatic of world domination Garin finds a decent girlfriend. This female adventurer puts everything at stake: the men she encounters – Rolling, captain Yanson, and Garin himself – are only pawns in her own big game. There is kind of a sinister charm in Zoya, which reminds of the charm of Milady from "The Three Musketeers" [Revich, 1984].

As for the "positive" character, the communist Shelga, it seems to me that both in the novel and in its film adaptations he remains a pale "walking function" of the plot...

Significant changes in lives of the characters. The lives of the main characters – Garin, Zoya, Shelga and Rolling – changes from the moment they meet and enter into a (voluntary/forced) alliance. The culmination of these events in the final version of the novel and in its first film adaptation falls on the creation of Garin's "empire" on the "golden island". In L. Kvinikhidze's film the culminating events occur on the yacht "Arizona", on which a Nazi agent Shefer acts.

Originated problem. In the main version of A. Tolstoy's novel and its 1965 adaptation the main problem for Garin is an uprising of "working masses" on the island. In 1973 adaptation a Nazi plot became the main danger for Garin's plans.

Searches for the solution of the problem. Using a small hyperboloid from the yacht "Arizona" Zoya destroys the big hyperboloid on the "golden island". Garin arrives to her on a zeppelin (later versions of the novel and 1965 film adaptation). In Leonid Kvinikhidze's version it seems that Garin relies only on luck...

The solution of the problem. In the first versions of the novel A. Tolstoy allows Garin to disappear or rush to new adventures... In later versions of the novel and in A. Gintsburg's film adaptation the "solution" of the problem is the shipwreck of the yacht "Arizona", when Garin and Zoya end up on an uninhabited island. In "The Failure..." Garin's landing on the ocean shore ends with his death...

P.S. Despite the radical changes on political, social and cultural situation in Russia, the popularity of the novel "The Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin" has not declined. For instance, its "sequel", the novel "The Second Advent of Engineer Garin" was rather successful with the readers [Alko, 2001], also we can remember the unfinished attempt of Alexander Abdulov to make another film adaptation of the story about the failed ruler of the world ("Excommunicate", 2008). And who knows, maybe someday we will see a Hollywood version of "The Hyperboloid..."

Questions for the analysis of media texts in the student audience

Media agencies:

What is the main purpose of the given media text? To what extent is this purpose achieved? With what characters did the authors of the media text wanted to identify you? What ideology do these characters express?

Media/media text categories:

To what genre and thematic category can we attribute this media text?

Media languages:

Why did the author of the media text construct this or that episode in this way? Why are certain items (including clothing, characters, etc.) shown in this particular way? What do these items tell us about the characters, their life, their relations with each other? In what way are dialogues and the language of the characters important for the development of action?

From whose point of view are the events shown in this or that episode of the media text? How are people and things depicted in this or that episode? Are there moments in the media text in which the proposed point of view helps to create the sense of danger or surprise? What is the role of light, color, sound, music in the media text?

Media representations:

Think about social, moral and ideological problems raised in this media text. In what way are they related to the political, social and cultural situation contemporary to this media text?

With whom does the author of the media text sympathize? How does he make the audience understand it? Why did you come to this conclusion?

What are the key episodes of this media text? Why do you think they are the key ones?

What do you think was selected to make this particular frame?

Do you think it is possible to insert additional episodes into this media text? If so, what episodes? In what part of the media texts they could have been inserted?

How do the changes in the way the character or situation is shown help the development of action in the media text? Were some facts about the characters, things or places of action hidden from the audience at first? Was it done to force tension or to solve mysteries or crimes?

In what scenes are the conflicts revealed in this media text?

Are there scenes of violence in this media text? If so, what is the difference in the depiction of violence in other media texts known to you?

Could this plot have ended earlier? What would have changed in our perception of this media text? What is the importance of the actual finale of this media text?

Media audiences:

For whom is this media text meant? For one or more types of audience?

How do the style and the contents of the media text influence the audience's understanding?

What is the role or gender social class, age and ethnicity in media perception of the audience?

Do you understand the information put in the advertisement of this media text?

What are the reasons for the success of these media texts with the audience? (genre, theme, the system of emotional overfalls, reliance on mythology, happy ending, the calculation for the maximum coverage of the audience's media preferences, etc.)?

How is the audience's interest to the narration maintained? Is it possible to trace how our attention grows from episode to episode?

What are the parameters needed to assess media texts (political, social, moral, philosophical, artistic, etc.)?

What abilities and skills does a person need to competently analyze media texts?

Filmography

The Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin. Russia, 1965. Director Alexander Gintsburg. Scriptwriters: Alexander Gintsburg, Joseph Manevich. Cameraman Alexander Rybin. Artists: Evgeny Galey, Mikhail Karyakin. Composer Moses Vaynberg. Cast: Evgeny Evstigneev, Natalia Klimova, Vsevolod Safonov, Mikhail Astangov, Yuri Sarantsev and others.

Audience: 20,8 millions viewers.

Grand Prize "Golden Seal of the City of Trieste" at the International Fantastic Film Festival in Trieste (Italy, 1966).

The Failure of Engineer Garin. Russia, 1973. Director Leonid Kvinikhidze. Scriptwriter Sergey Potepalov. Cameraman: Vyacheslav Fastovich. Atrist: Boris Bykov. Composer Vladislav Uspensky. Cast: Oleg Borisov, Nonna Terentyeva, Alexander Belyavsky and others.

Excommunicate / Garin. Russia, 2008. Director Alexander Abdulov. Cast: Sergey Nikonenko, Sergey Stepanchenko, Elena Proklova, Evgenia Kryukova, Georgy Martirosyan and others.

Film shooting was interrupted by A. Abdulov's death.

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